The Third Year-Students' Ability in Answering Synonymous Word Questions in Reading Comprehension of TOEFL-Like Tests at the English Department of Bung Hatta University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to describe the third-year students' ability in answering synonymous word questions in reading comprehension of the TOEFL Like test at the English Department of Bung Hatta University. The design of this research was descriptive research. The population of this research was third-year students at the English Department of Bung Hatta University. A total sampling technique was used, and the number of samples was 35 students. The instrument for collecting the data was reading comprehension of the TOEFL test. Based on the result analysis, the result of this research showed that the third-year students had low ability in answering synonymous word questions in reading comprehension of the TOEFL Like in the form of nouns, verbs, and adjectives. So, it can be concluded that the students' ability in answering synonymous word questions in reading comprehension of the TOEFL Like was low.

Keywords: reading comprehension, synonymous word questions, TOEFL like

INTRODUCTION

Various language institutions around the world offer international English tests for students who want to know their English proficiency. One of them is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). According to Samad et al. (2017), TOEFL has been used worldwide as a means to help people in accomplishing their degree, continue their studies overseas, or apply for a job.

PBT TOEFL is widely simulated in several institutions and the world of education. This simulation is also known as TOEFL-like. In addition, this TOEFL is applied at Bung Hatta University to recognize the students' proficiency skills in English and as a requirement before graduation. This is supported by The Chancellor's Circular Number: 1006/UM-1/KP/II-2022 regarding graduation requirements in article (i) which is stated that the students should submit a photocopy of a TOEFL certificate of at least 425 scores from PPBA-UBH. The same requirement is also applied in the English Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Bung Hatta University. Several institutions and universities apply different policies regarding the passing grade of PBT TOEFL (Hotcourse, 2016: Kampung Inggris, 2021). Considering the very important role of the TOEFL test, the English Department at Bung Hatta

University offers a subject that is related to the TOEFL-like test called Essay Reading. This subject is offered in the fifth semester.

The purpose of reading is to grasp or understand the text. Grabe and Stroller (2011: 11) stated that the ability to comprehend and interpret information in a text, the readers are required to involve background knowledge of learners, employ a variety of strategies, and the process of environmental factors. Wahyuni, et al (2018) stated through reading students can also enrich their knowledge of speaking expression, English sentence structure, the English instruction of the text, writing techniques, and vocabulary mastery. According to Putra, 2020), students with an advanced vocabulary will have a shorter time in understanding a text. As a result, the reading process will be much easier and will result in better comprehension. One of the issues for readers is when they focus on specific vocabulary rather than content.

Regarding the level of TOEFL score at Bung Hatta University, students' score is still in the elementary level. It is proved by Putri (2020) who analyzed the difficulties faced by the third-year students of the English Department at Bung Hatta University in the reading comprehension section of the TOEFL test. Her findings showed that the percentage of the students who got scores in the elementary level was 48.4 %. The advanced level, on the other hand, was only 2.2 %. These data proved that the students' reading comprehension levels were still low. Additionally, her findings also represented that the most challenging part for the TOEFL test takers is the reading comprehension section. Since they have learned reading comprehension of the TOEFL test in Essay Reading subject in the fifth semester, their reading score should have reached the high intermediate or advanced level.

In order to figure out the students' ability in finding synonymous word questions in reading comprehension of the TOEFL test, the researcher conducted a small test. The researcher found out that there is no student get a satisfactory result. This test is important to assist students in understanding the vocabulary (synonymous word question) that has been provided in the TOEFL question sheet. Understanding this vocabulary will help students in answering questions correctly and the time needed will be also short. Based on this phenomenon, the researcher is interested in conducting research entitled "An Analysis of the Third Year Students' Ability in Answering Synonymous Word Questions in Reading Comprehension of TOEFL Test at the English Department of Bung Hatta University"

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Comprehension

Reading is one of the English skills that has been learned and taught. Reading comprehension is the process of extracting ideas from a text in order to gain an overall understanding of the text. The comprehension is highly dependent on the reader, the text, and the situation, with prior knowledge having a significant impact on building the meaning on this process as it is constructed within the reader's mind (Woolley, 2011). Reading comprehension is the ability to derive meaning from what is read, as defined by Pressley (2000) and Birsch (2011). Oyetunji (2011) states that comprehension is vital in reading. Reading comprehension necessitates various reading skills such as word recognition, fluency, lexical knowledge, and pre-existing knowledge in order for the reader to gain knowledge from the text.

