

*Corresponding author: Yeyep Natrio, Nutrition Departement, Faculty of Health Sciences, Universitas Perintis Indonesia, Padang, Indonesia

E-mail: yeyepnatrio@gmail.com

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Student's Issues Depicted through TOEFL Score Test: A Case Study in Medical Laboratory Technology of X University in Padang

Yeyep Natrio^{1*}, Melly Siska Suryani², & Sariani³

¹Nutrition Departement, Faculty of Health Sciences, Universitas Perintis Indonesia, Padang, West Sumatera, Indonesia

²Medical Laboratory Technology Departement, Faculty of Health Sciences, Univertas Perintis Indonesia, Padang, West Sumatera, Indonesia

³English Department, Politeknik Negeri Padang, Padang, West Sumatera, Indonesia

Abstract: This study is intended to analyze the obstacles encountered by test takers and to give insight to the university, especially the Language Centre Unit, to rebuild strategies in prioritizing the further attention of the teaching methods. The data were derived from 62 medical laboratory technology students with the purposive sampling technique. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to analyze the data. The data collection included the TOEFL score and drilling tests during the TOEFL preparation training by employing the non-participant observational method. The result reveals that medical laboratory technology students were still at the elementary level, with an average score was 384. Structure, with an average correctness of 13 is the most challenging part of the three sections, followed by reading comprehension 16 correct answers. The easiest part is listening comprehension, depicted in the table of correctness with 18 correct answers. Therefore, the finding of this research suggests that the language center in the university should produce extensive TOEFL preparation training based on the previous results from the test taker's issues with appropriate TOEFL material as solution to student`s obstacles in TOEFL test. The language center should have provided not only the TOEFL test but also facilitated the courses that focus on each skill in the TOEFL part.

Keywords: TOEFL Test, Case Study, Student`s Difficulties, Strategies, Medical Laboratory Technology Student

1. Introduction

English learning is a must in every university. The phenomenon of learning English has been proceeding continuously to encourage the achievement of language skills for students, especially for Indonesian students, where English is a foreign language. This skill is compulsory for the young generation to compete with others in this era of globalization.

However, the data showed that Indonesia's English Proficiency Index is still low. It ranks among the 79 positions out of 113 countries (*EF EPI EF English Profi Ciency Index A Ranking of 113 Countries and Regions by English Skills*, n.d.). It means encouraging learning and improving English proficiency has to be implemented. Based on this phenomenon, many English training programs are mushrooming in Indonesia, whether in formal or informal institutions.



In the case of the higher education system, the university is a typical formal institution that provides its students with this skill to make academic communication run well since English is a foreign language functioning as a tool to connect to the global world and assist in the development of science and modern technology for the country. Many innovations and improvements in approaches exist to learning English, such as Total Physical Response (TPR), Community Language Learning (CLL), Competency-Based Learning (CBL), etc.

2. Literature Review

Nowadays, learning is not concentrated within the classroom, but it is more flexible for students who can access any materials for learning English independently through computers and internet-based resources. Using this access will give students more exposure to abundant learning resources. On the other hand, the effectiveness of internet-based sources can reduce education inequality (Korkmaz & Erer, Elif; Erer, 2022).

To achieve the four competencies in English, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the University's Language Centre provides the TOEFL preparation test. Students are given approximately one semester to prepare themselves before accomplishing study. The campus offers a TOEFL training program as the capital before taking the TOEFL test. The TOEFL Preparation program aims to help students face global competition in the working field. Because of this, it becomes a requirement for graduation.

However, the expectation to achieve the goal is not straightforward. It needs a process. For those who are non-native speaker students, it is a very daunting task to gain the standard TOEFL score. It has also been explained by some researchers such as (Narayana & Soepriyanti, 2023) and (Gunantar & Rosaria, 2023). Most of them reported the participants of the TOEFL test faced diverse difficulties, for instance, the lack of time in the exercise of questions about TOEFL, the inability to understand recording text from long passages, the obstacles to figuring out difficult vocabulary, and the inability to comprehend the complex sentences in structure. In line with the previous studies, this current study is a case study where most of the test takers who were from one of the universities in Padang, West Sumatra, particularly Medical Laboratory Technology students, achieved less than the standardized score – 450 of the TOEFL score.

Because of that reality, this researcher of this study wants to (1) depict and analyze the obstacles encountered by those senior students of the Medical Laboratory Technology program and (2) give insight to the university, especially the Language Centre Unit, to rebuild their strategies in prioritizing the further attention of the teaching methods refers to the lowest scoring section whether it is listening, Structure, or reading. Lastly, the aim is to assist students in their learning process.

3. Research Method and Materials

This research employed a case study method. It focuses on an individual or a group of people in which the phenomenon is examined. Its phenomenon emphasizes contemporary events (Yin, 2018). Here, the researcher has observed the phenomenon of Medical Laboratory Technology students' issues in facing the TOEFL Test depicted from their TOEFL score. Furthermore, the result of drilling during the TOEFL preparation training was also taken to be secondary data.

