Exploring Challenges and Strategies in TOEFL Preparation among Students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh

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ABSTRACT

In this descriptive quantitative study, thirty students from Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh discuss the difficulties they had and the methods they used to get ready for the TOEFL. An 18-item questionnaire was used to gather the data, and the results show that the listening section presented the biggest issue, with 58.1% of participants finding it difficult to stay focused and limited in time. The reading portion, on the other hand, was thought to be easier, while some participants had trouble with vocabulary and time management. Students' strategies included using internet resources, with a significant emphasis on cognitive and metacognitive skills, such as TikTok, YouTube, and TOEFL-specific apps. Notably, frequent strategies for navigating the written expression and test structure parts included determining the core concept and closely examining sentence structure. These results imply that more students could benefit from focused listening exercises, improved training in metacognitive strategies, and expanded usage of online resources for TOEFL preparation. In order to better prepare students for the exam, educators might consider incorporating real TOEFL-like materials and time management advice into the curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a standardized test used to evaluate the English language skills of non-native speakers. It is generally recognized and approved by academic institutions and agencies all over the world as a measure of a person's ability to understand and use English in academic settings. TOEFL is frequently required for admission to English-speaking institutions and colleges, as well as for job and immigration purposes. Many Indonesian colleges now require the TOEFL test before taking the final exam for graduation (Alek, Nurlia, & Hausca, 2019; Friska, 2022; Rahma, Syafitri, Oktavinanda, Rahmatillah, & Syahputri, 2022). It is known as TOEFL prediction or TOEFL equivalent, depending on the version of the test. Listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension are the three areas covered in this paper-based test. Mahmud (2014) claimed that the TOEFL-equivalent test, or a TOEFL prediction, may also be given by the university, for example, by the language laboratory or the center of language studies. The university administers this particular

TOEFL exam locally, and it is only used internally to assess students' English language skills.

One of these institutions which conduct TOEFL prediction is Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh. To prepare graduates for global competition, Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh requires the TOEFL prediction test as part of the thesis final examination. The minimum TOEFL score is 475 for English students' department and 410 for other disciplines. Students still struggle to meet the minimum score of 475 required for English learners, notwithstanding this resolve. Therefore, in recognition of the persisting obstacles in achieving the first set minimum score, the English department has decided to accept a TOEFL score of 450 for English students. Despite the fact that many students have completed grammar, writing, reading comprehension, and listening classes, even TOEFL classes provided by the language center at the university, they continue to struggle to meet their TOEFL score targets. It is evident from their low TOEFL scores that the students require numerous techniques to improve their TOEFL scores.

Numerous pertinent studies have examined difficulties with English language proficiency. Friska's (2022) study sought to determine which reading comprehension subskills students found most difficult and to understand the factors influencing the difficulty of completing the TOEFL reading comprehension section. The results showed that there were a lot of difficulties with vocabulary, stated and unstated detail questions, pronoun referent questions, inference questions, and key idea questions. Lack of vocabulary, sluggish reading speed, and a lack of useful solutions were blamed for the problems faced by the students. The study conducted by Sa'diyah (2016) identified several obstacles to good listening comprehension, including but not limited to accent, pronunciation, speech rate, vocabulary impairments, shifting speaker accents, lack of focus, anxiousness, and poor recording quality.

Additionally, Akmal, Rasyid, Masna, & Soraya (2020) examined the difficulties that students faced when completing the written expression and structure component. Determiners, conjunctions, adjective clauses, apposition phrases, quantifiers, relative clauses, clauses of concession, adverb connectors, and subject-verb agreement were among the problematic areas highlighted by the study. Contributing elements like insufficient experience, incorrect grammar, a small vocabulary, problems with time management, and low self-confidence were also emphasized by the study. When taken as a whole, these studies offer thorough insights into the range of difficulties students encounter in many areas of English language proficiency. Thus, to increase students' TOEFL results and better prepare them for academic and professional efforts in an English-speaking environment, it is imperative to comprehend these problems and devise effective solutions to address them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Challenges in TOEFL
2.1.1 Listening Comprehension

Many studies found that EFL students struggle with the listening section in the TOEFL test. Rahma et al. (2022) claimed in their study that most students have trouble answering the listening portion of the TOEFL exam (66.1%), with longer talks being the main source of difficulty (53.6%). Abboud & Hussein (2011) also affirmed that students

consider Part C to be much more difficult than Part A since it consists of a protracted monologue given by a single speaker on a particular topic or area. Students frequently struggle with this section because they may not be familiar with the subject, which makes it difficult for them to understand the speaker's point of view. According to (Bingol, Celik, Yildiz, & Mart, 2014; Rina & Tiarina, 2021; Sa'diyah, 2016), some issues might happen during the listening test are recording quality, cultural distinction, accent, unknown vocabulary, duration and speed of the audio, physical circumstances, and also inability to focus. Alek et al. (2019) also found the same challenges that the students face in listening because of inadequate sound system quality, the speaker's hard-to-understand accent, the challenges to interpreting the implicit meaning, lack of vocabulary, and ignorance of grammar. Since students see listening comprehension as the most difficult talent that requires concentrated attention, it leads them to feel anxious. Sarair, Farsia, & Baidah (2022) discovered that students' inability to understand native speakers who pronounce words differently is the main cause of anxiety during the TOEFL listening comprehension test. Hence, it affects their performance in answering the questions in the listening section.

