

# The Students' Reading Ability on Test of English as the Foreign Language (TOEFL)

Herdi

Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia, 28265

E-mail: herdi.23@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** The Purpose of this research was to find out students' ability in reading texts in Test of English for the Foreign Language (TOEFL) at English Education Department of Lancang Kuning University. Design of this research was survey design. Sample of the research was 23 students at the Seventh semester Students of English Education Department of Lancang Kuning University. The researcher used test as instrument that was reading texts in TOEFL in term of multiple choice. Test was analyzed by using 'descriptive statistics'. The result of analyzing data showed that the students' scores was 1214, mode was 46, median was 52, variance was 157.35 and standard deviation was 12.54. Mean was 52.78 Thus, researcher concluded that students' ability in reading texts in TOEFL was categorized into weak

**Keywords:** Reading and TOEFL

## 1. Introduction

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a kind of proficiency test for students to know about their proficiency of English. It is very important for them to get a good score. The students got the admission of their English proficiency by having the certificate given after test. TOEFL represents students' proficiency in English in term of listening, written expression, speaking, reading and structure. Therefore, it should be learnt seriously by the students.

In English Department of Lancang Kuning University, TOEFL test (Test of English for the Foreign Language) is one of the requirements to have the comprehensive examination. In the TOEFL test, there are three main discussions such structure, reading and listening. Firstly, structure focuses on the understanding of written expression and grammar. Secondly, reading focuses on the students' understanding in the some kinds of texts that belong to the particular contexts. The last, the students have to understand the spoken language expression in listening section. The students should get the score more than 450. It means that the students have to be good in understanding structure, reading, and listening if they want to pass the exam.

In this research, the researcher focused on reading comprehension in TOEFL. It is defined as a cognitive or behavioral action that is enacted under particular contextual conditions with the goal of improving some aspects of comprehension (Graesser, 2007:6). This assumption mainly regards the cognitive aspect in context of the reader while reading. Text was made by the author under the particular context. Then, every text has a context. Context is the field or condition and situation where the passage belongs to. The knowledge that is got from the text is able to develop the reader comprehension of the

particular discussion. Therefore, it can be said that the more he or she read the more he or she got the information.

In short, reading is one of skills that is suggested in every level of education. In short, Reading is one of language skills that can be taught at every level of education dealing with teaching English. It is a receptive skill where the students are regarded to receive and understand the language skill in form of written language. It is caused by the consideration that supposes reading as the important skill because many books used are written by using English. It makes the students have to learn how to read effectively. It was useful for them to be proficient in reading. Referring to the explanation above, the researcher was interested to conduct a research under title "The Students' Reading Ability in Test of English as the Foreign Language (TOEFL): A study at English Education Department of Lancang Kuning University".

## 2. Reading in TOEFL

Reading in TOEFL (Test of English for the Foreign Language) is complex because students have to know some discussion to answer the question. According to Barry (2003:1) in having the reading in TOEFL, the test takers who receive a score at the high level, typically understand academic texts in English that require a wide range of reading abilities regardless of the difficulty of the texts. Test takers who score at the high level, typically: (a) Have a very good command of academic vocabulary and grammatical structure. (b) Can understand and connect information, make appropriate inferences and synthesize ideas, even when the text is conceptually dense and the language is complex. (c) Can recognize the expository organization of a text and the role that specific information serves within the larger text, even when the text is conceptually dense. (d) Can abstract major ideas from a text, even when the text is conceptually dense and contains

complex language. Takido (2007:8) The Reading section measures the test taker's ability to understand university-level academic texts and passages. In many academic settings around the world, students are expected to read and understand information from textbooks and other academic materials written in English. According to Sharpe (2004: 207) there are some discussion in reading TOEFL such as:

a. Previewing

Research shows that it is easier to understand what students are reading, if students begin with a general idea of what the passage is about. Previewing helps you form a general idea of the topic in your mind. To preview, read the first sentence of each paragraph and the last sentence of the passage. Students should do this as quickly as possible. Remember, students are not reading for specific information, but for an impression of the *topic*.

b. Reading for main ideas

By previewing, students can form a general idea of what a reading passage is about; that is, students identify the topic. By reading for main ideas, students identify the point of view of the author-that is, what the writer's thesis is. Specifically, what does the author propose to write about the topic? If students could reduce the reading to one sentence, what would it be? Questions about the main idea can be worded in many ways. For example, the following questions are all asking for the same information: (1) What is the main idea? (2) What is the subject? (3) What is the topic? (4) What would be a good title?

