

# Structure and Written Expression Section on Paper-Based Toefl : Perceived Difficulties by Nursing Students of Poltekes Solok, West Sumatera

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**Structure and Written Expression Section on Paper-Based Toefl : Perceived Difficulties by Nursing Students of Poltekkes Solok, West Sumatera**

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**Abstract**

English language ability is one of the skills that must be possessed by college students, including nursing students. Having good English skills will open broad opportunities for increasing the competency and expertise of nursing students. One form of recognition of good English skills is to have a high TOEFL score. However, getting a high TOEFL score is still a challenge for nursing students. Facts in the field show that many nursing students find it difficult to achieve high scores on the TOEFL test. The most common form of difficulty is the problem in answering questions related to the structure and written expression section in the Paper-Based TOEFL test. This study aims to investigate the difficulties faced by nursing students in answering the structure and written expressions section tested in the Paper-Based TOEFL. The population of this study was 80 nursing students of POLTEKES Solok, and the sample was selected using cluster random sampling. Data of the research was collected through questionnaires and interviews. From the research findings, it can be concluded that 8 items are considered as the most difficult elements encountered by nursing students in the TOEFL test. These items were word order, parallel structure, singular and plural nouns, missing and extra words, articles, comparative and superlative, word choice, and word form. Besides, the findings also show that several factors influence students' difficulties in the structure and written expression section. The factors were unfamiliarity with the TOEFL test, lack of practice, and lack of grammatical competence.

**Keywords:** TOEFL, Structure and Written Expression Section, Nursing Students.

**Abstrak**

Kemampuan berbahasa Inggris merupakan salah satu keterampilan yang harus dimiliki oleh mahasiswa perguruan tinggi, termasuk mahasiswa keperawatan. Dengan memiliki keterampilan bahasa Inggris yang baik akan membuka kesempatan yang luas terhadap peningkatan kompetensi dan keahlian mahasiswa keperawatan. Salah satu bentuk pengakuan dari kemampuan bahasa Inggris yang baik ialah memiliki skor TOEFL yang tinggi. Namun, mendapatkan nilai yang tinggi dalam tes TOEFL masih menjadi tantangan tersendiri bagi mahasiswa keperawatan. Fakta di lapangan menunjukkan bahwa masih banyak mahasiswa keperawatan yang kesulitan untuk bisa mencapai skor tinggi dalam tes TOEFL. Bentuk kesulitan yang paling banyak ditemui adalah permasalahan dalam menjawab soal yang berkaitan dengan structure dan written expression section pada Paper-Based TOEFL test. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa keperawatan POLTEKES Solok dalam menjawab structure dan written expression section yang diuji dalam Paper-Based TOEFL. Populasi penelitian ini adalah 80 orang mahasiswa keperawatan, dan sampel penelitian ini dipilih dengan menggunakan cluster random sampling. Data dari penelitian ini dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan tes dan interview. Dari temuan penelitian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa ada 8 item yang dianggap sebagai elemen paling sulit yang ditemui mahasiswa keperawatan dalam tes TOEFL. Item-item tersebut adalah word order, parallel structure, singular and plural noun, missing dan extra words, article, comparative and superlative, word choice, dan word form. Selain itu, temuan ini juga menunjukkan bahwa ada beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi kesulitan siswa dalam structure and written expression section. Faktor-faktor tersebut adalah tidak terbiasa dengan tes TOEFL, kurangnya latihan, dan kurangnya penguasaan tata bahasa.

**Kata Kunci:** TOEFL, Structure and Written Expression Section, Mahasiswa Keperawatan.

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**Introduction**

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is one kind of standardized test which is addressed for speakers in which English is not as their native language. As one of the English standardizes tests, TOEFL becomes one of the important tools in measuring English proficiency for non-native speakers. It is used to evaluate the non-native ability to understand English as it is spoken, to recognize selected structural and grammatical sentences in standard written English, and to read short English passages<sup>1</sup>.