2.1.2 Structure and Written Expression

The second portion of the TOEFL test that concentrates on written English is called structure and written expression. On the one hand, Ananda (2016) discovered that the majority of the students in two universities in Aceh found that written expression (part B) is harder than structure (part A). They said that it is more difficult to detect errors in sentences than when trying to complete them. According to Fitria (2021), there are several challenges faced by the students in the written expression section, and those are parallel structures, comparatives and superlatives, the uses of verbs, passive verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives and adverbs, articles, prepositions and usages. On the other hand, Abboud & Hussein (2011) have contradictory outcomes from Iraqi learners. It is simpler to identify errors than to finish incomplete phrases, especially in complex and compound sentences. He added that students encounter long, complicated and compound sentences in the structure section that take more time to study and choose the right response for. Ananda (2016) said that more research may be necessary to resolve the ongoing debate over which of the two sections, A or part B, is harder for the students. The initial finding, according to Akmal et al. (2020), was that the participants had poor comprehension and had no idea what the questions' subject matter was. Second, the test caused confusion and anxiety among the participants. The test's question structure served as the last justification. He also added that there are some factors influencing the challenges when completing this structure and written expression section, such as lack of practice, poor grammar, lack of vocabulary, time management, and lack of confidence.

2.1.3 Reading Comprehension

The last section of the TOEFL paper-based test is reading comprehension. Friska (2022) found in her research that there are six subskills-vocabulary, unstated detail question, stated detail question, pronoun referent question, inference question, and main idea question -were the most challenging for students in the reading comprehension section. Asrida & Fitrawati (2019) also mentioned that five skills were classified as challenging abilities: answering main idea questions, stating details, transitions, application of context to understand simple terms, and tone of the passage. Subsequently, Samad,

Jannah, & Sarah Fitriani (2017) ranged the most difficult ones in the reading section from answering implied detail questions, stating detail questions, using context to give meanings of difficult words, the main idea, and determining meanings from words. Meanwhile, Fajri (2019) examined inference questions as being regarded as the most challenging in the TOEFL reading comprehension section. The second is the vocabulary test, and the next unstated detail came up. Asrida & Fitrawati (2019) uncovered the poor comprehension skills of many English students. The students do not really learn the abilities of subjects evaluated in the TOEFL reading part. The data further highlights the reality that having daily English instruction does not ensure that a student will score highly on the TOEFL. Girsang, Marbun, Turnip, & Saragih (2019) found that the participants' lack of interest in reading, the difficulty in understanding the text' meaning and purpose in reading comprehension questions, a lack of practice, and a lack of time are the main reasons why it is difficult for them to answer reading comprehension questions on the TOEFL test.

2.1.4 Students' Strategies for Improving TOEFL Score

According to the previous study conducted by Netta & Trisnawati (2019), the Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh students appeared to study for the TOEFL prediction by selecting their learning methods, which can include reading books and listening to audio that is linked to English. For a variety of reasons that are too many to list in their research, the students would like to study alone rather than attend on-campus or off-campus TOEFL preparation classes. Meanwhile, Pratiwi & Waluyo (2022) implemented the learning outcomes of students from two Indonesian higher education institutions that used task and game-based learning in an online TOEFL preparation course. There was a notable improvement in students' scores, indicating a moderate impact of the course design on their learning outcomes. Abboud & Hussein (2011) recommended strategies to increase the listening section in TOEFL by listening to English-language radio shows, movies, TV newscasts, documentaries, lectures on educational television channels, and free university lectures. In order to prepare for the section on structure and written expression, students may also utilize review materials for advanced grammar and practice questions. He also mentioned that in order for them to learn more about this area, they must enroll in English classes. Furthermore, I read a range of English-language texts for reading comprehension, including articles from American and English encyclopedias, magazines, newspaper stories, and textbook extracts. Rifiyanti, Dewi, & Putra (2023) also suggest that using TOEFL preparation provides insightful information on improving communication abilities in English. The TOEFL exam assesses reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar. Consequently, the preparatory program helps identify areas in which students can raise their overall English competence.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative case study design. Although the questionnaire was sent to a larger group of 300 test-takers, 30 students who passed the TOEFL test were chosen using a purposive sample technique. These students were taken from many faculties. A survey consisting of eighteen closed and open-ended questions was circulated through Google Forms in order to collect data. Using theme analysis for open-ended responses and descriptive quantitative data analysis for closed-ended responses. The research aims to

comprehend students' tactics for raising their TOEFL scores. Through the utilization of both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study offers a thorough understanding of students' perspectives and encounters with TOEFL preparation and success tactics.

4. FINDINGS

Based on an analysis of the questionnaires completed by the thirty students who took part in the study, this section offers the study's findings. The results are arranged in order to respond to the following research queries:

4.1 What are the difficulties faced by the students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh in answering the TOEFL test?

The TOEFL test presented a number of difficulties, according to the participants. The results show that students struggle with a range of issues in several test components, particularly the listening section.

Figure 1. Number of times taken
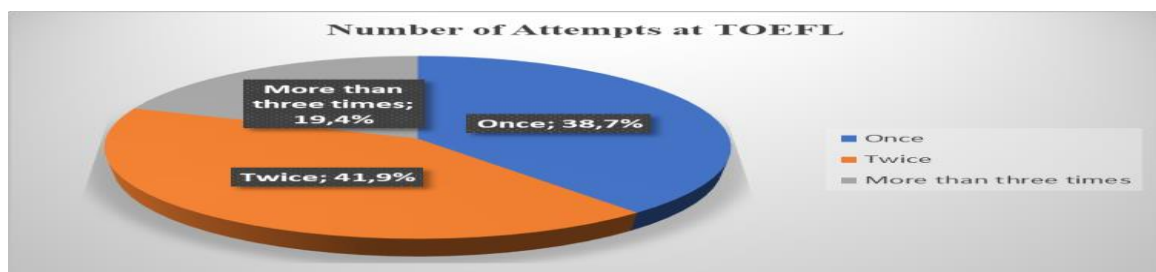
This study needs a sample that has already completed the TOEFL test before the thesis examination in order to obtain strategies for passing the TOEFL test. The chart above shows how many times the participants took the test. It can be seen that the sample took the TOEFL test 1-3 times.