According to Donald et al in Nurul (2012), there are six major components of reading comprehension. They are decoding knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic knowledge, readiness aspect and effective aspect.

Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) state there are many factors influencing reading comprehension skill. Some of those are complexity of the reading text, environmental influences, anxiety during reading comprehension, interest and motivation, decoding or word recognition n speed, and medical problems. These factors are described as follows.

a. Complexity of the reading text

The first factor that influences students' reading comprehension is the complexity of the texts. This factor is affected by the readers' strength, command of the language, as well as their understanding of its applications and various meanings. Because learners hear words and acquire a large vocabulary, oral abilities play an important role in determining how skilled a reader can be. A large amount of vocabulary aids students in explaining unfamiliar words by utilizing context-based opinions.

b. Enviromental Influences

The second factor affecting reading comprehension is related to the environmental conditions that influence students who attempt to read a passage. Readers in an unorganized environment may have more difficulty understanding a text than those who read in a calm and controlled environment. When students are in an unsafe environment, it is difficult for them to concentrate on their reading. Their reading comprehension abilities will improve when they are in safe environments. When there

are background noises, such as televisions or radios, readers will lose concentration and struggle to understand the text (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

c. Anxiety during Reading Comprehension

The third factor is related to reading comprehension anxiety. Exams, classwork, or homework assignments can put more pressure on readers' reading than reading for pleasure. Some students respond positively to exams, while others are overwhelmed by the pressure to complete a reading activity. Learners who are anxious may not fully comprehend the instructions, and this leads them become confusion. Thus, they become poor in comprehending the reading task (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

d. Interest and Motivation

The fourth factor is motivation and interest. Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) asserts that learners' interest and motivation are essential for developing reading comprehension skills. Readers will have a difficult time concentrating on their comprehension if they find the reading material monotonous. Readers' reading comprehension may suffer as a result of this. If the reading material is interesting to the students, they will understand it and remember it clearly. EFL teachers should motivate their students by providing engaging reading materials during class time.

e. Decoding or Word Recognition Speed

The fifth factor is the speed with which words are decoded or recognized. Readers who have difficulty decoding and recognizing words read more slowly and have a more difficult time understanding the meaning of passages than those who do not have decoding difficulties. Dennis (2008) states that vocabulary influences reading comprehension because readers use decoding skills to understand the pronunciation and meaning of unfamiliar words. People with a large vocabulary can clarify the meaning or read passages faster than those who must guess the meaning of unfamiliar words based on context clues (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

f. Medical Problems

The final factor is concerned with medical issues. According to Hollowell (2013), poor reading comprehension ability may be related to a medical problem that is not addressed until the child is older. This includes undiagnosed ADD (attention deficit disorder), speech difficulties, and hearing loss. She emphasized that students who struggle with speech and hearing are less likely to participate in oral reading and class discussions. These are the two activities that assist students in improving their reading comprehension skills.

TOEFL

There are some definitions of TOEFL given by experts. According to Mufidah (2017), TOEF is the most commonly used examination in the admission process of international students to colleges and universities in the United States. The test is regarded highly by academicians since it is one of the admission requirements for most universities in the world (Golubovich, Tolentino & Papageorgiou, 2018, p. 8).

TOEFL assesses a person's ability to master English. This is in line with Matthiesen (2017:1) who states that TOEFL is a test used to assess students' English proficiency as one of the requirements for international students seeking admission to universities in English-speaking countries such as the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world. Furthermore, according to Samad et al in Putri (2020), TOEFL is a test that assesses student English proficiency and is also used to fulfill college graduation requirements.

There are three types of TOEFL that has been tested. They are Paper-Based Test (PBT), the Computer-Based Test (CBT), and the Internet-Based Test (IBT) (Alek et al., 2019). For more detail, the researcher will explain them as follows:

a. Paper-Based Test (PBT)

Paper-based TOEFL (PBT) is a test performed using a writing instrument (pencil 2B), a question sheet and answer sheet (Destiyanti et al., 2021). Matthiesen (2017: 6) states that the paper-based TOEFL is a test that consists of three sections; Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. According to ETS (2017), the total test time is about two and a half hours; however, it takes about three and a half hours for a test administration to admit examinees to the testing room, allow them to enter identifying information on their answer sheets, and distribute and collect the test materials.

