

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a brief explanation of what is discussed in this study. The explanation is about the background, problem formulation, research objectives, research usefulness, scope and limitations of research, term affirmation, systematics of thesis writing.

A. Background Of The Study

English proficiency is widely recognized as a fundamental skill for academic success and professional advancement, particularly for students in higher education. Language proficiency refers to one's ability to use language for a variety of communicative purposes. Proficient users can understand the language without difficulty, express a range of ideas clearly in speech and writing, and interact with other speakers effortlessly.¹

The ability to communicate effectively in using English is not only advantageous but also a crucial requirement for academic and professional success.² A study titled *Impact of English Language Proficiency, Multilingualism and Perceived Language Difficulties on International Student's Academic Performance in Iraq* found that English language proficiency significantly affect students' academic performance, as well as psychological and social aspects.³

¹ Renandya, W. A., Hamied, F. A., & Nurkamto, J. (2018). "English language proficiency in Indonesia: Issues and prospects. Journal of Asia TEFL". 15(3).

² Lewis, Gwyn, Bryn Jones, and Colin Baker. (2012) "Translanguaging: Origins and development from school to street and beyond." Educational research and evaluation. 18(7)

³ Grain, H. M. J. S., Abbas, S., & Al-Khazaali, M. (2022). "Impact Of English Language Proficiency, Multilingualism And Perceived Language Difficulties On International Students' Academic Performance In Iraq". Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 8(2).

Previous study highlights the importance of English language proficiency in supporting academic and career prospects. While there are limited studies specifically addressing this issue in Indonesia, numerous websites emphasize the crucial role of English proficiency in the job market. A study titled *Sosialisasi Pentingnya Menguasai Bahasa Inggris bagi Mahasiswa* underscores that having English language skills in Indonesia can provide individuals with an edge in job competition.

It is unfortunate that Indonesia still has a low level of English proficiency compared to other developing countries. According to the data found in 2017, Indonesia ranked 51 all over the world with the score of 51.58. While comparing to other countries in Asia, Indonesia's rank was 13 which is still lower than Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, India, and Hong Kong.⁴

English proficiency consists of four key components: listening, reading, writing, and speaking, all crucial for effective communication. Listening involves understanding spoken English in various contexts, aiding in comprehension and cultural understanding. These skills are interconnected, each supporting and reinforcing the others to create a comprehensive language proficiency, where strong listening skills, for instance, contribute to accurate pronunciation when speaking.⁵

Among the popular tests to check English language proficiency is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), although alternatives such as the Test of

⁴ Parmadi, A. R., & Kepirianto, C. (2023). Indonesian EFL's learning strategies and personality types in achieving TOEFL score above 500. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Undiksha*, 11(1).

⁵ Cambridge English Dictionary

English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) are also prevalent.

TOEFL stands for Test of English as Foreign Language. This test is administered by an authority in the United States called ETS (Educational Testing Service), an organization headquartered in New Jersey, United States. These tests serve as reliable measures of language proficiency and widely recognized worldwide. It is utilized to assess the English language proficiency of non-native English speaker as a standardized English language assessment that can be taken by students who are not native English speakers to find out how good their English skills are.⁶

Generally, TOEFL test is classified into three types namely, PBT, CBT, and IBT. PBT involves the use of physical paper sheets for test-taking, with answers marked using a pencil. CBT utilizes computers as the medium for conducting the test, where questions are presented on-screen through interactive software. IBT, on the other hand, employs both computers and the internet for test delivery.

All universities in Indonesia provide English Proficiency Test that serves as graduation requirement in Indonesia, but the naming of the test may differ across universities.⁷ Some universities still refer to it as TOEFL, while others use different names such as English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA), Certificate of English Proficiency Test (CEPT), English Proficiency Examination (EPE), and many more.

Language Center of UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, which known as *Pusat Pengembangan Bahasa-P2B*, also has its own English proficiency

⁶ Longman Dictionary <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary>

⁷ Renandya et al., 2018 p 620-623

test. The test commonly known as TOEP which stand for Test of English proficiency.⁸ The test consists of 3 sections to be completed namely Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension.

According to the information on the official webpage Language Center of UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, the latest required score to pass was 450. But, it has been removed.⁹ It means that all of the students do not have to get any required minimum score in their TOEP test. Furthermore, the alumni confirmed that there has been an absence of a specified minimum TOEP score requirement for the past two years.

Despite the relevant materials have been studied from the early semesters and additional support has been given through TOEFL preparation programs, a considerable number of TBI students still face challenges in obtaining what would generally be considered a satisfactory TOEP score. From casual discussions with peers and insights shared by alumni, it becomes evident that getting a score above 450 was not easy by many students.

