

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of The Study

In Indonesia, a strong command of the English language holds significant value for prospects. Mastery of English facilitates extensive comprehension and learning opportunities. A specific English proficiency score is imperative for admission to local and international universities. Additionally, proficiency in English becomes a key criterion for hiring in numerous foreign companies. Notably, government entities in Indonesia are increasingly utilizing TOEFL certificates to gauge the English proficiency of their employees. Consequently, due to these advantageous factors, there's a prevailing belief that possessing an English certification, notably the TOEFL, is crucial for future job prospects.

The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is a standardized test to evaluate English language competence. Developed by Educational Testing Services (ETS) in 1962, this assessment evaluates proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.<sup>1</sup> Recognized by universities worldwide, the TOEFL test is mainly required for international student admissions. Moreover, government bodies, corporate entities, and scholarship programs frequently employ the TOEFL as an assessment tool. Some Indonesian universities also incorporate the TOEFL test into their graduation prerequisites.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Smart, "Affordances of TOEFL writing tasks beyond university admissions. Assessing Writing", ScienceDirect, Vol. 41, No. 80-83, (June, 2019), 7.

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has grown in popularity worldwide. It is one of the best tests for assessing our English Proficiency.<sup>2</sup> A TOEFL test is a prerequisite for aspiring to study or work abroad in nearly all cases. Institutions where English is the primary language demand such assessments to ensure the ability to communicate and engage effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. With over 4,500 test centers in 180 countries and more than 22 million test-takers, the TOEFL is globally acknowledged for assessing English proficiency, including its usage within Indonesia.

The TOEFL test was initially conducted in Indonesia by the English Language System (ELS), a dedicated institution for TOEFL testing, referred to as Institutional TOEFL. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) evaluates the English language proficiency of individuals whose native language is not English. The TOEFL, initially overseen in Indonesia by the English Language System (ELS) within Institutional TOEFL, assesses non-native English speakers. Phillips defines TOEFL as a gauge for non-native English proficiency, while various researchers.<sup>3</sup> Many researchers conducted studies on the difficulties faced by students in the TOEFL test. Gunawan highlights issues arising from rapid speech delivery, unfamiliar academic terminologies, and students' struggle with concentration, particularly in the listening section, due to external distractions and physical conditions.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, students are troubled by long speeches delivered too quickly by native speakers, and the speech content is about academic subjects

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<sup>2</sup> Educational Testing Service, *The official guide to the TOEFL test*, (New York: McGraw-Hill LLC, 2012 Fourth Edition), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Phillips, *Longman complete course for the TOEFL test: Preparation for computer and paper test*. (N. Y: Longman, 2001), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Hero Gunawan, "Talks: the most challenging part in TOEFL listening section: a case study", *Widyatama Repository*, Vol.10, No. 1, (Agustus, 2010), 16.

such as biology. Students face difficulties since many terminologies connected to academic subjects are unfamiliar. Furthermore, lack of concentration causes students to struggle with the TOEFL listening comprehension test. Pratiwi discovered in her research that pupils are not focused on taking the test.<sup>5</sup> Physical conditions are also causing students to struggle with the TOEFL listening comprehension test. Students who do not have breakfast before taking the test will be unable to concentrate.

Slamet & PGRI Sidoarjo, n.d; there were various reasons why students struggled with the 'Structure and Written Expression' section of the TOEFL, which was used as a placement test.<sup>6</sup> First, there was no planning. Second, the students lacked vocabulary. Third, because it was the students' first time taking the TOEFL test, it was assumed to be complicated. Finally, the time allotted was minimal. (Asrida, n.d.)<sup>7</sup> According to the skill difficulty study, all skills in reading TOEFL are usually at the medium level for students. Then, the analysis of all items assessed also gave the information that First, in the passage's ideas, students' difficult skill was answering the main idea questions. Second, students' complex skills were to answer stated detail questions directly. Third, in answering indirect responses to questions, students' difficult skill was answering transition questions correctly. Fourth, in vocabulary questions, students' complex skills were to use context to determine the meaning of

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<sup>5</sup> Liyeni Pratiwi, "An Analysis of The Difficulties Encountered by Non-English Department Students in TOEFL Test of Listening Faculty of Education and Teacher Training the State Institute for Islamic Studies Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten", (Paper Bachelor Degree, UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, Serang, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Joko Slamet and Sulistiyansih, "Students' Difficulties in Answering "Structure and Written Expression" TOEFL-like at STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo", *E-Structural*, Vol 4, No.1, (June: 2021), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Risa Asrida and Fitrawati, "The Difficulties of English Department Students At Universitas Negeri Padang In Answering Reading Section Of TOEFL", *Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol. 8, No. 4, (April, 2019), 5.

simple words. Fifth, the overall review questions students' complex skills were used to determine the passage's tone.