Figure 2. Preparation for the TOEFL Test
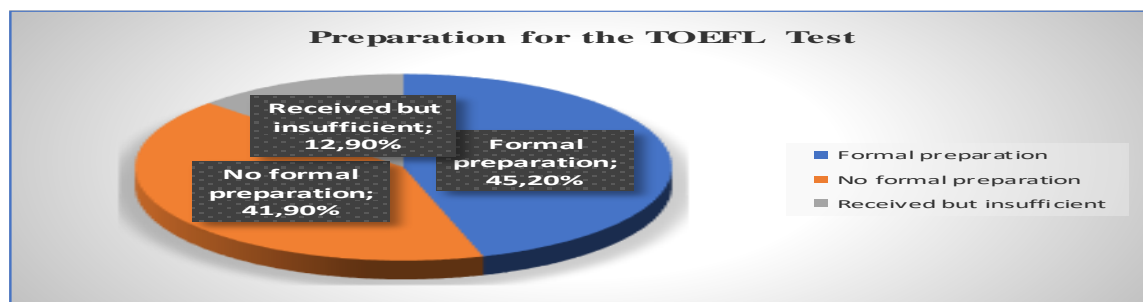
The data provides important insights into how participants prepared for the TOEFL exam. Notably, 45.2% of participants took official English for TOEFL classes as a kind of formal training, demonstrating a proactive attitude to understanding the exam's criteria. On the other hand, 41.9% did not undertake any formal preparation, which might have hampered their performance due to lack of confidence, financial constraints, or ignorance of the advantages of such training. Furthermore, 12.9% of them had some training but felt it was insufficient, indicating a weakness in the efficiency of their preparation. Overall, this emphasizes how different people's preparation levels vary and how important it is to have easily accessible, excellent training materials in order to improve TOEFL performance.

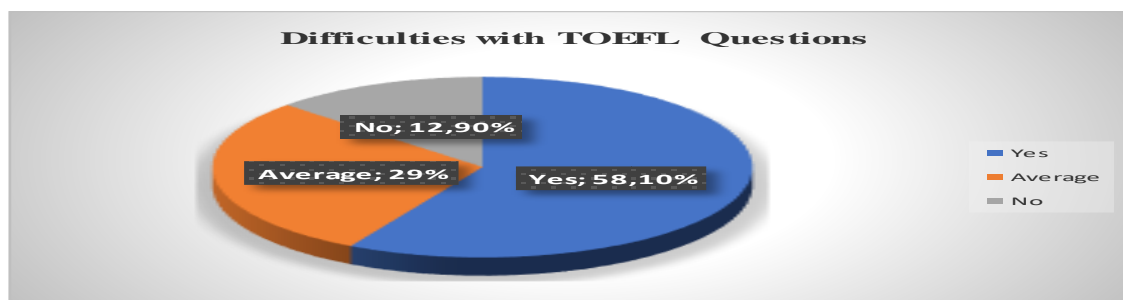Figure 3. Difficulty in answering TOEFL questions

Figure 3 illustrates that 58.1% of participants felt the TOEFL exam to be challenging, while 29% said it was manageable but still presented some difficulties on occasion. Merely 12.9% of the respondents said the test was easy. According to this research, most students face significant difficulties when taking the TOEFL. These difficulties may be related to a number of factors, including language ability, time restrictions, and test format familiarity.

Figure 4. Frequency of losing concentration during TOEFL test
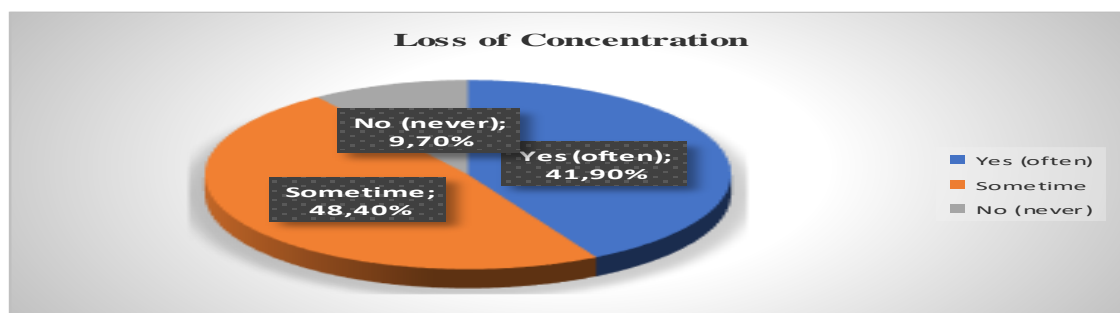
One major problem that came up during the test was staying focused. Figure 4 shows that 48.4% of participants stated they occasionally lost concentration during the test, and 41.9% claimed they did so frequently. Just 9.7% of test takers were able to stay focused the entire time. This suggests that many pupils have trouble focusing, which is important for answering the test questions correctly.

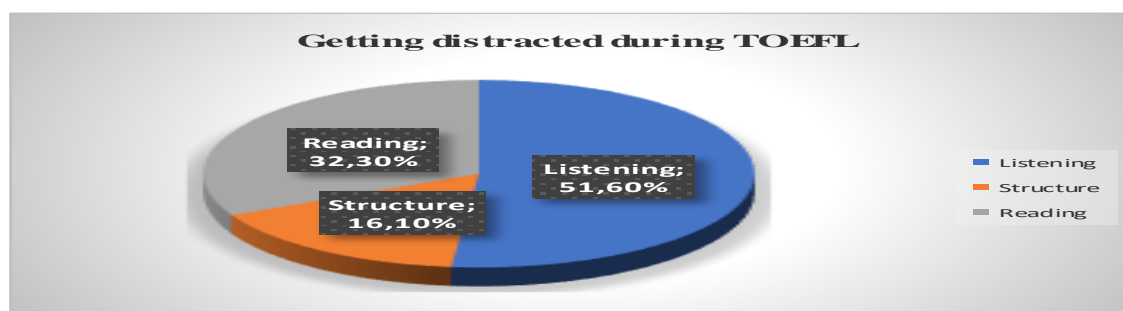Figure 5. Getting distracted during the TOEFL section