The data were derived from 62 students with the purposive sampling technique. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to analyze the data. According to (Creswell, 2012), marking research data, organizing them into tables, characterizing trends, and generating conclusions are all part of quantitative analysis. In addition, transcribing data, describing data, reporting, and summarizing findings are known as qualitative analysis. The data collection included the administration of the TOEFL test and TOEFL score. Three sections were tested: Listening Comprehension (50 questions), Structure (40 questions), and Reading Comprehension (50 Questions). Then, the total number of questions was 140. The researcher gathered the TOEFL test results to ascertain the most problematic part among the three sections of the

TOEFL test. In addition, the non-participant observational method was also used during their learning process in TOEFL Preparation (Schensul, Jean J; Lecompete, 2013). The researcher concluded the result of drilling tests, which were always given in the Preparation/training program, and took some of the students' responses while grasping TOEFL materials such as Listening Comprehension, Structure, and Reading Comprehension. Then, from all of the data, the researcher can conclude which of the skills in the TOEFL test are difficult for senior medical laboratory technology students.

They were senior students who were about to graduate. The fact that most of them were not the first TOEFL test takers should be a guarantee to get at least a standard score. On the contrary, they are still at a low level of English language competency despite the demand of the university to produce a high-quality alumna who is competent in their basic knowledge of medical laboratory technology and have good English skills. The lack of English skills was proven and depicted by the result of the TOEFL test, which was given before they completed the study.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher has found some findings after doing research derived from the TOEFL test result and observational from drilling tests of the TOEFL Preparation from October to November 2023. Based on the results of the drilling test in a month and some questions that were delivered through the preparation before the test, several main factors made students face some hard times in participating in TOEFL drilling questions, such as the difficulty of understanding many formulas in breaking structure question related, the low capability in understanding and comprehending the meaning in listening questions. The difficulty in catching clear information when they listen to the recording reading texts also becomes a problem in terms of ignorance of pronunciation. In reading questions, they merely understand the basic questions like references and main idea. However, finding synonyms or meanings for the words or phrases would be a big problem for them since they were illiterate in English vocabulary. Besides, the scientific terminologies and topics of the reading texts contributed to the complexity of their understanding. Therefore, they could not catch and figure out its essential ideas.

This study is served by looking at the quantitative data from the TOEFL test result and the qualitative data from small talks and responses during TOEFL Preparation training.

Table. 1 The Final Score of Medical Laboratory Technology Students in The TOEFL Test

Level	Advanced (525- 677)	High Intermediate (480- 520)	Low Intermediate (420- 480)	Elementary (310- 420)
Total Student	-	1	14	47

The highest score was 493, and the lowest score was 310. The average score was 384. The result showed that medical laboratory technology students were still at the elementary level. The Institutional Testing Program (ITP) states the score rate(ETS, 2022).

So, based on the Figure 1, it can be concluded that the TOEFL Score of Medical Laboratory Technology Students was predominantly in the elementary range with 76%. Then, it was followed by low intermediate level 22% and high intermediate at 2%. It means that the students have a fundamental knowledge of English. In other words, they could struggle to do the TOEFL test, where the questions are related to high critical thinking and analysis. Unfortunately, there is no one get an advanced level. So this is the fact that the language centre in the university must consider. The lack of capability in English proficiency cannot be solved by only giving a month preparation before taking the test. The students need extra time to learn and study in TOEFL Preparation training. It is also described in the table 2. The detail of their correctness.

