

THE HIGH ACHIEVERS' STRATEGIES IN ANSWERING READING COMPREHENSION IN TOEFL

Agung Wicaksono¹⁾, Jatmiko²⁾

¹⁾Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FKIP

²⁾Prodi keperawatan S1, Fakultas Ilmu Kesehatan

Universitas Kadiri, East-Java, Indonesia

agungwicaksono@unpkediri.ac.id¹⁾, jatmiko@unik-kediri.ac.id²⁾

Abstract (English)

This study is to describe the high achievers' strategies in answering reading comprehension in TOEFL. As we know there are many strategies used in answering this section, so this study finds out the essential strategies used by the high achievers in TOEFL. It is descriptive study that employed qualitative approach. The subject of this study was 5 the high achievers of Nusantara PGRI University. The sample was selected using purposive sampling technique; they were selected by having score more than 500 and achieved high score in reading comprehension section. The data collected by interviewing the high achievers, so interview used as a data collection technique. The findings show that various used in answering reading comprehension. There eight essential strategies used by the high achievers to answer reading comprehension include vocabulary in TOEFL.

Article History

Submitted: 10 Juli 2024

Accepted: 15 Juli 2024

Published: 16 Juli 2024

Key Words

TOEFL PBT; Reading
Comprehension; High
Achiever

INTRODUCTION

The TOEFL paper-based test (PBT) is a four-section assessment that is offered in places where the TOEFL internet-based test (iBT) is not available. The PBT evaluates reading, listening, and writing skills along with knowledge of English conventions through four test sections: listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. This test evaluates the academic ability of an individual in using and understanding the standard of American English at a university level (mufidah, 2014) PBT reading comprehension is designed to measure "the ability to understand non-technical reading material." Students are allowed 55 minutes to answer 50 multiple-choice questions on reading passages intended for non-specialists. Questions ask about information stated or implied in reading passages and the meaning of specific words or phrases. PBT Reading Comprehension features a series of multiple-choice questions on brief reading passages that are each approximately 10-35 lines of text. Reading passage subject matter is intended to reflect topics that are likely to be included in college courses. Among the important skills for PBT Reading Comprehension are understanding of main ideas, using context to infer meaning, and comprehension of information. On the Reading Comprehension portion of the TOEFL PBT, students must answer 50 questions in 55 minutes. The number of questions associated with each reading excerpt depends on the length of the passage and can range from 6-12 questions for each. Reading is tested in the last section on TOEFL test which focuses on understanding reading passage. In this section, the paper test may ask about the main idea, directly answered details, vocabulary or overall review ideas ((Iskandar Abdul Samad, 2017).

Every section has its own difficulty such as in reading comprehension. According to (Antoni, 2014), they defined that reading comprehension is a section of TOEFL test that assess the ability in understanding English reading passage. Each passage is followed by several questions depends on the topic discusses in reading passage ((Mahmud, 2014)

explored generally the difficulties in reading comprehension influenced by test-takers limitation of vocabulary and unfamiliar phrase in understanding the meaning of English texts. This impacts on the students' ability in answering questions in reading comprehension section of TOEFL test (Iskandar Abdul Samad, 2017).

They agreed that they less of strategy in answering the question. The strategy could help the test-takers increasing their scores on tests through the effective use of their time and answer the question easily. Interestingly, (Lambert, 2012) in his research found that the strategy is an important factor in completing the test. In his research, he divided his respondents into two groups which are students' view and students' experience. Students' view refers to student that have taking the TOEFL without using any strategies whereas students' experience refers to student that have taking TOEFL and using strategies the result of his study is both of student agree that having strategy during the test is more important that having skills. Furthermore, (Alavi, S, M & Bodbar, 2012)) states that this is important to recognize that strategies and a group of skills can be used to facilitate the test of reading comprehension. As a result, the strategy used becomes one of the ways in answering TOEFL.

METHOD

According to Creswell, (2012) defined that population is a large collection of individuals or objects that have similar characteristics. The population of this study is Nusantara PGRI Kediri students in Teacher Training and Education faculty especially English language education department. This research decides to have five participants. Those five participants are chosen based on purposive sampling method. This study purposively takes the students that have taken and got 500 or more the TOEFL test score and have 35-50 correct answers in the reading section which is presented by 45-67 score for their reading comprehension section. (Brown, 2005) defined that in purposive sampling, the researchers choose the participant based on the researcher own judgment, keeping back in mind the purpose of the study.

