#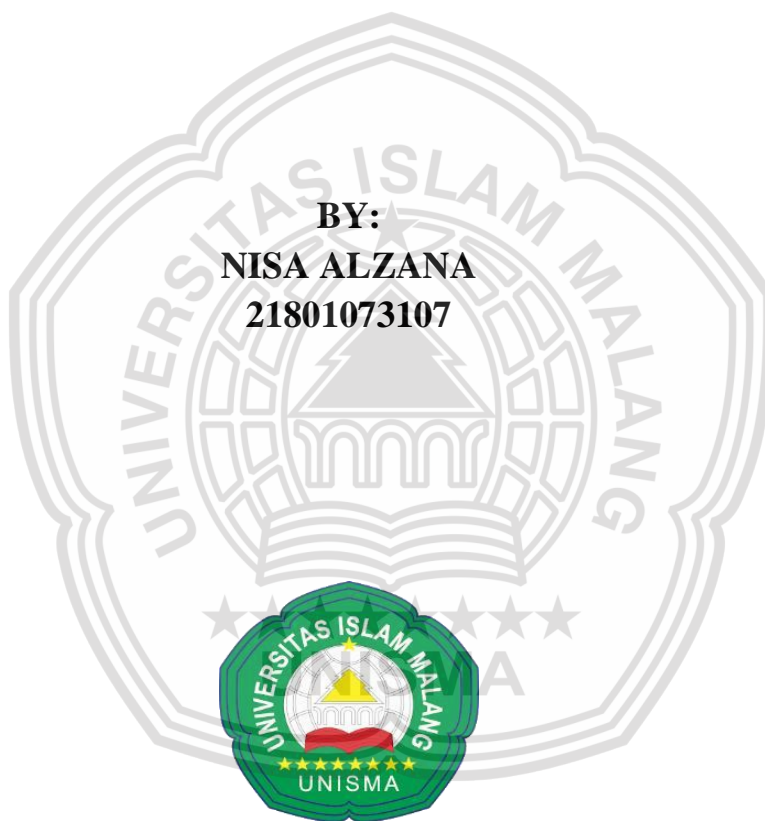 A PORTRAIT OF EFL LEARNERS' DIFFICULTIES AND STRATEGIES IN ANSWERING LISTENING COMPREHENSION OF TOEFL ITP PREDICTION TEST AT ONLINE ENGLISH COURSE

SKRIPSI

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JULY 2022

ABSTRACT

Alzana, Nisa. 2022. *A Portrait of EFL Learners' Difficulties and Strategies in Answering Listening Comprehension of TOEFL ITP Prediction Test at Online English Course.* Skripsi, English Education Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education University of Islam Malang. Advisor I: Ika Hidayanti, S.Pd., M.Pd; Advisor II: Mochamad Imron Azami, S.Pd., M.Ed.

Keywords: Listening Comprehension, TOEFL ITP, Prediction Test

In the presence of global competition, mastering English has become increasingly important for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. In order to assess learners' English Proficiency, they mostly use Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as one of the requirements for scholarship programs and other recruitment processes. However, TOEFL has a difficulty level, necessitates high English mastery, and encourages students to apply a well-thought-out strategy when answering questions. EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners may consider that TOEFL is extremely difficult because there are 3 sections to be tested; listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. However, listening comprehension is regarded as the most difficult part among the three sections.

This study aimed to discover most common difficulties of listening comprehension for TOEFL ITP prediction test as well as the learners' strategies to overcome their difficulties. For research design, this study employed descriptive quantitative method with purposive sampling technique. Thirty participants were found significantly from Indonesian EFL learners at online English course. The procedure of the research involved two steps; administering a questionnaire and conducting an interview. To analyze the data of common difficulties, the researcher calculated the data through SPSS 20. On the other hand, to analyze the employed strategies, the researcher recorded and transcribed the data from the interview.