This phenomenon is consistent with findings from previous research (e.g., Rahman et al., 2023; Maharani & Putro, 2021), which highlight persistent difficulties among test-takers, such as inadequate time management, insufficient vocabulary, and the absence of effective answering strategies. However, those studies tend to focus on broader issues or common approaches like skipping hard questions or relying on guesswork. There is still limited exploration into the actual strategies applied by successful students.

⁸ P2B UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung Retrieved from <https://ppb.uinsatu.ac.id/> (March 8, 2024: 10.43 AM)

⁹ UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung Retrieved from UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung Official Webpage <https://uinsatu.ac.id/> (March 8, 2024: 7.26 PM)

To fill this gap, the present study aims to identify the specific strategies used by students who managed to achieve TOEP scores above 450 between 2021 and 2023. The goal is to generate useful insights that could guide future test-takers in preparing more efficiently for each section of the test, especially listening, structure, and reading comprehension.

According to a study that was conducted by Endah Anisa Rahma et.al, under the title *Tertiary students' strategies and difficulties in answering the TOEFL test*, students frequently encounter challenges when taking the TOEP test, ranging from limited vocabulary and difficulty managing time to feelings of anxiety and confusion over unfamiliar question formats.¹⁰ These types of obstacles tend to appear across all parts of the test—whether in Listening, Structure and Written Expression, or Reading Comprehension. In response to such difficulties, students often begin to apply certain methods either consciously or intuitively to help them cope and perform better. Several common strategies students use, including skipping questions they find difficult, relying on elimination techniques, anticipating possible question types, or making educated guesses.

Another previous study that discussed the similar concern of this study was conducted by Indah Fadhilah Rahman et.al. under the title *The Analisys Of Students' difficulties In Accomplishing TOEFL Minimum Score As The Final Requirement*.¹¹ The study found various approaches employed by students when they encountered difficult questions in the TOEFL test include skipping the difficult

¹⁰ Rahma, E. A., Syafitri, R., Oktavinanda, G., Rahmatillah, R., & Syahputri, V. N. (2022). Tertiary students' strategies and difficulties in answering the TOEFL test. SALTeL Journal (Southeast Asia Language Teaching and Learning), 5(2), 33-37.

¹¹Rahman, I. F., Kamsinah, K., & Nur, N. A. (2021). The Analisys Of Students' difficulties In Accomplishing TOEFL Minimum Score As The Final Requirement. *ETERNAL (English, Teaching, Learning, and Research Journal)*, 7(2), 359-373.

items and focusing on the easier items, thinking hard and usually spending so much time in one question, thinking hard and effort to spend short time in one question, and guessing.

However, the majority of these studies provide only a general overview like regular practice and using certain learning materials, there's a lack of study offering specific strategies for handling different types of questions in each section of TOEP. They rarely explore which strategies have been proven effective in practice, particularly for those who achieved higher scores to enhance TOEP scores, especially the during test strategy.

This present study seeks to fill that gap by closely examining the approaches used by English Education students at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung who successfully earned scores above 450 in the TOEP of the students 2021 to 2023. By focusing on the specific techniques they used in each part of the test—Listening, Structure, and Reading—this research aims to deliver actionable insights that can support future test-takers and contribute to a better understanding of strategy-based performance improvement in English proficiency assessments. Researcher decided to take this concern with the title “Strategies for Achieving Score above 450 in Test of English Proficiency of English Department Students at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung 2021-2023”

B. Formulation of the Research Problem

The main problem identified in this study is that students in the English Department at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung face significant challenges in passing the TOEP test despite receiving the necessary materials and courses from the university, making them not achieve the good grades of TOEP.

This study aims to identify the specific test-taking strategies used by successful students in each section of the TOEP to achieve a score above 450. Based on the background and problem identified above, the researcher would like to conduct a study aimed to answer these questions:

1. What strategies do English Department students at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung implement to achieve a score above 450 in TOEP Listening Comprehension Section?
2. What strategies do English Department students at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung implement to achieve a score above 450 in TOEP Structure and Written Expression Section?
3. What strategies do English Department students at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung implement to achieve a score above 450 in TOEP Reading Comprehension Section?

C. The purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate students' strategies in achieving the required standard of TOEFL test score.

1. To discover the strategies implemented by students in answering Listening Comprehension Section in TOEP.
2. To discover the strategies implemented by students in answering Structure and Written Expression Section in TOEP.
3. To discover the strategies implemented by students in answering Reading Comprehension Section in TOEP.