Figure 5 examines the challenges that test takers encounter in various TOEFL parts. According to the figure, 51.6% of participants frequently report losing concentration during the listening section. By comparison, 16.1% regard the structure and written expression section and 32.3% find in the reading section. This indicates that the listening section is actually the hardest for participants to focus fully on.
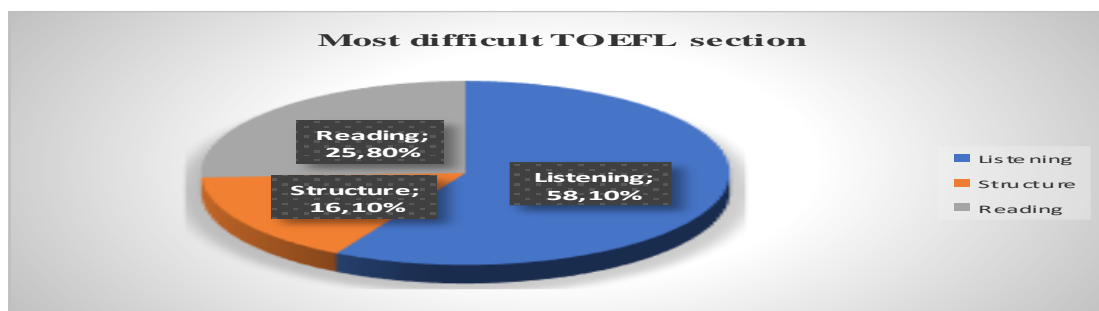
Figure 6. The most difficult TOEFL section

Figure 6 explores how participants perceived the most difficult elements of the TOEFL exam. The data highlights difficulties with focus or comprehension during this piece since the majority of participants, 58.1%, believe the listening component to be the most challenging. With 25.8% of participants reporting problems, the reading element is the second most difficult section. According to (Girsang et al., 2019), reading comprehension challenges may be caused by multiple reasons. Lack of interest in reading, difficulties deciphering the text, a lack of time to work through issues, insufficient practice with reading comprehension activities, and a deficiency in vocabulary in a foreign language are a few of these. Because they are not native speakers of the language, students often rely solely on what they hear, making it more difficult for them to understand the primary ideas in TOEFL test questions. On the other hand, 16.1% of participants say that the written language and structure section is the most difficult.

Table 1. Reason for Difficulty in TOEFL section

Participants	Students' opinion
3	Lack of concentration
2	Need for thorough preparation and English listening skills
1	Difficulty in focusing during reading passages, time constraints
3	Lack of proficiency in the listening section
1	Similar to the 4th participant - lack of proficiency in the listening section
2	Fast-paced conversation in the listening section, limited vocabulary
1	Lengthy reading passages in the reading section
1	Complexity in determining the structure of sentences
1	Insufficient time and need for focus during reading passages
1	Differences between written and read content requiring understanding
1	Overall difficulty, especially in the English language
2	Lack of clarity in sound during the listening section
2	Unfamiliarity with accents, especially for the first time
1	Difficulty in reading comprehension
1	Overwhelmed by the quantity of reading texts and limited time
2	Difficulty in understanding what the speaker is saying
2	The fast pace of dialogue in the listening section
1	Pronunciation issues affecting clarity
1	Lengthy reading texts affecting focus
1	Difficulty in maintaining focus during long reading sessions

The table demonstrates that throughout the TOEFL exam, the majority of participants had trouble focusing, managing their time, and listening. Common concerns

were trouble focusing on extensive reading sections, fast-paced talks in the listening segment, incorrect pronunciation, and unfamiliar accents. Some participants found it difficult to comprehend the material quickly because of their limited vocabulary and complicated sentence constructions. The biggest challenges were with focus, timing, and listening comprehension.

Table 2. Challenging Aspects of Structure and Written Expression Section

Participants	Students' opinion
1	Requires extra focus and understanding of grammar; perceived as a challenge
3	Time management is crucial, making it challenging
2	It is not considered very difficult but emphasizes the importance of maintaining focus
2	Learning extensive English grammar is necessary, and preparation takes a long time
3	Contextual understanding is essential for answering; it is perceived as a challenge
2	Diverse English grammar rules tested, making it challenging
3	Requires intense focus and is considered the hardest part of TOEFL
1	Filling in the blanks is a preferred part, suggesting it's enjoyable
3	Careful selection is needed due to tricky answers
2	Unpredictable patterns add to the challenge
1	Personal difficulty with grammar
3	Time constraints pose a challenge in answering questions
3	High difficulty due to the short time allotted
1	Lack of understanding of the questions contributes to the challenge

The information reveals that the TOEFL grammar component was difficult for the participants, especially because of the time limits and requirement for intensive concentration. Many students stressed how important it is to have a solid command of English grammar and time management. While some people found filling in the blanks and other specialized tasks enjoyable, others found the variety of grammar rules and challenging questions challenging. In general, the participants' main areas of difficulty were focus, grammatical understanding, and time management.

4.2 What strategies did students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh use to improve their TOEFL scores?

In order to get ready for the TOEFL exam, the students used a variety of preparation techniques, some of which worked better than others.

