

ISSN 2528-3898

# ENGLISH EMPOWER

JOURNAL OF LINGUISTICS AND LITERATURE

**PUBLISHED BY  
FKIP UNITAS**

English Empower Vol. 02 No. 02 Page 57-116 November 2017

# ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' TOEFL RESULT AND DIFFICULTY

**Cita Hikmahyanti**

Universitas Bina Darma  
citahikmahyanti@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This study was conducted to analyze the result of the students TOEFL score and the difficulty of every section tested in the test. 150 students were chosen to take the TOEFL ITP at Universitas Bina Darma. The result of overall performances described using Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Language proficiency level. Thus, the obtained data were analyzed in every section (Listening, Structure and Written Expression and Reading) to see the most difficult section in the test. The result shows that all of the students were on the A2 level. This means that their English proficiency in the target language used exceedingly limited and basic. Furthermore, the data shows the students' difficulty in every section on the test was mostly in Structure and Written expression. Indeed, this research hopefully able to meet the other researchers as the references to conduct further research about proficiency which possibly testified by TOEFL and the finding on how to improve their English skill.

## 1. Background

English has become the most influential language in many countries. This language is used massively in the current years. According to *www.statistica.com* about the most spoken languages worldwide, English has 1500 million active users. Furthermore, English not only use in daily communication but also 985 millions of world's populations communicate with English through internet (*www.internetworldstats.com*). Nowadays, people reassure to work and visit different non-English native countries because more people use this international language. Likewise, English becomes a primary language of commerce and internet all over the world.

In Indonesia, having English skill is very beneficial for future. This ability eases people to understand and learns lots of information. English is one of the subjects tested in national examination. Students have to reach particular score for English to enter both local and international universities Most of foreign companies also hire the ones with good English. Recently, some government institutions use TOEFL certificate for acknowledging their

employees' ability in English. For those beneficial factors, now people assume that English certificate particularly performs an important requirement for their future job.

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is a certified test that demonstrates English proficiency which has been used widely in the world. It measures listening, reading, speaking and writing skills to perform academic tasks in English. This test is exceedingly popular and used by many people for different purposes. In America, this test is a certified document that must be attained for non-native students who wants to study in universities. There are many language institutions take an action to provide the test and the preparation for the students to get their desired score. This test measures your ability to use and understand English at the university level. And it evaluates how well you combine your reading, listening, speaking and writing skills to perform academic tasks (ets.org). However, in Indonesia this test gradually has been misused beyond its purpose.

In Indonesia, people use TOEFL for many different purposes. This language proficiency certificate is used for academic requirement to enter top-quality University where English is mostly used as the language of communication. International schools also provide their graduates with good TOEFL score as the passing grades. People need specific TOEFL score to study and work in foreign countries. In the job industry, requirement for TOEFL certificate is written in almost all job advertisement for national and international big companies. Thus, teaching issues a challenging to meet this need.

Teaching English in Universitas Bina Darma is very challenging. The students come from many different areas, tribes, languages, academic competence, way of learning, and motivation. Those are the possible factors that demand hard work in teaching a foreign language. Some students are able to use English actively and the others passively practice their English. At the very first time learning in the integrated English subject, the lecturers get difficulty in finding out a good way to upgrade the students' TOEFL score as a tool to measure their English proficiency

The writer found out the importance of analyzing the students' TOEFL score and describe the result of the test. Furthermore, the score analysis expands to the students' difficulties of doing the *TOEFL ITP* as well as to describe difficulties from all the sections

in the test. In short, to describe the students' English proficiency, the writer conducted an analysis of students TOEFL result and their difficulties in taking the test.

## 2. TOEFL ITP

TOEFL ITP tests are paper based and use 100 percent academic content to evaluate the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers. All questions are in multiple choice formats, with four answer choices per question. The tests evaluate skills in three areas:

1. Listening Comprehension measures the ability to understand spoken English as it is used in colleges and universities.
2. Structure and Written Expression measures recognition of selected structural and grammatical points in standard written English.
3. Reading Comprehension measures the ability to read and understand academic reading material written in English. The number of the questions, sections and approximate time to finish the test shown in table 1.