D. Significance of the Study

From the formulation of the problem above, the researcher concludes the use of this study, as follows:

a. Theoretical Significance

This study is intended to contribute to the academic understanding of effective strategies used in English proficiency tests, particularly in the context of the TOEP. It aims to enrich the literature related to language learning strategies by offering insights into how successful students approach different sections of the TOEP—Listening, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. This theoretical contribution is expected to be useful for future researchers, curriculum developers, and educators in the field of language testing and teaching.

b. Practical Significance

1. For English Department Students

This study can provide valuable insights for English Department students in developing effective strategies in preparing for the TOEP. Thus, it is hoped that they can increase their chances of achieving the appropriate TOEP score and improve their future academic and professional prospects.

2. For Other Major Students

Students from other majors can also take advantage from the findings of this study by adopting the same strategies in preparing for the TOEP. It is hoped that this can help them improve their English

proficiency and expand their academic and professional opportunities in the future.

3. For The Language Center of UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung

This study will provide valuable insights for the Language Center of UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung in developing effective learning course to prepare the students for TOEP. The strategies discovered may be used as a reference in TOEP Course that has been provided before.

4. For Further Research

This study is expected to be used as further information in the future by adding research variables or with different research methods. Perhaps, future study may be conducted on another major or another type of test and use this study as a reference.

E. Scope and Limitations of the Study

To avoid misunderstandings about what the researcher has previously described, the researcher limits the scope of this study to be more detailed and focused. This study focuses on the strategies applied by English Department students from 2021-2023 at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung who have taken TOEP. The study specifically analyses the strategies implemented in different sections of the test and does not analyse other factors such as students' motivation, prior exposure to English or physical factors affecting test performances.

This study is conducted at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung. So that, the results of this study are applied at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung,

especially in the English Department 2021-2023 students as the population of this study.

F. Definition of Key Terms.

Some terminologies are used in this study. As a result, researcher would like to define any terms that need more clarification. It aims to prevent misunderstandings. The terms include TOEP and strategies.

a. TOEP

TOEP stands for The Test of English Proficiency. TOEP is an English proficiency test that is provided by Language Center of UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung. This test measures the level of English proficiency, especially the ability to understand the contents of spoken and written texts, both implied and expressed.¹²

The structure of TOEP resembles internationally recognized language tests such as TOEFL PBT or TOEFL ITP, but it is locally adapted to better suit the institutional context and student needs. The TOEP is implemented as part of the university's academic policy and serves as a graduation requirement. Students are expected to demonstrate a sufficient level of English language proficiency to ensure their readiness for academic and professional communication tasks.

According to the official guidelines published by the Language Center, UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung uses the test as a graduation requirement to evaluate the level of English language proficiency of students and ensure they have good understanding English well. TOEP emphasizes

¹² Language Center UIN SATU Official Guidelines 2023.

comprehension of both explicit and implicit information in listening and reading tasks. Although speaking and writing are not tested directly, the test functions as a comprehensive diagnostic tool for receptive language skills.

b. Strategies

Strategies refer to a set of tactics that people use in order to gain control over their own learning process. The term 'strategy,' as defined in the Collins dictionary, refers to an overall plan or series of plans aimed at accomplishing a goal, often over an extended period. A strategy is also known as technique, tactic, or move, in a widely used terms. It refers to an individual's efforts towards a goal.¹³ Strategies are purposeful courses of action, whether conscious plans, specific maneuvers to outwit competitors, patterns of consistent behavior, or methods of positioning an organization in its environment.¹⁴

In the scope of this study, the term strategies is more specifically aligned with test-taking strategies. These are techniques used by learners while taking a test to maximize their performance, especially when facing time constraints, complex instructions, or unfamiliar question formats.³

Cohen classifies them to control time and focus during the test, and test-wiseness strategies, which involve recognizing patterns in test construction to select the best answer.¹⁵ These strategies do not necessarily reflect a student's actual language proficiency but can significantly influence their test outcomes.

¹³ Stathopoulou, M., & Nikaki, D. (2009). Test-taking strategies in the KPG reading test: Instrument construction & investigation results. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 25.

¹⁴ Mintzberg, Henry. (1987). "The strategy concept I: Five Ps for strategy." *California Management Review* 30(1)

¹⁵ Cohen, Andrew D. *Strategies in Learning and Using a Second Language*. Longman, 1998. P.92

In this study, the strategies is defined as the techniques that students implement in answering the Test of English Proficiency (TOEP) in order to achieve the appropriate scores. The strategies used also known as test-taking strategies. These strategies can include managing time efficiently, eliminating unlikely answers, identifying key words, and using logic based on test structure.