

Students' Perception: Assessing English Competence in TOEFL As a Standardized English Language Proficiency Test in Indonesian's Higher Education

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Abstract

This study aimed to know the perception of Indonesian students in standardized English proficiency in TOEFL. The research design of this study employed descriptive research. Twenty-seven students from several degrees in university level were selected randomly as the participants. To examine students' perception, the researcher employed Google Form as an instrument to collect data, and the researcher also employed an interview section as supporting data. In collecting data, the researcher attached nine questions in Google form. Therefore, the questionnaires were analyzed to identify the perception of students in TOEFL as a standardized English Language Proficiency test. In methodology, the researcher employed mix method to investigate in this study, and the questionnaires distributed randomly by using WhatsApp. Regarding findings in this study, the conclusion revealed that TOEFL as a standardized proficiency test still could be as a benchmark to measure English proficiency in certain kinds such as TOEFL ITP. In addition, the other assessments could be possible as an instrument to measure English proficiency such as portfolio, peer assessment and many more.

Keywords: *Students' perception, TOEFL, English Proficiency*

1. INTRODUCTION

English becomes a tool in communicating processes among people around the world globally. English also is employed as one of official languages when you interact with foreigners. Therefore, many Indonesians attempt to learn English, and mastering English is also considered to be a compulsory requirement in applying to multinational companies. English is also considered to be an asset to succeed now day

in competing for job market. Since 2015, ASEAN regional agrees to implement MEA (Southeast Asian Economic Society), English is more needed than before in communicating among ASEAN people. It is needed not only in the diplomacy field but all interactions at all levels. Starting from students, professionals, and commoners attempt to master English, and the way to assess that is through an English proficiency test.

Most Indonesian Universities have similar requirement before university students graduate. They have to pass in a minimum score in English Language Proficiency Test, which is required as a requirement in the graduation process. The university students are not allowed to graduate before they reach 450 scores in TOEFL PBT (Herwandar, Haryono, and Safriono, 2012). Ananda (2016) adds in her research that most prestigious universities in Indonesia require TOEFL and IELTS as the compulsory requirements for admission in every level university, starting from undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students to reach high score test. In order to achieve a satisfactory score, many university students do a simulation through TOEFL preparation test, which becomes a way to be familiar with the questions. The research based on TOEFL preparation test has been conducted by (Mafufah, 2017). In her research, most of the students reveal that they are satisfied in taking TOEFL preparation class before doing the real TOEFL test. In addition, there is research where the teacher faces challenges in order to teach TOEFL for certain Indonesian to reach maximum score (Roza, 2019).

In recent years, using TOEFL score is employed as a requirement for graduation, where it also becomes a trend in the academic world besides IELTS (Nurhayati & Giri, 2015). Erfani (2012) also states that TOEFL and IELTS becomes frequently used in an academic setting; those tests are taken by students, teachers, or researchers for certain purposes regarding their needs. Furthermore, using TOEFL and IELTS is seen as the best test for measuring English competence. A similar case also happens in Taiwan, where in every year demanding to reach a higher score at the university level happens. University students in Taiwan are emphasized to reach a high score in standardized English proficiency test (Tsai & Tsou, 2009).

TOEFL and IELTS are not the only tests in order to measure English proficiency for non-native and native, and there are some commercial standardized tests to examine that even for native itself. There are four commercially standardized tests of English proficiency, such as TOEFL, Michigan English Language Assessment Battery, IELTS, and TOEIC (Brown, 2003). Those standardized tests are a good assessment to monitor student's English proficiency. Therefore, reaching a high score in TOEFL and IELTS is considered that they are capable enough to communicate English by doing in spoken or written.

This study focuses on the learner's perception and examines what university students view the use of standardized English proficiency as a way of measuring their English competence for undergraduate and on-going graduate students. The subject assumptions of this research are that what students view about the test of TOEFL can

measure English real competence. It also assumes that the relation in reaching a high score in TOEFL reflects their English competence.

1.1 The role assessment in learning

The reason for focusing students' viewpoint in conducting two perceptions: the effect assessment on learning and the effect of standardized in learning. First, it is that a good assessment is a tool to assist students in collecting information about the knowledge and skill of learners (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2001). During the learning process, the teacher attempts to ensure that the assessment encourages students' active involvement in reflection, feedback, and self-evaluation (Keppel & Caeless, 2006). In addition, Stobart (2005) points out that fair assessment is not only a system related to the impact on how curricula are planned and taught, but it also relates to cultural and social differences. Gardner (1992) argues that assessment should be through a real-life context such as projects and portfolios. Many researches have conducted an alternative assessment such as peer assessments Sivan (2000), portfolios Gardner (1992), and innovative feedback Carless (2002). Second, standardized tests are originally English proficiency tests that are different from achievement tests. Moreover, it relates to students' focusing view, and it should be given more attention to students themselves. Regarding this second reason, there is a negative impact on students (Morison & Tang, 2002). The students are considered to compare other results rather than on how he/she perform in mastering English proficiency.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research employed mix methods. The research design of this study employed descriptive qualitative. In addition, the research objectives in this study are to investigate some aspects regarding students' perceptions in English proficiency tests. The following represent objectives for study:

1. To analyze students' perception factors of a standardized English proficiency test in TOEFL.
2. To analyze students' view of the standardized English proficiency test as a tool for assessing English competence.