b. Computer-Based Test

Computer-based test is the examination that uses computer as the media or device to do the test. According to Yao (2020), computer-based testing (CBT) has been used as a standard English academic test since 1970s. Destiyanti et al (2021) also states that "computer-based TOEFL (CBT) is test performed using a computer tool without encasing both a writing device and answer sheet." Everyone who registers to take the TOEFL exam receives free test preparation materials. Examinees who registered for TOEFL BT received TOEFL POWERPREP® software, which included two full CBT tests (ETS, 2017).

c. Internet-Based Test (iBT)

Internet-based TOEFL (iBT) is a test conducted using the internet. The TOEFL iBT exam is divided into four sections: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The entire test lasts approximately 4 hours, and all sections are taken on the same day. The TOEFL iBT test assesses all four language skills necessary for effective communication, with an emphasis on the test taker's ability to use English effectively in academic settings (Irmawan & Nurdini, 2020).

There are six types of reading comprehension (Elfriondri et al., 2020). They are main Idea Questions , Stated Details ,Unstated Detail Questions ,Pronoun Referent Questions, Inference Questions ,*Vocabulary Questions.* According to Meriam-Webster (2022), "synonymous is having the character of a synonym, alike in meaning or significance, or having the same connotations, implications, or reference." Meanwhile, the definition of question according to Meriam-Webster (2022), "is an interrogative expression often used to test knowledge, an interrogative sentence or clause, or an act or instance of asking.

As mentioned before, reading comprehension section consists of several types. They are vocabulary question, main idea question, stated details, unstated detail questions, pronoun reference question, and inference questions. Putri (2020) in her study explained that "vocabulary question is a question to guess the meaning of the difficult words in the reading comprehension text of the TOEFL."

Vocabulary is one of the English components that is defined as the total number of words in a language (Wardani, 2015). For foreign language students, mastering a large vocabulary is critical. By mastering vocabulary, someone can comprehend a wide range of information in the form of English, whether spoken or written.

Reading Comprehension section is closely related to vocabulary mastery. In other words, the more students can master their vocabulary, the more they can comprehend reading section. As a result, the higher TOEFL score they will get. It is proved by Setyowaty et al (2019) who conducted the correlational research between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension of TOEFL test. They stated that there is a significant correlation between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension in the TOEFL test. Their Pearson correlation value was 0.839 which was categorized as a perfect correlation.

METHOD

The researcher used the descriptive method since this research is to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study (Refnita, 2018:17). The data of the research were the students' scores. The scores were calculated to find out the second-year

students' ability in answering synonymous word questions in the reading comprehension TOEFL like a test at the English Department of Bung Hatta University.

The population of this research was all the third-year students at the English Department of Bung Hatta University. The sample of this research was 37 students. The instrumentation of the research was *a* reading section of a TOEFL test in the form of synonymous word questions. It was taken from several TOEFL test *books* written by ETS. The researcher gave 20 questions in the form of *a* multiple-choice test. Then, these questions were categorized as synonymous word questions in the form of *nouns* (5 questions), synonymous word questions in the form of *verbs* (5 questions), synonymous word questions in the form of *adjectives* (5 questions), and synonymous word questions in the form of adverb (5 questions). The test was valid in terms of content validity.

To collect the data, there are some steps used; (1) administering test to the students. **(2)** collecting the students' answer sheets. (3) counting the score (1 for correct answer, and 0 for the wrong answer). The data were analyzed by doing the following steps:

1. The researcher showed the raw scores on table
2. The researcher converted the score into mastery level of Bung Hatta University using the following formula.

$$\frac{students'\ score}{\max\ score} \times 100$$

3. The researcher classified the students' ability based on the criteria of Bung Hatta University. The criteria can be seen on table below:

Criteria of Classification of Students' ability

Mastery Level	Grade	Ability
85-100	A	Very Good
80-84,99	A$^-$	
75-79,99	B$^+$	Good
70-74,99	B	
65-69,99	B$^-$	
60-64,99	C$^+$	Moderate
55-59,99	C	
45-54,99	D	Low
0-44,99	E	

4. The researcher calculated the percentage of the students who got very good, good, moderate and low ability by using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where: P = Percentage of students who got very good, good, moderate, and low ability.

F = The sum of the students who got very good, good, moderate, and low ability.

N = The sum of students.

5. The researcher described the result of the data analysis and draw conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There were four results of the research. Each of the results will be explained below.