In getting and collecting the data, this study uses interview as the data collection technique. This is a method of collecting data that was done through a question and answer directly with the data source. (Mahmud, 2014) argued that interview means collecting information which is done directly and verbally, meaning that the interviewer has a face-to-face, questioning-answering session with the interviewee. According to (Dooden, 2015) there are three types of interviews called highly structured interview, semi-structured interview, and open- structured interview. This research employed a semi-structured interview. In this study, semi-structure interview uses in order to give freedom to the participant and encourage them to speak about their strategy deeply. A Semi-structured interview is a type of interview where the researcher is allowed to ask the additional question and discuss additional topics related to the issue discussed (Lambert, 2012)

FINDINGS

All of students have various factors in reading comprehension. Here are some common problems that students encounter in reading comprehension section of TOEFL PBT

1. Limited Vocabulary: A lack of familiarity with words can impede comprehension. When readers encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, they may struggle to understand the meaning of sentences and paragraphs, leading to a breakdown in comprehension.

2. **Poor Decoding Skills:** Difficulty in decoding words can hinder comprehension, especially in younger readers or individuals with reading difficulties. Decoding involves recognizing letter-sound relationships and blending sounds to form words, which is crucial for fluency and comprehension.
3. **Lack of Background Knowledge:** Comprehension often relies on background knowledge and prior experiences. If readers lack relevant background knowledge about a topic, they may struggle to make connections, infer meanings, and understand contextually complex texts.
4. **Ineffective Reading Strategies:** Some readers may not employ effective reading strategies, such as summarization, questioning, predicting, visualizing, and monitoring comprehension. Without these strategies, comprehension can be shallow, and important information may be missed.
5. **Difficulty with Text Structure:** Different types of texts have distinct structures, such as narratives, expository texts, and technical documents. Difficulty understanding text structures, including main ideas, supporting details, and organizational patterns, can hinder comprehension.
6. **Limited Attention Span:** Short attention spans or distractions can lead to poor comprehension. Readers may lose focus, miss key information, or struggle to retain and recall details from the text.
7. **Lack of Engagement:** When readers are not engaged with the text, they may skim or scan rather than reading deeply. This can result in surface-level comprehension and a failure to grasp the nuances and complexities of the material.
8. **Reading Speed:** Reading too quickly or too slowly can impact comprehension. Speed reading techniques, while helpful for some purposes, may sacrifice depth of understanding if not used appropriately.
9. **Complex Texts:** Reading comprehension can be challenging with complex or dense texts that contain sophisticated vocabulary, intricate sentence structures, abstract concepts, or specialized terminology.
10. **Language Barriers:** For readers who are learning a new language or have limited proficiency in the language of the text, comprehension can be hindered by language barriers, including unfamiliar idioms, cultural references, or nuances of expression.

Addressing these challenges often involves targeted interventions, such as vocabulary development, explicit instruction in reading strategies, scaffolding of text complexity, building background knowledge, fostering engagement with diverse texts, and providing opportunities for practice and feedback. Overcoming reading comprehension problems involves a combination of strategies that target specific areas of difficulty used by students.

1. All of the high achievers read the questions before they read the passage then they select questions relate with vocabulary such as refers to and closest in meaning. They will do these questions first because they do not to read and understanding the passage to answer them. Next, they will do the questions relate with sentences such as detail information/how many/WH questions and inference questions and last, they will deal with the questions relate with main idea/point/purpose/best title. By the time they answered the other questions, they will be able to answer the general ones.
2. All of the high achievers use the strategy on time efficiency the time by working questions on vocabulary only read the word in a quote and answer, if there are two possible answers, they will read the sentence.

3. Most of the high achievers used the strategies that the question for each passage follows the order in which information is presented in the passage. They said once they found the answer in certain portion of the text they do not go back to look for the answer on that portion. Only one of the high achievers did do this strategy.

4. All of the high achievers used elimination strategies for answering main-idea, best-title, and main-topic since they know those questions the distractors are the response is too broad, it is too narrow and one noun, verb or adjective in the response make it false answer. Usually, the high achievers examine the multiple-choice carefully and eliminate the wrong answer one by one.

DISCUSSION

This section explains the discussion of the obtained data. As data presented earlier, the strategy used by the high achievers were varied. There were four major strategies that students used in answering the Reading Comprehension section of TOEFL PBT Test which are categorized as reading and test-takers strategy (Ananda, 2016)

The first main strategy was scanning the passage to find out the meaning of words. All of students said that they used scanning strategy to deal with the passage. These students also said that they got bored and being lazy to read the whole paragraph in the passage. (Educational Testing Service (ETS), 2024). The strategy helped them to answer the question such as, finding the main idea and true or false statement question. In this case, it could be concluded that most of students used the reading strategy, such as skimming and scanning which assisted them read quickly and got the answer fast. This result is also supported by (Jannah, M, Fitriani, S, 2018) who claims that 40% of the students often use the skimming and scanning the passage as their strategy in answering Reading Comprehension section of TOEFL test. It is in line with this (Nurhayati, 2016) who states that skimming the reading passage to decide the main idea and the overall organization of ideas in the passage.

The second strategy was using the context clue of the text to understand the unfamiliar vocabulary. All of the participants agreed that vocabulary was one of the most important aspects which influenced them to understand the passage and the question. According to (Nurhayati, 2016), she states that there are 70% of the students who try to understand certain words when the words are related to the questions and the context of the text.