Students' views of difficulties varied within the three abilities focused on throughout the TOEFL test. Numerous students consider the structural and Written expression sections tricky, whereas some struggle with listening and reading. Each student's unique strengths heavily influence this diversity. For instance, students who perform well at listening comprehension find the listening section easy to handle. In contrast, others without exposure to hearing English might think of it as challenging. Based on Marzuki's findings, students face various obstacles in the reading part. These limitations involve a restricted vocabulary, challenges recognizing the content of phrases, weak skim reading and scanning skills, challenges summarising each sentence, and challenges interpreting sentences.<sup>8</sup> Given their academic focus, English majors should emphasize learning English more than non-English majors, as mastery of the language is essential to their field of study. The proficiency of English students in mastering the language can be assessed through their TOEFL test performance.

Based on her a notable observation was made during a preliminary investigation. In the context of an English Language Training Management (ELTM) subject, it was discovered that out of all the students who took the TOEFL test, only seven (7%) out of 100 students achieved a score above 470, generally considered a passing mark. This strikingly low success rate highlighted a significant gap in EFL students' effective preparation and strategy implementation. The researcher aims to delve deeper into successful students' specific strategies and advice by conducting a descriptive qualitative

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<sup>8</sup> Dony Marzuki, "Keterampilan Reading TOEFL Like Test Mahasiswa Semester V Jurusan Akuntansi Politeknik Negeri Padang", *Jurnal Akuntansi & Manajemen*, Vol.3, No.2, (December, 2008), 7.

study. Also, to determine the difficulties and factors students faced while answering the TOEFL Test. The goal is to identify common techniques and practices that can be disseminated to help more students improve their TOEFL scores, enhancing their academic and professional opportunities in the English-speaking world. In this research, the researchers analyzed TOEFL because it has been a big problem for students of the English Education Department at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten. It took a lot of work for them to get a high score as a requirement to finish their study.

In Indonesia, particularly at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, the TOEFL test is required for students as a condition of the Skripsi Examination (Munaqasah) and English Degree Score Standard (PEDOMAN AKADEMIK PROGRAM STRATA 1 (S1), n.d.).<sup>9</sup> At UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, English and non-English majors must take the TOEFL test. English Education Department students must achieve a minimum score of 450, while students from other departments must attain at least 400. The most commonly administered test format is the computer-based test (CBT), utilized for the subjects in this research. This test assesses three critical English skills: listening, grammar, and reading comprehension. However, achieving a passing score on the TOEFL test is often challenging, leading to many test takers failing to meet the required standards.

This research analyzes the TOEFL test because it presents significant challenges for students in the English Education Department at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten. Achieving the high scores required to complete their studies has proven difficult for these students. Accordingly, this study investigates EFL students' difficulties with the TOEFL test. Additionally, it explores the challenges and contributing factors affecting students with lower

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<sup>9</sup> PEDOMAN AKADEMIK PROGRAM STRATA 1 (S1). (n.d.).

scores and identifies the strategies employed by those who achieve higher scores. This problem is interesting to be investigated by researchers taking the title "EFL Students' Difficulties and Strategies for Attaining High Scores on The TOEFL Test (Descriptive Qualitative in English Education Study Program)".

## **B. Identification of The Problem**

From the research background above, the identification of the problem is:

1. Difficulties in achieving high scores in the TOEFL test among English students and Factors that hinder the attainment of high scores in the English education study program.
2. The importance of developing effective strategies to address these difficulties and factors to improve the quality of English education and increase the success rates of English students in the TOEFL test.

## **C. Scope and Limitation of the Problem**

The researcher will center on the primary issue outlined in the background section of this study. The investigation will take place at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, focusing on the challenges encountered by English students striving to attain high scores in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) test. The research scope is limited to uncovering the barriers that impede students' success in English education study programs. This issue is relevant for non-native English speakers pursuing an academic bachelor's degree in the English education department. The proposed research aims to identify the obstacles hindering students from achieving high TOEFL scores and analyze the contributing factors.

## **D. Formulation of Problem**

Considering the background, problem identification, and problem limitation described above, the research problems can be formulated as follows:

1. What are English students' difficulties and factors when attempting the TOEFL Test?
2. What are the potential solutions/Advice to address these difficulties and improve English students' TOEFL scores?

### **E. Objective of Study**

The researcher determines the research objective based on the formulation of the problem as follows:

1. Identify the most common difficulties and factors that hinder English students from achieving high scores in the TOEFL test by English students when attempting the TOEFL test.
2. Propose potential solutions to address the identified difficulties and enhance the English language proficiency of English students, including interventions that target individual factors.

### **F. Significance of Study**

The researcher expects that the current study will be valuable to society in general, particularly regarding the need for teaching and learning in the TOEFL test. The researcher divides the study's relevance into theoretical and practical components.