c. Using context for vocabulary

Before students can use a context, you must understand what a context is. In English, a context is the combination of vocabulary and grammar that surrounds a word. Context can be a sentence or a paragraph or a passage. Context helps you make a general prediction about meaning. If students know the general meaning of a sentence, students also know the general meaning of the words in the sentence. Making predictions from contexts is very important when students are reading a foreign language. In this way, students can read and understand the meaning of a passage without stopping to look up every new word in a dictionary. On an examination like the TOEFL, dictionaries are not permitted in the room.

d. Scanning for detail

After reading a passage on the TOEFL, students will be expected to answer six to ten questions. Most of them are multiple-choice. First, read a question and find the important content words. Content words are usually nouns, verbs, or adjectives. They are called content words because they contain the content or meaning of a sentence.

e. Making inference

Sometimes, in a reading passage, you will find a direct statement of fact. That is called evidence. But other times, you will not find a direct statement. Then you will need to use the evidence you have to make an inference. An *inference* is a logical conclusion based on evidence. It can be about the passage itself or about the author's viewpoint.

f. Identifying exception

After reading a passage on the TOEFL, you will be asked to select from four possible answers the one that is not mentioned in the reading. Use your scanning skills to locate related words and phrases in the passage and the answer choices.

g. Locating reference

After reading a passage on the TOEFL, students will be asked to find the antecedent of a pronoun. An antecedent is a word or phrase to which a pronoun refers. Usually, students will be given a pronoun such as "it," "its," "them," or-"their," and you will be asked to locate the reference word or phrase in the passage. First, find the pronoun in the passage. Then read the sentence using the four answer choices in place of the pronoun. The meaning of the sentence in the context of the passage will not change when students substitute the correct antecedent.

h. Referring the passage

After reading the passage on the TOEFL, students will be asked to find certain information in the passage, and identify it by line number or paragraph. First, read the question. Then refer to the line numbers and paragraph numbers in the answer choices to scan for the information in the question.

i. Reading faster

Read the following passage, using the skills students have learned. Preview, read for main ideas, and use contexts for vocabulary. To read faster, read phrases instead of words. Students try to see an entire line of text when students focus their eyes on the passage. Scan for details and evidence. Make inferences.

Furthermore, according to Johan (2001:1) reading comprehension in TOEFL focus on how to be advanced reader. Advanced reader means that the students try to get the information exactly and can use the time as effective as possible. In TOEFL, the students only have limited time to answer the question correctly so that they should know how to do it well.

The last, George (2000:3) states that reading comprehension in TOEFL should be taken after having knowledge of how to be a good reader. Therefore, they must learn and take special course before they take TOEFL test in order they get satisfied result. In fact, reading comprehension in TOEFL is difficult enough which it needs a good background knowledge of the text and understanding of some less intensity of words. In conclusion, there are nine indicators of reading in TOEFL that will be used in this research such as previewing, reading for the main idea, using context for vocabulary, reading for detail, making inference, identifying exception, locating referring, reading the passage, and reading faster.

### 3. Method

In doing this research, the researcher conducted survey designs as quantitative research. Creswell (2005:354) explains that survey research is procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people in other to

describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of population. The purpose of survey designs are as a program evaluation in this research.

In this study, the researcher analyzed the performance of the students' ability in understanding TOEFL in reading at the English department of Lancang Kuning University. Then, to analyze the students' level score the researcher used the rank as presented below:

**Table 4.1:**  
**Score Categories**

No	Scale	Level
1	84-100	High
2	71-83	Intermediate
3	56-70	Low
4	<55	Weak

(from ETS paper based)

### 3.2 Setting of the Research

The research conducted at the seventh semester of English Education Department of Lancang Kuning University Pekanbaru. The number of sample was 23 students.

### 3.3 Instrument of the Research

The instrument of this research was reading in Paper-Based TOEFL documentation. The test of document used was reading section that comfomed in the TOEFL test based on Sharpe (2004) indicator.