Furthermore, the third strategy was the use of the background knowledge. Sometimes, students used their background knowledge whenever they read the text. The students argued that having the background knowledge increased their understanding about the passage. They claimed that background knowledge was an important strategy for them in answering the questions. As mentioned by (Jannah, M, Fitriani, S, 2018), the students frequently use their background knowledge to be a good strategy in answering Reading Comprehension section of TOEFL.

The fourth strategy was surveying questions before reading the text. Most participants said that surveying the questions in the early period helped them to answer the questions. They said that the strategy was helpful in managing the time during the test. In this case, it was concluded that the students' difficulty was not about the questions, but it was about how they could manage the time during reading comprehension section. It is similar with (Abboud, Z. A. R., & Hussein, 2011) who state that the difficulty faced by the students when they involve in the test is no enough time available. This result is also supported by (Dooden, 2015), he states that the test-takers who want to answer the question easily, they need to have the good strategy for the test, especially for the reading test. The good test-taking strategies based on (Dooden, 2015) are managing the time effectively.

The fifth strategy was answering the easiest questions. In the reading comprehension section, there is no any level of difficulties in the questions. It happens because the questions have the same purposes to ask all about the general or the specific information related to the passage.

CONCLUSION

From the result of the interview, it can be concluded that there are four essential strategies which are used by the high achievers in answering reading comprehension of TOEFL PBT test. All of the high achievers used skimming and scanning as their reading strategy. Many of them stated that they used that strategy to make them easy to read the passage. The high achievers cope with the unfamiliar vocabulary, the reading strategy they used was to relate the vocabulary to the context of the passages. The high achievers used their background knowledge as the strategy to comprehend more the topic in the passages discussed in the passage. Mostly the student claimed that they their own background knowledge is very useful especially to answer the detail types of question easily.

Furthermore, all of the high achievers said that the time was incredibly limited. This research also finds that students has their own strategies coping with the situation during test such as limitation of time in the test. There are two test takers strategies found in this study. In addition, since the time is limited, therefore, the high achievers in this study they prioritize to answer the questions considered easy for them which is related with vocabulary.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my co-writer his continuous support to finish this research.

I also extend my appreciation to the members of my research group for their insightful comments and suggestions, which significantly improved the quality of this research.

Special thanks to the research assistants for their diligent efforts in data collection and preliminary analysis. Their hard work and dedication were instrumental to the success of this study.

I am grateful to my colleagues in the Department of English Language Education for the stimulating discussions and the collaborative environment.

REFERENCES

- Abboud, Z. A. R., & Hussein, N. J. (2011). The difficulties faced by advanced Iraqiforeign learners in passing ITP TOEFLtest. *Journal of Basrah Researches (Humanities Series)*, 36(4), 110-138.
- Alavi, S, M & Bodbar, S. (2012). A Closer Look at Reading Strategy Use in Reading Section of TOEFL iBT. In *Theory And Practice In Language Studies* (pp. 450–460).
- Ananda, R. (2016). *Problems with section two ITP TOEFL test*.
- Antoni, R. (2014). An analysis on 6th semesterstudents' TOEFL experience at Englishdepartment of teachers training andeducation faculty of Pasir Pengaraian University. *Journal Ilmiah Edu Research*, 3(1), 9–16.
- Brown, D. H. (2005). *Language Assessment: Principle and Classroom Practices*. New York: Pearson Education Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative research design:: An interactive approach (4th ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dooden, H. (2015). Teaching Test-Taking Strategies: Importance and Techniques.Psychology Research. *Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 2(2), 57-63.
- Educational Testing Service (ETS). (2024). *Test and Score Data Summary for TOEFL Internet-*

- based and Paper-based Tests*. Retrieved April 29, 2024 from Www.Ets.Org/Toefl.
- Iskandar Abdul Samad. (2017). EFL STUDENTS' STRATEGIES DEALING WITH COMMON DIFFICULTIES IN TOEFL READING COMPREHENSION SECTION. *International Journal of Language Education*, 1(1), 29–36.
- Jannah, M, Fitriani, S, S. (2018). EFL Students' Strategies dealing with Common Difficulties in TOEFL Reading Comprehension Section. *International Journal of Language Education*, 1(1), 29–36.
- Lambert, M. (2012). A beginner's guide to doing your education research project. In *Nursing examination review: Test-taking strategies*.
- Mahmud, M. (2014). The EFL students' problems in answering the test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL). In *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* (pp. 4(12), 2581–2587).
- Mufidah. (2014). The English teachers' mastery in TOEFL prediction. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 2(4), 79–86.
- Nurhayati, N. (2016). An Analysis Of The high achievers' Strategies In Answering Toefl. *Journal of English Language Studies*, 1(1), 10-18.