#### **a. Theoretically**

The current study will theoretically be helpful as a reference for developing knowledge about identifying the most common difficulties encountered by English students when attempting the TOEFL test and

analyzing the primary factors that prevent English students from achieving high TOEFL test scores.

b. Practically

Practically, the result of this present study will be expected to have significance for the teacher, student, and the researcher herself.

1. For the students

the study's identification of the specific difficulties students encounters when attempting the TOEFL test and the factors hindering their high scores can inform students' preparation strategies and help them achieve better results. It will provide valuable insights into the difficulties encountered by students when attempting the TOEFL test and inform the development of more effective preparation strategies. The researcher hopes that EFL students can overcome it.

2. For the teachers

The present study's findings will be of great practical significance for English language teachers in designing teaching strategies and interventions that target the identified difficulties encountered by English students when attempting the TOEFL test. English language teachers can use this information to develop teaching interventions and strategies that address these specific difficulties and help students achieve higher scores on the TOEFL test.

3. For the researcher

It will provide valuable insights into the difficulties encountered by English students when attempting the TOEFL test and inform the development of future research studies that



seek to address these difficulties and improve language learning outcomes.

## **G. The Previous Research**

So far, the researcher has found what is related to this study. It can be explained as follows:

### 1. Students' Difficulties in Answering "Structure and Written Expression" TOEFL

Joko Slamet and Sulistyaningsih of STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo are the study's authors. This study aims to investigate the types of tough questions in TOEFL-like and discover the students' challenges in answering TOEFL-like's "Structure and Written Expression" part. The descriptive-qualitative research method was used for this investigation. According to the findings of this study, there was no prior preparation, the students lacked vocabulary, the exam was deemed challenging because the students were taking the TOEFL for the first time, and there was a time constraint.<sup>10</sup>

### 2. The Difficulties of English Department Students at Universitas Negeri Padang in Answering Reading Section of TOEFL

Risa Asrida and Fitrawati, researchers from the English Department Faculty of Languages and Arts at the State University of Padang. They aimed to explore students' challenges in tackling the TOEFL reading section. The study utilized descriptive research to assess students' proficiency issues in completing the TOEFL reading test during the 2016 academic year. The research instrument

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<sup>10</sup> Joko Slamet and Sulistyaningsih, "Students' Difficulties in Answering "Structure and Written Expression" TOEFL-like at STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo", *E-Structural*, Vol 4, No.1, (June: 2021), 4.

employed was the reading sub-test. Analysis revealed that English students from the previous year at Universitas Negeri Padang encountered difficulties with 13 specific topics within the test. Notably, the five most challenging aspects were identifying main ideas, responding to stated detail questions, addressing transition questions, determining word meaning within context, and interpreting the tone of paragraphs.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. An Analysis of English Department Students' Difficulties in Answering TOEFL Test of Listening Comprehension

Parni Rina and Yuli Tiarina from the English Education Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Padang, are the authors of this study. This study aimed to determine the elements contributing to English students' problems answering the TOEFL listening comprehension test. The descriptive research method assessed students' challenges in solving the TOEFL listening comprehension test. The findings of this study indicate that students in the English Department at Universitas Negeri Padang do not face significant challenges in responding to the listening comprehension sections of the TOEFL test. The students concur that the listening comprehension questions are not excessively difficult to answer.<sup>12</sup>

Students encounter difficulties during the TOEFL test due to several factors, including limited vocabulary, lack of concentration, the length and speed of the listening sections, and physical condition. Despite these challenges, students can often devise effective

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<sup>11</sup> Risa Asrida and Fitrawati, "The Difficulties of English Department Students at Universitas Negeri Padang in Answering Reading Section Of TOEFL", *Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol. 8, No. 4, (April, 2019), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Parni Rina and Yuli Tiarina, "An Analysis of English Department Students' Difficulties in Answering TOEFL Test of Listening Comprehension", *Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol. 10, No.1, (February, 2021), 4.

strategies to identify the best answers, even for the more minor issues. All of the researchers mentioned above examined the same thing. This study and theirs are similar in analyzing the difficulties students encountered during the TOEFL test. Most researchers concentrated solely on one aspect, such as listening, vocabulary, and structure.

The researcher aims to comprehensively address this topic by thoroughly examining the challenges associated with responding to the TOEFL test across all evaluated skills. The goal is to ascertain the impediments that hinder achieving high scores. The research endeavours to holistically identify and analyse the obstacles faced in TOEFL test performance across various section sets. It also aims to discern the underlying factors that inhibit the attainment of high scores while offering potential learning strategies to navigate these challenges. The study supports TOEFL test prediction methods and employs a combination of documentation and interviews as crucial investigative tools.