Figure 7. TOEFL Practice frequency
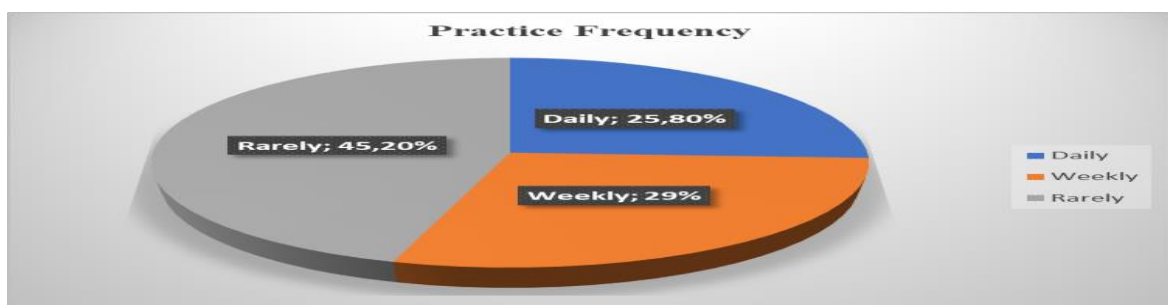
The data in the figure shows that the participants' frequency of TOEFL practice varies, with the largest group (45.2%) practicing infrequently. This implies that a sizable percentage of students might not take part in regular or organized TOEFL preparation. While 25.8% of participants practiced daily, indicating a smaller but more committed

group of students who probably value frequent practice, about 29% of participants practiced weekly, showing a moderate level of participation. The higher number of students who practice infrequently may indicate problems with time management, a lack of practice materials, or a lack of enthusiasm, all of which could affect a student's total TOEFL score. It is in line with the finding of Roza (2019) that the problem for the teachers was that the students who did not put in any effort were the ones with high expectations. It means that the students want to get higher scores but make no effort to learn English.

Figure 8. Learning resources utilized by participants in preparation for the TOEFL test
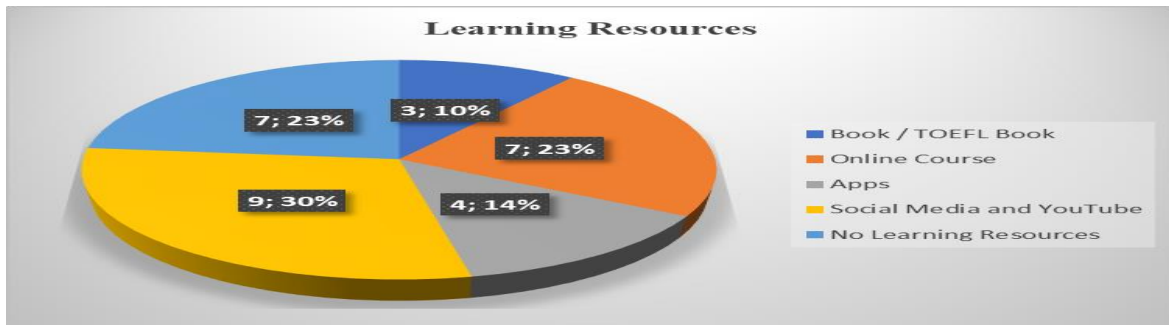
The distribution of learning resources utilized by participants to be ready for the TOEFL is shown by the data above. Nine individuals indicated that social media and YouTube are the most popular options, suggesting a preference for easily available and perhaps free instructional content. Seven people used online classes, indicating that this kind of structured learning is also popular. As Syakur, Junining, & Sabat (2019) stated in their finding, integrating e-learning technology into a higher education TOEFL instructional strategy can improve TOEFL scores. The use of e-learning in TOEFL preparation has shown that it is a successful learning strategy for raising test scores.

Meanwhile, interestingly, seven participants said they didn't use any learning materials. This could indicate that they relied too much on existing knowledge, weren't aware of the resources, or weren't aware of them. Only three people relied on traditional literature or materials specific to the TOEFL for preparation, whereas four participants used apps. This suggests a tendency for TOEFL preparation to choose more contemporary, digital resources over more conventional ones.

Figure 9. Perception of previous TOEFL practice
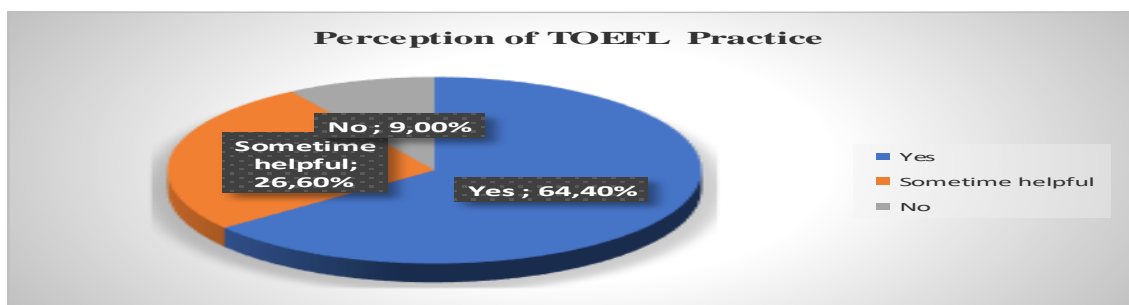
According to the results, 26.6% of participants thought that their prior TOEFL practice was occasionally useful, whereas the majority of participants (64.4%) found it helpful. Merely 9% thought it was unhelpful. This indicates that while a sizable portion of

students still find it to be inconsistently successful, most students view prior TOEFL practice as beneficial.

Figure 10. Utilization of TOEFL Strategies
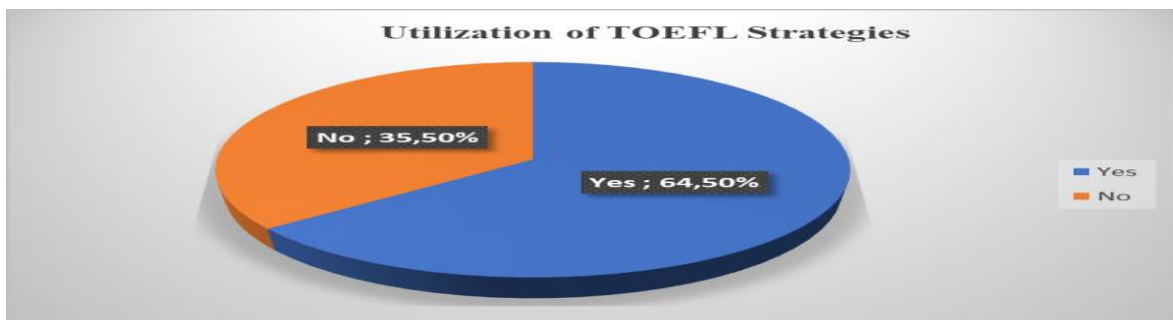
The data shows that 64.5% of participants reported adopting techniques to prepare for the TOEFL, while 35.5% did not. This suggests that while most students understand the value of using strategies during their study, a sizeable proportion nonetheless goes into the test without any particular strategies or tactics.