This study employed an electronic questionnaire survey by using Google Form to investigate how students from several universities in Indonesia viewed the use of TOEFL as the standardized English proficiency test. The researcher distributed randomly to these students in social media platforms (i.e., *Whatsapp*), and got good responses. Several university departments filled the questioners. In addition, there were certain graduate and undergraduate students who express their perceptions regarding this issue.

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study were recruited randomly by using an electronic survey, and the level of the subjects were from the bachelor and master degree. There were

27 participants who came from several departments (i.e., English education, Math education, Communication, and Law).

Table 1. Summary of Respondents

No	Department	Level	Participants
1	English Education	Magister	16
2	English Education	Bachelor	1
3	Math Education	Magister	7
4	Law Department	Magister	2
5	Communication Department	Bachelor	1
Total			27

2.2 Instrument

Regarding theories from this study, the questionnaires were made by using Bahasa to avoid misinterpretation from other departments such as Maths, Law, and communication department. Using Bahasa as questionnaires facilitated participants from non-english department to submit the data. Moreover, it might increase an opportunity from other department to submit and enrich the data. The instrument would be changed into English in the discussion below. There were nine questions that all of the questions emphasized in students' perception of a standardized English proficiency test. In addition, the researcher employed paperless and using Google form to collect the data. Before the participants filled the questionnaire, there were a section that indicated the levels of education, starting from high school to doctoral degree, but the respondents only came from bachelor and magister degree.

The researcher also employed interviews with some participants. The data from interview section would be a supporting data in this study. During the interview section, both interviewer and interviewee employed casual conversation. The data were recorded digitally by using an audio recording device, and the questions were open-ended questions. To sum up, the response of interview section, the researcher presented point of the questions. TOEFL might be able to measure English proficiency fairly. Regarding interviewee, TOEFL had various kinds such as PBT, CBT, iBt, and ITP. ITP seemed more difficult rather than other, but it helped you to measure in listening, writing, and reading comprehension. ITP model looked like IELTS in its test. Several kinds of TOEFL might be employed to measure it. Moreover, TOEFL was not only way that could be employed in measuring English proficiency. There were a lot of tools that could be employed. Portofolio was one option that could be considered as an alternative tools in measuring English proficiency.

3. FINDING

There were several findings that the researcher found in questionnaires and interviews in students' perceptions in standardized English proficiency tests.

1. Students' perception in making TOEFL to be the only one to assess English proficiency test.

In the questionnaire, all participants answered regarding the question and shared their thoughts, perceptions, point of view, and feeling opinions about a certain question based on a standardized English proficiency test in TOEFL. In this first question, only 11.1% of participants answered strongly agree for employing TOEFL, the only one tool to assess English competence. That was the lowest opinion regarding others. 14.8% of participants replied they agree, and 40.7% of participants responded neutral as the most frequent response. Meanwhile, 14.8% of participants report strongly disagree, and the rest answer 18.5% for disagreeing.

In addition, the result of the interview states that using TOEFL for the only option to assess English competence was not appropriate. TOEFL was not only an instrument to assess it, but it could also be employed IELTS for advanced assessment than TOEFL. Indonesian thought IELTS was more advance than TOEFL in assessing English proficiency. The interviewee added if the result of English competence that only employed in restricted scope. Assessing English proficiency could be employed, such as portfolio, speaking practice, or even casual conversation to know how far they master English.

2. Students' perception for using another assessment to measure English competence.

In this questionnaire, there were two big sides that agreed to use another assessment to measure English competence. The most frequent participant answered agree (48.1%) in employing another assessment to measure English competence; meanwhile, a third participant also gave strongly agree in order employing that. The first and second questionnaires showed that TOEFL was not the only option to measure English competence. In addition, the interviewee responded that TOEFL could be possibly employed to measure real competence, but it was another kind of TOEFL, namely ITP. In fact, PBT was more common to be employed in Indonesia universities rather than ITP.

3. Your TOEFL score reflected your English competence.

In this questionnaire, participants gave their thought that your TOEFL reflected your competence. In this third question, only 3.7% of participants answered strongly agree and strongly disagreed with this issue. Those were the lowest opinion regarding others. That was interested in the major opponent reached the same percentage. Meanwhile, 44.4% of participants replied agree, and 40.7% of participants responded neutrally. 7.4% of participants responded with disagreeing. As the most frequent response. Meanwhile, 14.8% of participants report strongly disagree, and the rest answer 18.5% for disagreeing.