**Table 1: TOEFL ITP**

| <b>Section</b>                   | <b>Number of questions</b> | <b>Admin Time</b> | <b>Score scale</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Listening                        | 50                         | 35 minutes        | 31-68              |
| Structure and Written Expression | 40                         | 25 minutes        | 31-68              |
| Reading                          | 50                         | 55minutes         | 31-67              |
| TOTAL                            | 140                        | 115 minutes       | 310-667            |

This test may include questions that do not count toward the score. These are either questions that enable ETS to make test scores comparable across administrations, or new questions that help ETS determine how such questions function under actual testing conditions. Scores obtained at an institutional administration are reported only to the institution administering the test. TOEFL ITP scores are valid for two years from the test

date. Because language proficiency can change considerably in a relatively short period of time, scores more than two years old cannot be reported or verified.

## 2.1 CEFR Mapping Study

The purpose of this mapping study was to identify the minimum TOEFL ITP Level 1 test scores corresponding to four levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (ets.org). The table below presents the scaled cut scores for each section:

**Table 2: Score Mapping to CEFR**

| <b>CEFR Levels</b> | <b>Total Cut Score</b> | <b>Listening Comprehension</b> | <b>Structure and Written Expression</b> | <b>Reading Comprehension</b> |
|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| C1                 | 627                    | 64                             | 64                                      | 63                           |
| B2                 | 543                    | 54                             | 53                                      | 56                           |
| B1                 | 460                    | 47                             | 43                                      | 48                           |
| A2                 | 337                    | 38                             | 32                                      | 31                           |

## 2.2 TOEFL ITP Overall Performance Descriptors

The table below presents the TOEFL ITP scaled cut scores and overall performance descriptors for each Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level:

**Table 3: overall performance descriptors for each CEFR level**

| <b>TOEFL ITP score ranges</b> | <b>CEFR Levels</b>  | <b>TOEFL ITP Overall Performance Descriptors</b>   |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 627–677                       | <b>C1</b><br>Proficient User<br>— Effective Operational Proficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can understand essential ideas and some difficult and abstract vocabulary in short academic lectures/conversations that require integration and synthesis.</li> <li>• Can understand ideas and detailed information in academic written texts, even texts on abstract topics containing low-frequency vocabulary.</li> <li>• Can monitor grammatical interactions among elements in complex written sentences.</li> <li>• Can recognize less common grammatical forms, such as subjunctive mood and reduced clauses, as well as necessary word choices not</li> </ul> |

|         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
|         |   | specified by general grammatical rules.   |
| 543–626 | <b>B2</b><br>Independent<br>User —<br>Vantage   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can connect information across utterances from different speakers in short dialogues and can identify main ideas and details when reinforced in lectures and longer conversations.</li> <li>• In written texts containing high-frequency academic vocabulary, can connect details and ideas to understand information that is explicitly stated or implied.</li> <li>• Can recognize appropriate ways to vary written sentences using appositives, participles and subordinate clauses, and can demonstrate awareness of acceptable variations on basic grammatical rules.</li> </ul>                                      |
| 460–542 | <b>B1</b><br>Independent<br>User —<br>Threshold | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can understand clearly reinforced implications and common language functions in short dialogues containing high-frequency vocabulary and common idiomatic expressions.</li> <li>• Can understand simple process descriptions and narration in written texts containing high-frequency vocabulary.</li> <li>• Can recognize appropriate uses of verbs in common tenses — including passive forms — as well as common linking verbs and expletives such as "there is."</li> <li>• Can recognize the correct structure of a sentence or clause and the appropriate use of infinitives, gerunds and "that" clauses.</li> </ul> |
| 337–459 | <b>A2</b><br>Basic User —<br>Waystage           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can sometimes understand explicitly stated information in written texts and short dialogues containing simple vocabulary.</li> <li>• Can sometimes understand main ideas when they are strongly reinforced in texts and short oral exchanges.</li> <li>• In simple contexts, can sometimes select the appropriate verb tense and correctly choose between singular and plural nouns.</li> </ul>  |

### 3. Methodology

The researchers used descriptive method to describe the result of the students' TOEFL score. 150 students of Universitas Bina Darma who studied English 3 subject in the third

semester were the object of this study. The students were chosen by random sampling. They conducted the test as one of the requirements to pass the English subject. The test was done in one session at Language Center Universitas Bina Darma.

The researcher collected the data by waiting for the result of the test within 10 days from IIEF (the test center in Jakarta). As the results were released, the researcher summarized the percentage of the overall score scale and score in every section, analyzed the data by categorizing the score based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level.

#### 4. Findings and Discussions

From the results of students TOEFL score, the researcher summarized the findings of overall score and score in listening, structure and written expression and reading section in the table below.