The finding of this study showed that the most common EFL learners' difficulties in answering listening comprehension of TOEFL ITP prediction test are the choice of words (M = 4.73), followed by the speaker's speed (M = 4.60), speaker's accent (M = 4.50), speaker's intonation (M = 4.37), and speaker's length of the talk (M = 4.30). The learners employed various strategies to overcome each difficulty such as practicing frequently in various learning sources, anticipating the questions during answering the test, draw the speaker's conclusion, and get familiar with American accent such as watching YouTube videos, movies, and listening to English songs.

Based on the finding of the study, it is addressed to the EFL learners to be well-practiced before taking the TOEFL test. Therefore, they need to understand

well how to overcome their own difficulties, especially in the listening comprehension. Teachers can encourage the learners to focus more on the components of the listening comprehension section that appear to be the most difficult. Further, for the next researcher can properly extended to a much larger population and reinforce theories about listening comprehension for TOEFL created by certain experts or authors who have published TOEFL books.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents about the background of the study, the research problem, the objective of research, the significance of research, scope and limitation of the research, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the presence of global competition, mastering English has become increasingly important for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. It has begun to offer huge chances for international workers in looking for work, continuing study in native or neighboring countries, and requiring job applicants to work on improving their English skills. In order to assess learners' English Proficiency, they use test such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) as one of the requirements for scholarship programs and other recruitment processes (Yuyun et al., 2018).

According to Clark (2014) TOEFL is the most extensive applied to assess a person's English competence. In other words, it is also defined as a test used to assess the English ability of non-native English speakers. TOEFL has considered one of the foremost commonly used language proficiency tests. As reported by Educational Testing System (2007), the TOEFL test is the most widely acknowledged English-language test in the world that has already been taken by an estimated 27 million people worldwide over the years (Clark 2014).

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As one of the types of language testing, the TOEFL score is commonly used as an indicator in academic contexts in the worldwide (Mahmud, 2014). Many organizations and companies require them to present their TOEFL score as proof of English language proficiency. For that reason, EFL learners with greater English skills will have a better career for job requirements, scholarship, immigrantion, employment, international registration, and academic purposes. As evidenced by the TOEFL requirement score, in this century, people's ability to communicate in English has become a requirement.

Related to the international English proficiency test, the TOEFL has a difficulty level, necessitates high English mastery, and encourages students to apply a well-thought-out strategy when answering questions. Inadequate knowledge of the TOEFL test, including TOEFL skills approach, vocabulary mastery, and grammatical comprehension, are the most common TOEFL test difficulties. In addition, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners may consider that TOEFL is extremely difficult because there are 3 sections to be tested; listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension (Rina & Tiarina, 2021).

However, listening comprehension is the most difficult part of the three sections. Madina (2016) as cited in Hidayanti et al., (2021) mentioned that there are a few issues that learners frequently face. They struggle to understand lectures, take efficient notes, comprehend long descriptions in English, comprehend spoken language instructions, comprehend informal language, and comprehend the subject matter of a talk. Every so often, learners' capacity to understand the

message delivered may be influenced by the native's speaking speech rates, accent, tone and unfamiliar vocabulary.

Nevertheless, inadequate English proficiency is a result of the negative English language's hostile environment (Maharani & Putro, 2021). According to the English First (EF) English Proficiency Index data (2020), Indonesian is 80th place among 112 countries and provinces, 14th rank in Asia and also has a test score of 466. Throwing back to two previous years, Indonesia was 15th with a total English Proficiency Index score of 435. This low-level data rose in 2022 is possible because it began in 2020, when numerous companies began offering online English courses such as TOEFL preparation program because of Covid-19 pandemic's advent. For TOEFL preparation, learners are required to attend virtual meetings by several platforms (Hidayanti et al., 2021). Therefore, online learning is easier to adopt and can be followed by all EFL learners using online courses. Learners can understand as much as they have desired in a course since the interaction between them and teachers or instructors is more intense.