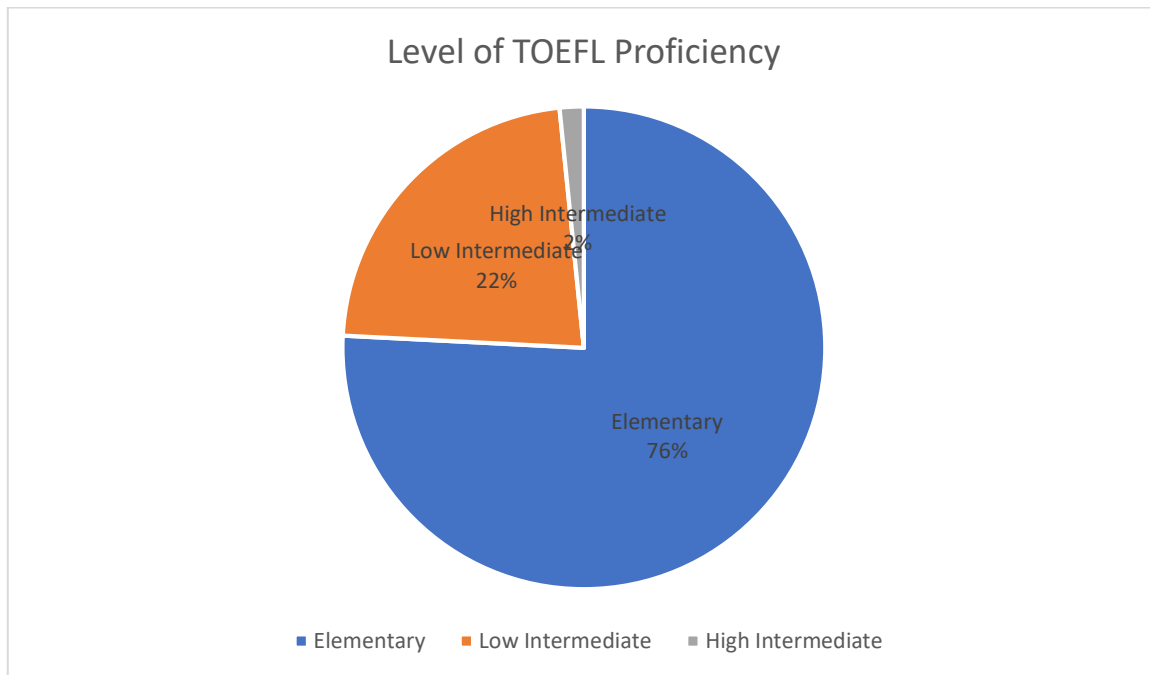


Figure. 1 Percentage of the Level of TOEFL Proficiency in Senior Medical Laboratory Technology Students

Table. 2 The Amount of Correctness of each section

Section	Highest	Lowest	Average
Listening Comprehension	41	7	18
Structure	34	6	13
Reading Comprehension	42	3	16

Based on the table 1, the researcher can conclude that reading comprehension took the highest point among others. The correct number was 42 out of 50 questions. It was slightly better than listening comprehension. In the last place was the structure section, with 34 correct numbers. However, the lowest correctness score also came from reading comprehension with merely 3 questions. In addition, regarding the average of 62 test takers who employed this TOEFL test, the Structure was the hardest for them. Then, it was followed by reading comprehension and listening comprehension.

Those results were in line with the results from drilling tests and observation in a month; most senior medical laboratory technology students had difficulty keeping up with all drilling tests, especially in the basics of subject-verb agreement. Even in this essential thing, they could not ascertain themselves to choose the correct answers. This issue impacts how they analyze questions of error analysis and how they choose the appropriate answer to complete the missing elements of sentences.

Basic knowledge about parts of speech is a prerequisite to comprehending questions in Structure; almost every question is related to this. On the other hand, although they were given a month of learning for the TOEFL test, it was not fully adequate for them to understand this concept wholeheartedly. Perhaps the reason is that their previous basic English knowledge was poor. Because of this lack, they found it hard to determine the higher level of questions such as multiple clauses, reduced clauses, inverted subject-verb, and passive voice.

Some students also complained about reading text that contained long passages. Even in the category of short passages, they also argued about the difficulty of understanding the meaning. So, in the observation process, the researcher detected topics unfamiliar to medical laboratory technology students, such as astronomy, literature, economics, and the environment. Even in health topics, they knew the minimum terminology they should have learned. The unfamiliarity of the academic text or scholarly terminologies affected the passages' apprehension. Although the trainers of TOEFL Preparation taught them tips on how to find the position of the answer in the text, for instance, the clue to find the main idea, purpose, detail question, and complex words, they were still in the condition of deadlock. Despite those difficult questions, they had no issue finding reference-related questions.

In the part of listening comprehension, the senior medical laboratory technology students complained about the inability to catch the meaning of the conversation and the spoken passages while they were listening. The unfamiliarity with the vocabulary and its pronunciation became a problem afterwards. They assumed the sounds of words they heard in the recording text were similar to the written answers in the paper test were correct. They were not always to be the best answer. Nevertheless, in the result of the TOEFL score, listening comprehension is the finest section among the three.

5. Conclusion

Finally, based on the combined result of data from the TOEFL score and observation during their TOEFL preparation training in a month, the researcher concludes that Structure with an average correctness of 13 is the most challenging part of the three sections, followed by reading comprehension 16 correct answers. The easiest part is listening comprehension, depicted in the table of correctness with 18 correct answers. In addition, the average level of medical laboratory technology students is elementary, scoring 310- 420. It means they are beginners who have mastered general or basic vocabulary and simple sentences. They need to improve their skill by taking intensive English courses, whether general English or TOEFL preparation training. Suppose it is for achieving a good score on TOEFL. In that case, the university can encourage the language centre to create an intensive program for preparation training before the test. It must be more than a month based on the last result of the training outcome. Less practice in answering exercises related to TOEFL may impact their ability and habit in dealing with those high-level questions.

Furthermore, the researcher suggests the language centre in the university produces extensive TOEFL preparation training based on the previous results from the test taker's issues with TOEFL material. The students may take a targeted section that is difficult for them to handle. For instance, they can focus on learning Structure class before continuing to another class, such as Reading Comprehension or Listening Comprehension. The language centre should have provided not only the TOEFL Test but also facilitated the courses that focus on each skill in the TOEFL part. However, the preparation of materials and instructional tips in dealing with TOEFL should be made based on student's needs and the difficulty faced by students by giving placement tests or some interviews before entering the TOEFL preparation training. The students may take the test after mastering each part of the TOEFL skill.

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