Figure 11. TOEFL Strategies in Listening Comprehension
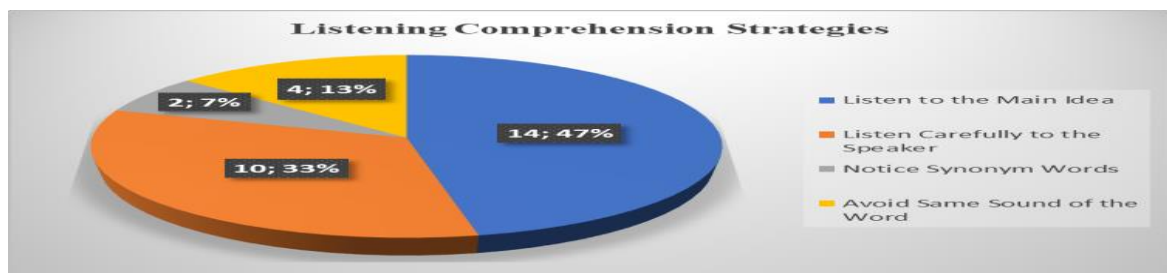
The data showed a range of methods. 14 participants, or the majority, highlighted "Listening to the Main Idea" as a crucial tactic. A noteworthy subset of participants, comprising 10 people, gave priority to "Listening Carefully to the Speaker." Furthermore, fewer participants used more targeted strategies: 2 concentrated on "Noticing Synonym Words," while 4 avoided "Same Sounds of Words." This distribution demonstrates the range of tactical techniques used in the listening segment. Notably, participants placed a strong emphasis on understanding the primary idea, indicating their understanding of its significance for successful TOEFL preparation.

Figure 12. TOEFL Strategies in Structure and Written Expression
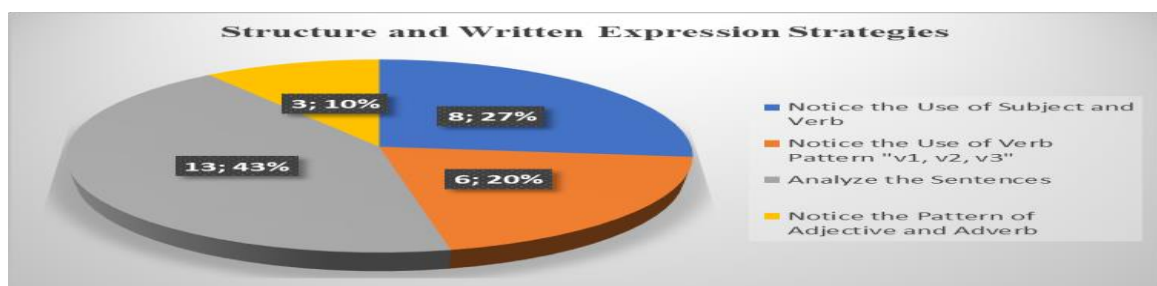
According to the statistics, analyzing terms is the most often employed method; thirteen individuals considered it to be a crucial tactic. Eight people then depend on paying attention to how verbs and subjects are used. On the other hand, just three individuals think about the pattern of adverbs and adjectives, whereas six concentrate on verb patterns (v1,

v2, v3). This shows that in order to respond to TOEFL questions properly, participants should prioritize comprehending sentence structure and verb usage. This is in contrast to Fitri's (2017) findings, which indicated that, with an average difficulty level of 84.7%, passive verbs were the most difficult. On the other hand, subject-verb agreements and verb forms were included in the easier questions.

Figure 13. TOEFL Strategies in Reading
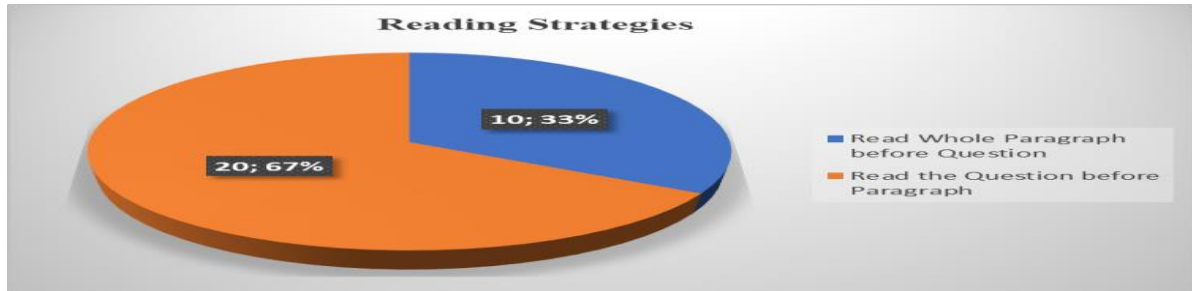
There is a clear pattern in the data on reading methods found in the TOEFL Reading section. Out of all the participants surveyed, 20 people said they would rather "read the question before the paragraph." This tactic encourages initiative and enables participants to foresee the data required to provide meaningful answers to the questions. A smaller but no less noteworthy group of ten participants, on the other hand, chose to "Read the Whole Paragraph before the Question." This method suggests going through the text in greater detail before answering particular queries. The former method is more common, which highlights how crucial pre-reading questions are for helping participants focus when reading. This distribution demonstrates the range of reading strategies that participants used, which in turn influenced how they approached the TOEFL reading section.