4. Students' perception in assessing TOEFL as fairest and objective to measure English competence.

In this questionnaire, participants responded negatively to the question. 37% responded they disagree in assessing TOEFL as fairest and objective to measure English. It indicated that TOEFL should be fairest and objective. Meanwhile, 29.6% responded neutral and agreed with this question. Only 3.7% of participants responded with strongly disagree. Conducting the first question, assessing English competence should not be totally based on TOEFL score. The interviewee also added that some people probably understood in a certain section on TOEFL, but they had a problem to deal with certain section (i.e., structure).

5. Students' perception in the effectiveness of TOEFL used to measure English competence.

Related to the previous questionnaire, participants responded negatively to this question. They responded 40.7% neutral, while 33.3% responded positively with agree. Only 3.7% responded strongly agree and strongly disagreed. In the third place from this question, respondents disagree (18.5%). In addition, the result of the interview stated that the effectiveness of TOEFL used to measure English proficiency. It might not be effective because TOEFL was not only one as an instrument to assess English competence. That was another way to assess by using IELTS for advanced assessment than TOEFL. Indonesian thought IELTS was more advance than TOEFL in assessing English proficiency. The interviewee added if the result of English competence that only employed in restricted scope. Assessing English proficiency could be employed, such as portfolio, speaking practice, or even casual conversation to know how deep they master in English.

6. Students' perception in using TOEFL as an appropriate assessment to assess four skills.

In this questionnaire, participants responded negatively to the question. Almost half of participants (48.1%) responded neutral when talking TOEFL to assess four English skills. 18.5% of respondents answered agree and strongly disagree, while 7.4% of respondents replied with disagree and strongly agree. In the interview section, the interviewee gave his argument regarding this issue. He stated that TOEFL could be employed to assess four English skills if it was ITP. Frequently, PBT was commonly used in university institutions to fulfill admission and graduation requirements. When ITP employed to test, it also covered the speaking test, whereas PBT did not have a speaking test in its score. It only had listening, structure, reading section in its scoring.

7. Students' perception in using TOEFL as a benchmark in assessing communication competence with foreigners.

In this questionnaire, participants responded negatively to the question. Only 14% of participants responded agree in this question while 37% responded neutral in assessing TOEFL as a benchmark where it reflected their

competence to communicate with foreigners by using English. In addition, 29.6% responded disagree, and 18.5% responded strongly disagree. Regarding the interview section, the interviewee stated his perception based on this issue. It related to the previous questionnaire, where using speaking tests like ITP could be the way to assess English competence. Using PBT was difficult enough to assess their speaking skill, whereas English was a tool to communicate among people by using English.

8. Students' perception in reflecting TOEFL test as the real illustration in mastering English concept.

In this questionnaire, participants argued on agree and neutral choice. 48.1% of participants responded neutrally, while 44.4% responded agree. Only 3.7% of participants responded strongly agree and disagree. In the interview section, the interviewee responded that even though PBT TOEFL could not cover all skills, TOEFL itself showed concepts in English (i.e., structure, listening, and reading). It has introduced concept English which the basics of English showed in the test.

9. Students' perception in reflecting TOEFL score with mastering English competence.

In this questionnaire, participants gave their thought that your TOEFL score reflected your competence. In this last question, the participants responded 37% agree, while 33.3% of participants responded neutral. 14.8% of participants responded with disagree, and only 3.7% of participants answered strongly agree and strongly disagree with this issue. Those were the lowest opinion regarding others.

Those explanations reflect every question in Google form. It is a sum up data which it shows in the table to display whole data.

Table 2. perception on the standardized test as an assessment tool in TOEFL.

Item	Question/option	Percentages				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Students' perception for making TOEFL to be the only one to assess English proficiency test.	14.8	18.5	40.7	14.8	11.1
2	Students' perception for using another assessment to measure English competence	-	7.4	11.1	48.1	33.3
3	Your TOEFL score reflected your English competence	3.7	7.4	40.7	44.4	3.7
4	Students' perception in assessing TOEFL as fairest and objective to measure English competence	3.7	37	29.6	29.6	-

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5	Students' perception in the effectiveness of TOEFL used to measure English competence	3.7	18.5	40.7	33.3	3.7
6	Students' perception in using TOEFL as an appropriate assessment to assess four skills	18.5	7.4	48.1	18.5	7.4
7	Students' perception in using TOEFL as a benchmark in assessing communication competence with foreigners	18.5	29.6	37	14.8	-
8	Students' perception in reflecting TOEFL test as the real illustration in mastering English concept	-	3.7	48.1	44.4	3.7
9	Students' perception in reflecting TOEFL score with mastering English competence	7.4	14.8	33.3	37	7.4

*1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5 = strongly agree

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, this study has shown that standardized assessments in TOEFL could be employed to measure English proficiency, but it happens for certain kinds of TOEFL like ITP. These findings support Sivan and Gardner. Assessing English competence did not only depend on using commercial assessments such as TOEFL, IELTS, etc. Portfolio, peer assessment and many more could be employed to measure English competence even though most institutions requires a certificate from those commercial assessments.

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