The Edupreneur has built online English course and offered a variety of skills and proficiency to acquire, including Speaking, Grammar course, IELTS (International English Language Testing System and TOEFL preparation course. A TOEFL preparation course is a common practice, especially in EFL countries where not all formal education can supply learners with enough knowledge to tackle the test (Adam & Magfirah, 2021). On some occasions, in order to pass the test and achieve the target score of TOEFL test, a TOEFL preparation course program is required to improve test takers' scores. According to Ma & Cheng

(2016) taking a test preparation course is the time-effective way to prepare for the TOEFL test.

As one of the online English courses in Indonesia, Royal English holds TOEFL preparation test program. However, due to the limits of the Covid-19 pandemic, the test was conducted virtually in at the class of "TOEFL ITP Advance". The course begins with an overview of the TOEFL ITP, and continued with live teachings, several mock tests, and the final test of TOEFL ITP Prediction Test. The purpose of the live teachings and mock tests is to prepare learners on how to answer and preserve appropriate test strategies as well as to deal with the difficulties of taking the test in answering TOEFL test. Every day, participants (EFL learners) practiced by working on the TOEFL ITP questions to familiarize them with the pattern of the TOEFL ITP real test.

Regarding that point, the learners inquired about their difficulties in answering daily practice questions from the mock tests, which included a part on listening comprehension. At the end of the course, the participants accomplished TOEFL ITP prediction test to indicate their final scores after along course held. Therefore, to answer the validation of participants' scores, the time limitations in the test form become a challenge for them to avoid cheating in answering all of the questions.

To sum up, TOEFL has considered one of the foremost commonly used language proficiency tests which are widely regarded as a challenging test to pass. Moreover, listening comprehension is considered the most difficult part of the three sections. The TOEFL scores are extremely important for any learners who

want to apply for school admissions and anything else that requires TOEFL. However, EFL learners find it difficult and obtain low scores when answering TOEFL questions, and yet some of them could obtain the excellent score. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the learners' experiences in terms of most the common difficulties and strategies in answering listening comprehension of TOEFL ITP prediction test. The data was gathered from EFL learners who had previously taken the test conducted by Royal English Online English Course.

1.2 Research Problems

Based on the discussion above, the problem in this study is formulated as follows:

1. What are the most common EFL learners' difficulties in answering listening comprehension for TOEFL ITP prediction test at online English course?
2. How do EFL learners overcome the difficulties in answering listening comprehension for TOEFL ITP prediction test at online English course?

1.3 Objectives of Research

Based on the research question above, the objectives of the research can be

1. To identify the EFL learners' common difficulties in answering listening comprehension of TOEFL ITP prediction test at online English course.
2. To find out the EFL learners' strategies in overcoming common difficulties of listening comprehension for TOEFL ITP test at online English course.

1.4 Significance of Research

This study's implications were separated into two categories: theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, this study was expected to contribute to a better understanding of the TOEFL concept, especially in the listening comprehension section. Practically, the leareners can practice the ways or strategies in answering listening comprehension for TOEFL test to achieve the highest TOEFL score, particularly in listening comprehension.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Research

This study only looked for the general difficulties and strategies of listening comprehension on TOEFL ITP prediction test among three skills of TOEFL test. It was held virtually at Royal English as one of the online English courses in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia. Due to the limitation of the accessibility to have many online English courses to conduct the research in Malang city, the number of participants that the researcher obtained were only thirty participants in the questionnaire and five participants were included in the interview. Thus, the data collected could be strengthened by using more participants in interview.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To prevent confusion and misperceptions of the terms used in this study, it is important to define the terms explicitly.

1. *Portrait*

In this study, the term *portrait* refers to the synonym of an analysis which discovers and describes factors of the difficulties encountered by EFL learners

when answering the TOEFL ITP Prediction Test as one of the requirements to gain a job and certain scholarship.

2. *EFL Learners*

EFL is an abbreviation for ―English as a Foreign Language which refers to those who learn English in non-English speaking countries (whose first language is not English). The EFL learners of this study are the participants of online English courses who have graduated from their universities and joined TOEFL preparation program.