Figure 14. Perception of Improvement by Strategies
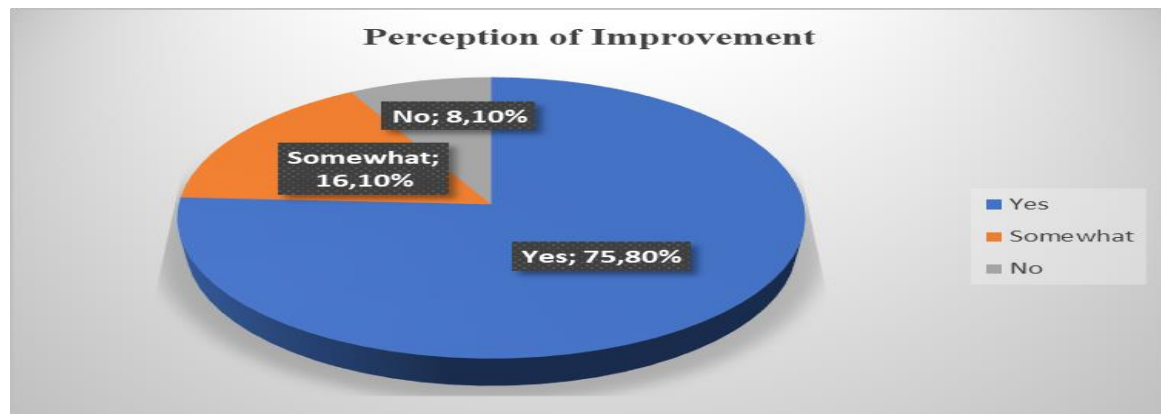
The perceptions of the participants about whether the tactics they use can improve their TOEFL scores are displayed in the table. 75.8% of respondents said they were certain that their tactics would help them achieve higher TOEFL scores. A sizeable percentage (16.1%) expressed a more circumspect viewpoint, claiming that the tactics only marginally boost scores. However, 8.1% of respondents disagreed, believing that their TOEFL results are not raised by the tactics they employ. According to this data, participants' opinions about the effectiveness of tactics for improving their TOEFL scores were generally good.

The majority of responders recognize the potential benefits of strategic techniques in TOEFL preparation, highlighting the subjective nature of this perception.

Table 3. Participant's time management strategy

No	Students' opinion
1	I usually answer easy questions or parts first, leaving out the hard ones. Then, I pay attention to the hard questions. I won't waste my time on questions for which I don't know the answer at all.
2	Make sure you measure your time when you finish working on one section, and record the time and results. Then, compare it with the results of your time record and your score on the next test.
3	I just read or heard the question once. If I don't have an answer, I answer with what feels most correct to me so that I don't get stuck on one question.
4	There is no specific strategy for time management; there is only willpower because if there is a will, there is a way.
5	We never make a schedule for exercising TOEFL before the test, making the TOEFL test difficult.
6	I give 1 minute for 1 question. If I can't answer it, I will skip it and try to answer it later.
7	In my opinion, 1 task is 10 seconds to answer the task and then the next task.
8	There is no special way; I just answer according to the specified time.
9	I don't manage my time because I don't prepare anything for the TOEFL test.
10	I just manage my learning schedule to get better preparation.
11	No, I only follow the time of the test.
12	No, I don't have a specific strategy for time management.
13	No, in fact, I was almost the last person out of the room.
15	Yes, I will spend special time taking the TOEFL test.
16	Yes. In the reading part, I try to do skimming and scanning.
17	With a predetermined time and do not use any strategy.
18	Answer questions that you already know.
19	Focus on questions that can be answered.
20	Make sure the time is right.
21	I have no strategy; I just answer quickly.
22	I don't have a specific strategy for time management.
23	Read and answer ASAP.
24	Actually, don't have a strategy for managing the time.
25	I keep track of my time by splitting the test into parts and giving myself a certain number of minutes for each part.
26	I try to answer all the questions as quickly as possible so that I have time to go back and look at the hard ones again.
27	To make sure I score higher in those areas, I focus on the sections I'm comfortable with first, then move on to the more difficult ones.
28	I try not to spend too much time on a single question; if it does, I move on and come back at a later time.
29	When I'm short on time, I rely on my intuition—it's better to hazard a guess than to go unanswered.
30	I time myself during practice sessions to get a feel for my pace on the real TOEFL exam, which helps me prepare.

Thirty participants' responses to the TOEFL exam demonstrate a variety of time management strategies. Approximately one-third of the participants employ time management strategies. Among these, some prioritize easier questions first and tackle harder ones later (participants 1, 6, and 18). Others concentrate on time constraints for every question (participants 6, 7, and 20) or skimming and scanning strategies for the reading portion (participant 16). But many participants (including 4, 8, 9, 12, and 22) said they don't have a set time management plan; instead, they just go with their gut, respond quickly, or don't plan at all. Certain replies (such as those from Participant 2) recommend a more methodical strategy, comparing time logs from various practice sessions to increase productivity.