**Table 4.2**  
**Blueprint of the Test**

No	Indicators	Items	Score
1	Previewing	10x2.5	25
2	Reading for main ideas	5x2.5	12.5
3	Using context for vocabulary	5x2.5	12.5
4	Scanning for detail	5x2.5	12.5
5	Making inference Identifying exception	5x2.5	12.5
6	Locating reference	5x2.5	12.5
7	Referring the passage	10x2.5	25
8	Reading faster	5x2.5	12.5
Total		50	100

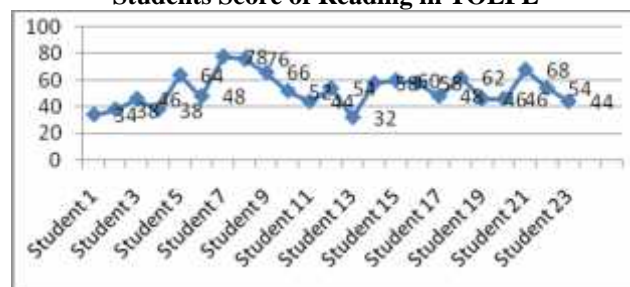
## 4. Findings and Discussion

The researcher has assessed the students' work to 23 samples at the seventh semester of English education department of UNILAK Pekanbaru. The test has been given to answer the research question in this research. The research question was "How is Students' Ability in Reading Texts in Test of English for the Foreign Language (TOEFL) at English Education Department of Lancang

Kuning University? In order to answer this question, the researcher collected the students' worksheet from the lecturer. In order to answer this question, the test consisted of 50 items. Each of the items scored 2, and 100 for the all correct. The researcher calculated the scores of the students from individual correct answer. The more correct answer they have, the higher their scores would be. On the other hand, the fewer the correct answer they made, the lower their score would be.

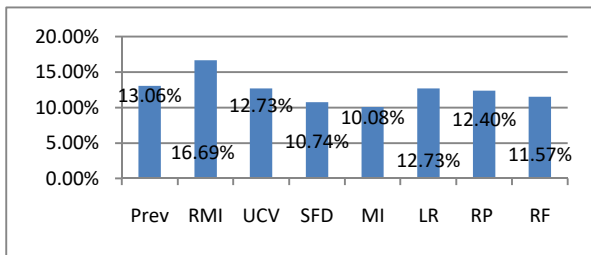
Based on the presentation of the table above, it could be seen students' ability in reading texts in Test of English for the Foreign Language (TOEFL) at the seventh semester of English Education Department of Lancang Kuning University could be generally categorized week. Table above showed that the total of the students' scores the students' ability in TOEFL was 1214, mode of the students' scores was 46, median of the students' scores was 52. Variance of the students' scores was 157.35, and standard deviation was 12.54. The scores range from a low of 32 to a high of 78 was 46 points. The average of mean score of the students' ability in reading texts in Test of English for the Foreign Language (TOEFL) at English Education Department of Lancang Kuning University Academic Year 2013 was 52.78.

**Figure 5.1:**  
**Students Score of Reading in TOEFL**



Referring to the figure above the highest score was 78, the student who got score 78 was students number eight, and the student who got lowest score was number thirteen with the score was 32. So it can be conclude range of the level score was 46. Based on the indicators of Reading in TOEFL, there were eight indicators, they were previewing, reading for main ideas, using context for vocabulary, scanning for detail, making inference identifying exception, locating reference, referring the passage, and reading faster. Pertaining to data gotten, the students had high score in Reading for main idea, while the low score in making inference identifying exception.

**Figure 5.2:**  
**Students' Score in Indicators of Reading in TOEFL**



With regard to the diagram above showed that students' score in previewing was 13.06%, Reading main idea was 16.69%, Using context was 12.73%, scanning detail was 10.74%, Making inference was 10.08%, locating inference was 12.73%, referring the passage was 12.40%, and the students' score in reading faster was 11.57%. it can be concluded that from eight indicators, reading main idea was the highest score among seven indicators. Referring the data gotten above that focused on the average of students' score, it could be identified that the students' ability in reading TOEFL at the seventh semester students of English Education Department of Lancang Kuning University was categorized into Weak.

## 5. Conclusions and Suggestions

Based on the data described in previous discussion, the researcher makes some conclusions as in the following: (a) there are 23 students as the sample. From these 23 students can be seen that the total of the students' scores in reading texts in TOEFL is 1214. The average of the students' scores in reading texts in TOEFL is 52.78. (b) The researcher concluded that the finding on students' ability in reading texts in TOEFL at the seventh semester student is categorized into weak. Based on the conclusion above, there are some suggestions that addressed by the researcher: (a) To the TOEFL Lecturers are suggested to teach reading section simultaneously. (b) To the students at the seventh semester are suggested to comprehend more in reading texts in TOEFL to be better. (c) To the other researchers who are interested to conduct the research in the same field are suggested to use the strategy or one technique for improving the students' ability in reading texts in TOEFL.

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