**Table 4: TOEFL ITP Students' Score Roster**

| No | Score | Number of students | Percentage (%) |
|----|-------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1  | 450   | 2                  | 1.3            |
| 2  | 443   | 1                  | 0.6            |
| 3  | 440   | 1                  | 0.6            |
| 4  | 437   | 1                  | 0.6            |
| 5  | 433   | 5                  | 3.3            |
| 6  | 430   | 4                  | 2.6            |
| 7  | 427   | 3                  | 2              |
| 8  | 423   | 4                  | 2.6            |
| 9  | 420   | 6                  | 4              |
| 10 | 417   | 8                  | 5.3            |
| 11 | 413   | 14                 | 9.3            |
| 12 | 410   | 8                  | 5.3            |
| 13 | 407   | 10                 | 6.6            |
| 14 | 403   | 19                 | 12             |
| 15 | 400   | 25                 | 16.6           |
| 16 | 397   | 21                 | 14.6           |
| 17 | 393   | 18                 | 12             |

The table above shows that there are 17 scores, the highest score is 450 and the lowest score is 393. Meanwhile, the highest percentage of the score is 16.16% for 400 score scale, and the lowest percentage is 0.6% for 443, 440 and 393.

**Table 5: Students' Scaled Score for Listening Section**

| No | Correct Answer | CERF | Scaled Score | Number of Students | Percentage (%) |
|----|----------------|------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1  | 10             |      | 33           | 2                  | 1.3            |
| 2  | 11             |      | 35           | 3                  | 2              |
| 3  | 13             | A2   | 38           | 9                  | 6              |
| 4  | 14             | A2   | 39           | 8                  | 5.3            |
| 5  | 15/16          | A2   | 41           | 23                 | 15.3           |
| 6  | 17             | A2   | 42           | 24                 | 16             |
| 7  | 18             | A2   | 43           | 25                 | 16.6           |
| 8  | 19             | A2   | 44           | 24                 | 16             |
| 9  | 20/21          | A2   | 45           | 24                 | 16             |
| 10 | 22             | A2   | 46           | 6                  | 4              |
| 11 | 23             | B1   | 47           | 1                  | 0.6            |
| 12 | 24             | B1   | 49           | 1                  | 0.6            |

The result for the listening section, the most score gained (25 students) or 16.6% for scaled score 43. The lowest percentage goes to scaled score 47 and 48 with both 1 student or and 0.6%. Thus, there are 143 students are on the A2 level of CEFR level and 5 students are on the B1 level in listening section. The highest score scale for this section was 49 and the lowest were 33.

The result of Structure and Written Expression is described in the following table.

**Table 6: Students' Scaled Score for Structure and Written Expression (SWE) Section**

| No | Correct Answer | CERF | scaled score | Number of students | Percentage (%) |
|----|----------------|------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1  | 9              |      | 31           | 8                  | 5.3            |
| 2  | 10             |      | 33           | 8                  | 5.3            |
| 3  | 12             | A2   | 36           | 24                 | 16             |
| 4  | 13             | A2   | 37           | 24                 | 16             |
| 5  | 14             | A2   | 39           | 27                 | 18             |
| 6  | 15/16          | A2   | 40           | 21                 | 14             |
| 7  | 17             | A2   | 41           | 15                 | 10             |



|    |       |    |    |   |     |
|----|-------|----|----|---|-----|
| 8  | 18/19 | A2 | 43 | 9 | 6   |
| 9  | 20    | A2 | 44 | 6 | 4   |
| 10 | 21    | A2 | 45 | 7 | 4.6 |
| 11 | 28    | B1 | 52 | 1 | 0.6 |

The result of structure and written expression section showed that the scaled score for 39 were gained mostly by 27 students or 18% of the participants. There was only 1 student scored 52 for this section. This data shows 133 students were on the A2 level and 17 students were on the B1 level. Furthermore, the highest score for this section was 52 and the lowest was 31.

Meanwhile, the result for the reading section described in this following table.