Figure 15. Seeking Advice on TOEFL Improvement
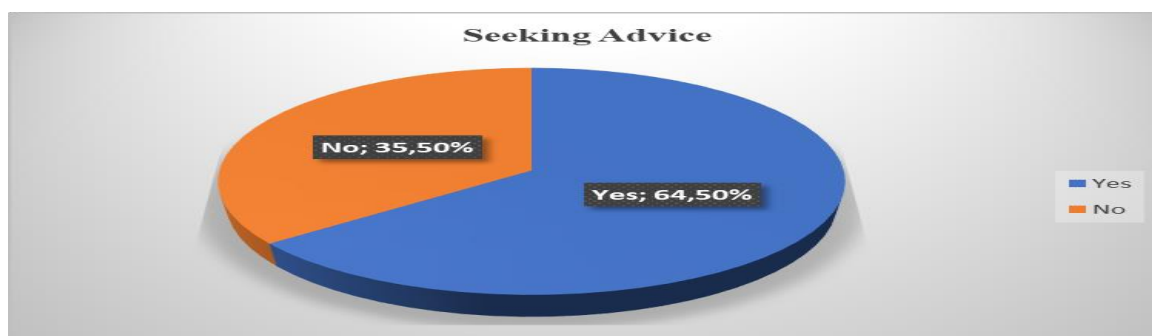
According to the data, 64.5% of participants have asked teachers or peers with higher TOEFL scores for tips or suggestions on how to raise their scores. This implies that participants are taking a proactive stance and realizing the need to ask others who have done well on the test for insights and guidance. However, 35.5% of participants selected the "no" response, suggesting that a sizeable percentage either did not believe that seeking advice was necessary or preferred using different strategies to prepare for the TOEFL. The information highlights the many strategies used by participants to get ready for the TOEFL, with a significant portion of them appreciating outside help to improve their scores.

5. DISCUSSION

This study looked at the difficulties and coping mechanisms faced by students taking the TOEFL exam. The research results pertaining to two particular research issues are examined in detail in this section. These questions matched the study's goals, which included figuring out how students overcome obstacles to do well on the TOEFL and figuring out what tactics they use. This part discusses the study's findings based on the data analysis, specifically addressing the first research question, which sought to identify the challenges Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh students experienced in order to obtain a passing TOEFL score.

The findings of the research indicate that information from the participants was gathered using the questionnaire. The exam results showed that a sizable portion of students had trouble answering the listening questions. This is supported by the questionnaire answers, which show that over half of the participants—more precisely, 58.1%, or 18 out of 30 students—reported having trouble with the listening part. This result is consistent with Alfiami (2020), which examined listening techniques adopted by

students at UIN Ar-Raniry in an effort to raise their TOEFL scores. Both findings point to a similar problem that students have, specifically issues responding to listening questions. The common problem centers on managing time and losing focus during the test, suggesting that students have difficulty negotiating these parts of the TOEFL exam. Additionally, in terms of methods for raising their TOEFL scores, most participants used internet tools like TikTok or YouTube videos, TOEFL applications, or online courses to prepare for the exam on their own. In light of its affordability and ease of use, it may be concluded that online media is frequently used to prepare for the TOEFL.

Finding the key idea is a common tactic used by participants in the listening segment, and many of them think it's the best way to succeed. Some participants also choose to pay close attention to the speaker during discussions. It means they also use metacognitive strategies because they were paying attention to the speaker during the test (Bingol et al., 2014). In this situation, listening intently to the speaker entails a metacognitive component since people are actively monitoring and controlling their knowledge and attention in addition to doing the cognitive activity of listening. They exhibit a metacognitive understanding of how attention and comprehension are necessary for effective listening, as evidenced by their conscious knowledge of the need to concentrate on the speaker.

Before answering the questions in the Structure and Written Expression section, participants typically take the approach of carefully considering the question. As Bingol et al. (2014) stated, sometimes learners attempt to infer a word's meaning from context when they are unsure of its definition and analyzing the question is regarded as a cognitive technique. By examining sentences to understand the subject and verb, half of the participants used this method. Furthermore, a subgroup of participants focused on comprehending adjectives and adverbs, whereas a smaller subset focused on the use of verbs in a sentence.

In addition, participants had no issues with the reading section. Most of them agreed that it was simpler to answer the reading questions after reading the question beforehand. However, due to time limits and vocabulary gaps, some participants could find it difficult to respond to them. Friska (2022), in her study, found that the majority of participants said they started by reading the text and then glanced at the question and the text again to determine the answer. As a result, students took longer, which prevented them from finishing all of the numbers before the allotted time ran out. Through the use of methods like analysis, repetition, summarization, and translation to grasp the content, participants in the reading section also indirectly apply cognitive strategies Bingol et al., 2014). Furthermore, Guntur & Pordanjani (2019) emphasized that giving pre-tests early in the session is a useful way to collect preliminary data on students' critical thinking abilities and their comprehension of key language components, which can help to direct and improve their reading comprehension skills.

The thirty participants' questionnaire responses showed a range of responses, with some answering patterns that resulted in high percentages for each item. Metacognitive methods emerged as the most preferred approach for Second Language Learning since the study found similar tactics used by participants and other students to learn English.

Analysis of the questionnaire responses showed that participants typically used approaches that are consistent with more general findings in the field of English learning

research, indicating a preference for metacognitive tactics in second language acquisition. These observations have useful ramifications for higher education. Using real materials that mimic the TOEFL experience, lecturers could incorporate focused listening exercises into the curriculum with the goal of improving their students' listening skills. Trisnawati & Netta (2020) suggest that improving EFL instruction and learning in Indonesia may increase students' desire to learn the language. Enhancing the TOEFL administration process at institutions as a graduation requirement will also guarantee that students are appropriately prepared, which would enhance test performance.

Additionally, they could offer instruction in metacognitive skills and time management, including how to manage test time limits and concentrate on listening passages. Moreover, increasing the usage of Internet resources and delivering workshops on how to employ these tools for TOEFL preparation will further benefit students.

6. CONCLUSION

This study helps us understand the problems Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh students had in getting ready for the TOEFL, especially in the listening section, where 58.1% of them said they had trouble focusing and managing their time. It draws attention to the increased number of students using online tools, such as time management applications and YouTube, to prepare for the TOEFL. It also shows the variety of metacognitive and cognitive tactics that students use. Nonetheless, the low sample size of 30 students from a solitary university limits the applicability of the results. It also ignores the experiences of test takers who failed, concentrating primarily on those who passed. The conclusions point to the necessity of providing focused assistance with listening comprehension, promoting helpful websites, and providing training in a variety of techniques. Future studies might examine particular therapies or programs that address the issues raised, especially with listening and time management, and they might also increase the sample size.

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