1. Students' ability in answering synonymous word questions in reading comprehension of the TOEFL like test

After analyzing the data, it was found that that 0 (0%) student had very good ability, 2 (5.71%) students had good ability, 5 (14.29%) had moderate ability, and 28 (80%) had low ability in answering synonymous word questions in reading comprehension of the TOEFL like test. It was proved by the fact.

Diagram 1

Students' Ability in Answering Synonymous Word Questions in Reading Comprehension of the TOEFL Like Test
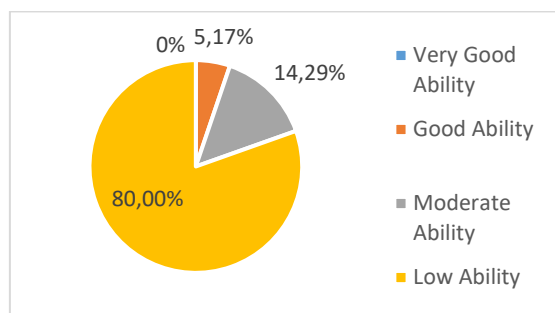
The diagram above shows that 80% of students had low ability in answering synonymous word questions in reading comprehension of the TOEFL like test (in the form of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs).

2. Students' Ability in Answering Synonymous Word Questions in the Form of Nouns

After analyzing the students' answers, the researcher found that there were 6 (17.14%) students had very good ability, 0 (0%) students had good ability, 11 (31.43%) students had the moderate ability, and 18 (51.43%) had the low ability. In order to be clear, see the Table 1 below.

Table 1 Students' Ability in Answering Synonymous Word Questions in the Form of Noun

No	Number of Students	Percentage	Classification
1	6	17.14%	Very Good
2	0	0%	Good
3	11	31.43%	Moderate
4	18	51.43%	Low
TOTAL	35	100%	

The table above shows students' ability in answering synonymous word questions in the form of nouns was low (51.43%). This result was supported by Elfriondri et al (2020) who stated that the most challenging part for TOEFL like test takers in reading comprehension section was vocabulary questions (synonymous word questions). These problems were caused by students' inadequate vocabulary size, students' reading speed, students' limited strategy, students' background of knowledge, and students' poor ability to understand complex grammar.

3. Students' Ability in Answering Synonymous Word Questions in the Form of Verb

After analysing the students' answers, the researcher found that 5 (14.29%) students had very good ability, 0 (0%) student had good ability, 13 (37.14%) students had moderate ability, and almost than a half of students (17 students) or 48.57 % had low ability. In order to be clear, see the Table 2 below:

Table 2 Students' Ability in Answering Synonymous Word Questions
in the Form of Verb

No	Number of Students	Percentage	Classification
1	5	14.29%	Very Good
2	0	0%	Good

3	13	37.14%	Moderate
4	17	48.57%	Low
Total	35	100%	

The table above shows students' ability in answering synonymous word questions in the form of verbs was low (48,57%). This finding is related to the research conducted by Putri (2020) who says that the difficulty faced by students in answering the reading comprehension section of the TOEFL test was caused by their difficulties to determine the meaning of a word, difficulty to determine the meanings from word parts, difficulty to determine meanings of difficult words and difficulty to determine meanings of simple words.

4. Students' Ability in Answering Synonymous Word Questions in the Form of Adjective

Based on the data analysis, it was found that 10 (28.57%) students had very good ability, 0 (0%) students had good ability, 9 (25.71%) students had moderate ability and 16 (45.72%) students had low ability). To be clearer, see the Table 3 below:

Table 3. Students' Ability in Answering Synonymous Word Questions
in the Form of Adjective

No	Number of Students	Percentage	Classification
1	10	28.57%	Very Good
2	0	0%	Good
3	9	25.71%	Moderate
4	16	45.72%	Low
TOTAL	35	100%	

The table above shows students' ability in answering synonymous word questions in the form of adjectives was low (45.72). It was caused by the fact that the students did not know how the strategy to answer it. Besides, the students have limited vocabulary (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of data analysis, the researcher draws some conclusions about the third-year students' ability in answering synonymous word question in reading comprehension of the TOEFL test at the English Department of Bung Hatta University as follows:

1. In general, the third-year students have low ability in answering synonymous word

questions in reading comprehension of TOEFL Like test at the English Department of Bung Hatta University.

2. Specifically, the third-year students' ability in answering synonymous word questions in the form of nouns, verbs, and adjectives was low.

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