**Table 7: Students' Scaled Score for Reading Section**

| No | Correct Answer | CERF | Scaled Score | Number of students | Percentage (%) |
|----|----------------|------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1  | 12             |      | 31           | 1                  | 0.6            |
| 2  | 14             |      | 33           | 3                  | 2              |
| 3  | 15             | A2   | 35           | 6                  | 4              |
| 4  | 17             | A2   | 37           | 15                 | 10             |
| 5  | 19             | A2   | 39           | 19                 | 12.6           |
| 6  | 20             | A2   | 40           | 19                 | 12.6           |
| 7  | 21             | A2   | 41           | 18                 | 12             |
| 8  | 23             | A2   | 43           | 23                 | 15.3           |
| 9  | 25             | A2   | 44           | 18                 | 12             |
| 10 | 26             | A2   | 45           | 10                 | 6.6            |
| 11 | 28/27          | A2   | 46           | 8                  | 5.3            |
| 12 | 29             | A2   | 47           | 7                  | 4.6            |
| 13 | 31/30          | B1   | 48           | 2                  | 1.3            |
| 14 | 34             | B1   | 51           | 1                  | 0.6            |

The result of reading section showed that the highest percentage was the scaled score for 39 and 40. Both were gained mostly by 12.6% or 19 students. There was only 1 student or 0.6% for each score 52 and 33 for this section. This data showed 143 students were on the A2 level and 3 students were on the B1 level. The highest score for reading section was 52 and the lowest score was 33.

In this study, the researcher described the result of the study. The result failed to satisfy the expectation of reaching higher scores. There were many students who relatively scored low in the test. as the students spent 3 semester learning English at Universitas Bina

Darma. The highest score was 450 and there were only 2 students reached the score. The lowest score was 393 with 12 students.

Based on the way how CEFR level see this results, the students who gain 337 to 459 for their TOEFL score, they are categorized into A2 or basic level. This means the students are on the level of understanding the short dialogues with simple vocabulary. On this level, the ability is only using verbs, tenses and singular plural in the limited situation. At the A2 level students are beginning to be able to function in social situations. They are able to use simple everyday polite forms, for example greeting and addressing; greet people, ask how they are and react to news; handle very short social exchanges; ask and answer questions about what they do at work and in their free time and some simple conversation.

Furthermore, the data showed the difficulty of students in doing the test. Those data represented the ability in every section of the test. The score mainly gained by 120 students or 80% students in the score scale 41 to 45. Hamouda (2013) stated that comprehending the spoken text is very difficult for students. This is probably caused by the infrequency of listening English. Some utterances are unfamiliar both in meaning and pronunciation. The students also need some repetition for the recording to finally understand the meaning.

For the structure and written expression, the score scale mostly obtained around, 36, to 41. The students on those score were around 111 students. 23 students scored above and 16 of them were below those score scale. The result is unsatisfying because comparing to the time students spend for learning grammar and another rules in English, they should have improved the score better. This problem has become the challenging issue for teacher, because in TOEFL preparation classes has more skills to discuss, more time to teach the students but the result is still unsatisfying.

Meanwhile, for reading section, there were 112 students obtained score scale for 37, to 44. The outcomes came out unsatisfying. This probably a very challenging language skill test because in reading comprehension the strategies used during the reading process included monitoring ongoing understanding of the text, predicting what will come, rereading for clarification, and modifying comprehension based on new information (Cohen & Upton, 2006). To achieve the better result for reading, the students need to practice doing the

reading test using useful tips for reading comprehension, gain more vocabulary and learn the variety of reading strategies.

## 5. Conclusion

The outcome of students TOEFL ITP, conducted at Universitas Bina Darma by students at the sophomore year who studied the last subject for English. This study described the proficiency level of English skill. Through this study, the data showed that the level of Students competence were on the A2 based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) on language ability. This level described that the students had limitation to the use and the knowledge in English. In every section of the test, the results failed to satisfy the participants, due to their low score in each section.

## References

Cohen, A. D. & Upton, T. A. (2006). *Strategies in Responding to the TOEFL Reading Task*.

From: <https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RR-06-06.pdf>

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) For Language. (2017) Retrieved from: [https://www.ets.org/s/toefl\\_itp/pdf/mapping\\_toefl\\_itp\\_scores\\_onto\\_the\\_common\\_european\\_framework\\_of\\_reference.pdf](https://www.ets.org/s/toefl_itp/pdf/mapping_toefl_itp_scores_onto_the_common_european_framework_of_reference.pdf)

Hamouda, A. (2013). An Investigation of Listening Comprehension Problems Encountered by Saudi Students in the EL Listening Classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 2(2), 113-15.

TOEFL ITP (2017), retrieved from: [https://www.ets.org/toefl\\_itp](https://www.ets.org/toefl_itp)

Language Users Statistics. (2017). Retrieved from: [www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.html](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.html)