3. *Difficulties*

The difficulty is a condition of not being easy to do or understand. All in all, its difficulty is a state of problem to be dealt with in the process of learning. In this case, a difficulty is regarded as the learners' problem experiences in answering the listening comprehension section for TOEFL test.

4. *Strategies*

The process that learners utilize to study and use the target language is known as strategy. In other words, a strategy is a general plan of students' activities as part of their learning endavor. In this study, a strategy is defined as a set of activities that students employ to answer the listening comprehension section of TOEFL test.

5. *Listening Comprehension of TOEFL ITP Prediction Test*

Listening comprehension is the skill among TOEFL test that has 55 questions and it has to finish in 40 minutes. The TOEFL is a proficiency test that assesses the competence of non-native speakers' abilities. Moreover, ITP

(Institutional Testing Program) is one of the TOEFL test issued by ETS (Educational Testing Service) which are available in paper or digital format. Following that, the Prediction test is a sort of TOEFL test used to estimate a test-score taker's before they take the official TOEFL test. This test, often referred as the TOEFL simulation, which features a structure and test form that are nearly identical to the degree of difficulty corresponding to the official TOEFL test.

6. *Online English Course*

Online English course is a sort of group and private English-learning that makes the learners need the internet networks that provide accessibility, connectivity, flexibility, and the capacity to join a variety of learning training with their tutors or teachers. It can modify the way knowledge is conveyed and can be used as an alternative to not requiring the use of a physical classroom.
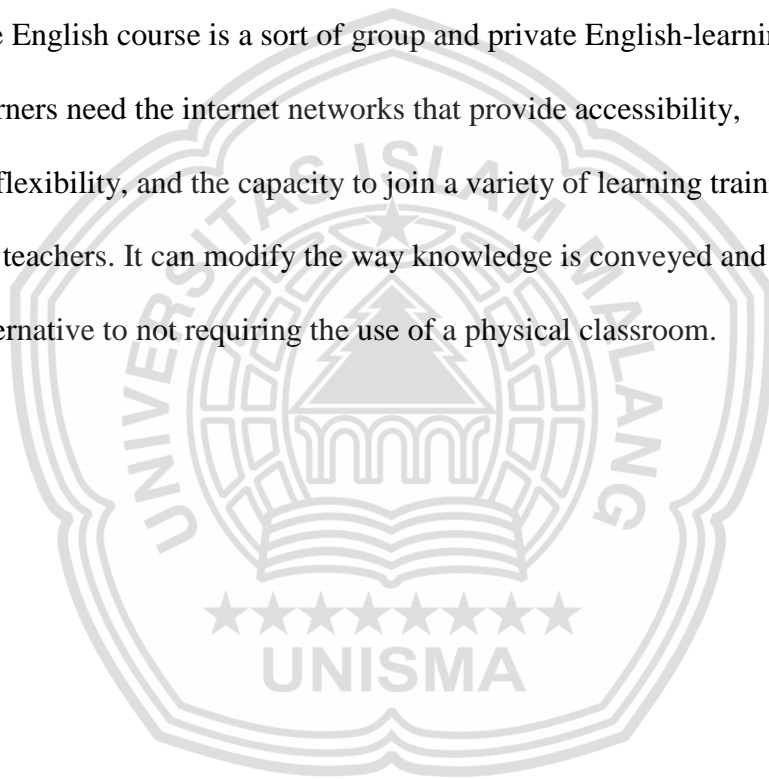
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In recent times, listening comprehension for TOEFL has been disregarded in study and practice. Based on the research findings and discussions in the preceding chapter, the researcher would like to draw some conclusions concerning students' listening difficulties and strategies in answering the TOEFL ITP prediction test at an online English course.

5.1 Conclusion

The researcher had already classified the 21 items as difficulties into three categories, which were considered to be the most common difficulties. Each of them was also investigated in terms of the potential strategies to overcome it. First, the choice of words (diction) is also to be the most common difficulty. The learners overcame this problem by practicing and using a variety of learning sources, such as Longman books, online websites, TOEFL application, or just making a list of words to recognize the meanings, synonyms, and antonym.

Next, the speaker's speed and long talk was also affected the learners' listening for the TOEFL test. Anticipating the question and signing the expected answer is one of the strategies for overcoming the speaker's speed and length of the talk. Furthermore, while listening, the learners must make inferences and identify the details about "what, when, where, who, or how" of the topic by answering the questions in order. Last, the speaker's accent and intonation affected the learners' listening for the TOEFL test. To overcome these difficulties,

learners must become familiar with the speaker's accent and intonation. By watching YouTube videos and movies, listening to English songs consistently, and enrolling in TOEFL preparation courses and TOEFL prediction, they can gradually develop familiarity with speaker accent and intonation.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on the conclusion as mentioned earlier, the researcher made the following suggestions about the study's findings.

5.2.1 For the further researcher

The researcher of this study is well aware of the study's limitations. For starters, because the study's population was small and restricted, the findings and outcomes cannot be properly extended to a much larger population. Moreover, new research findings related to listening difficulties are expected to be provided for future researchers, as well as to strengthen and reinforce theories about listening for TOEFL difficulties created by certain experts or authors who have published TOEFL books. Therefore, the findings should be explored further from a larger perspective in overcoming all of the difficulties of listening for TOEFL test.

5.2.2 For TOEFL teacher

Teachers can encourage the learners to focus more on the components of the listening comprehension section that appear to be the most difficult. It can encourage for learners to get familiar with the speaker's accent, intonation, speed, and length of the talk by frequently practicing through books, YouTube, apps, and

websites; expanding their list of diction; and taking TOEFL preparation course or prediction test.

5.2.3 For TOEFL learners

The learners should understand what factors influence the listening for TOEFL difficulties and try to overcome them, so that listening test for TOEFL can run smoothly and optimally. Furthermore, the learners can acquire strategies for each difficulty connected to the most common difficulties discovered by the researcher in this study. The component strategies require answering the questions during the test and learning preparation before taking the test. Therefore, prior practice is very required to achieve a higher TOEFL score.
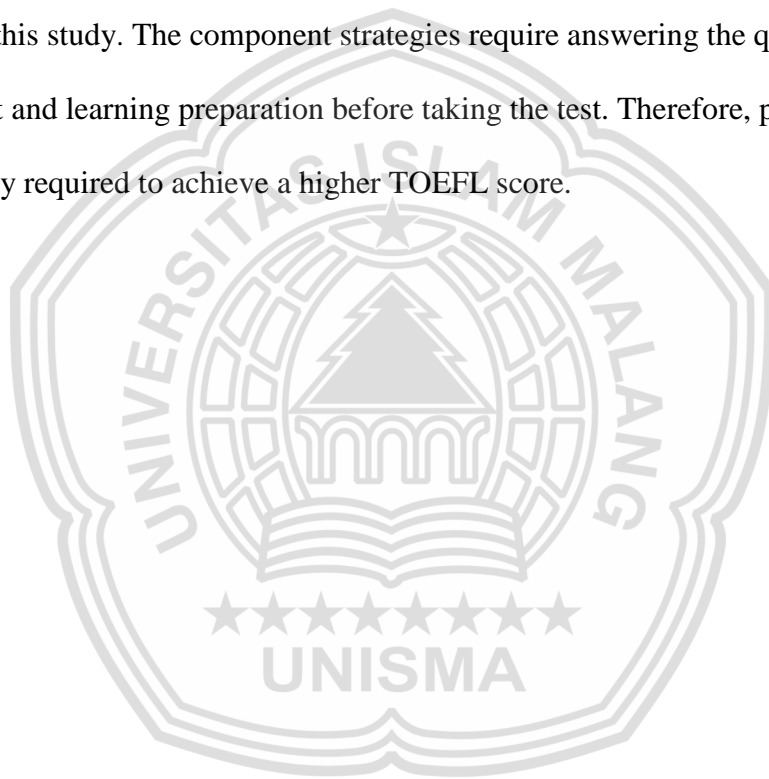
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