There are four types of TOEFL issued by ETS (English Testing Service) as a language proficiency test namely Paper Based Test (PBT), Computer Based Test (CBT), Internet-Based Test (IBT), and Institutional Testing Program (ITP). Among those tests, a Paper-Based Test is one of the familiar TOEFL tests taken by the test takers. The working system in this type of test is to use sheets of question paper and answer sheets that must be filled with 2B pencil<sup>2</sup>. This test consists of three main sections; listening comprehension, structure and written expression, reading comprehension. Listening comprehension is used to evaluate the examinees' ability to understand spoken English. The examinees must listen to different types of recorded passages and answer multiple-choice questions about these passages. Then, Structure and written expression is used to evaluate the examinees' ability to recognize grammatically correct English sentences. In this section, they have to choose the correct way to complete sentences and to identify grammatical errors in sentences. Finally, reading comprehension is

<sup>1</sup> Zaidoon Abdul Razaq Abboud and Nagham Ja'far Hussein, 'The Difficulties Faced by Advanced Iraqi Foreign Learners in Passing ITP TOEFL Test', *Journal of Basrah Researches*, 36.4 (2011), 110–38.

<sup>2</sup> Syaefani Arif Romadhon and Yuvita Yuvita, 'Toefl Result of Politeknik Harapan Bersama Tegal Student's Majoring Mechanical Engineering', *English Focus Journal*, 1.2 (2018), 119–26 <<https://doi.org/10.6009/jjrt.KJ00003534360>>.

used to measure the examinees' ability to understand written English passages. It involves finding topic, answering main idea in the passage, recognizing the organization of ideas, answering stated and unstated details, finding out meanings from structural clues, finding word parts, finding meaning for difficult and simple words by using context, searching for simple and specific information<sup>3</sup>. For nursing students, TOEFL is helpful to support their academic skills in teaching and learning medical health. By having a higher TOEFL score indicate that the students might have good English skill. They can use that skill to communicate fluently with their colleagues from other countries, attend an international seminar, find a lot of English sources, and even fulfill a requirement to continue their studies abroad. It cannot be rejected that TOEFL is used by many (overseas) universities for their admission processes that must be fulfilled by prospective new foreign students<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, the scholarship programs also require that students must have the ability to speak English and be able to achieve the TOEFL score determined by each program organizer. Scholarship institutions also strengthen these requirements, including scholarship institutions of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, in this

<sup>3</sup> Iskandar Abdul Samad, Miftahul Jannah, and Siti Sarah Fitriani, 'Efl Students' Strategies Dealing With Common Difficulties in Toefl Reading Comprehension Section', *International Journal of Language Education*, 1.1 (2017) <<https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v1i1.2869>>; Widya Syafitri, 'Problems in Learning Reading (Case Study: Islamic Banking Students of IAIN Bukittinggi)', *Jurnal Educativ: Journal of Educational Studies*, 3.1 (2018), 39–43; Yati Aisyah Rani and Dinovia Fannil Kher, 'Developing An Effective Model In Teaching Reading: What Would Work Best In a Large English Class?', *Jurnal Educativ: Journal of Educational Studies*, 4.1 (2019), 1–14.

<sup>4</sup> Michael A. Pyle, *TOEFL CBT*, ed. by Joan Friedman (Berkeley, CA: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc, 2001); Pamela J. Sharpe, *HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE TOEFL*, 11th edn (New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 2004).

case, LPDP (Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education)

However, there are still many nursing students who fail to get good results in the paper-based TOEFL. From the informal interview result done with some students, it was found that most of the students agreed that one of their biggest hurdles was section two of the test, which examines the structure and written expression. Hence, students often feel stressed about this part. They also stated that problems with grammar were thought to prevent them from getting a high score in TOEFL.

Theoretically, Structure and Written Expression is the TOEFL test section which concentrates on written English. This section is used to evaluate the examinees' ability to recognize language that is appropriate for standard written English<sup>5</sup>. This section entails two parts: Part A, Structure, and Part B, Written Expressions. In Part A, there are 15 incomplete sentences; beneath each sentence are four words or phrases, marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Test takers are to choose the one word or phrase that most perfectly completes the sentence. Subsequently follows Part B, which is the written expressions, with 25 questions which each having four underlined words or phrases. The four underlined parts of the sentence are marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Test takers are to choose the one underlined word(s) or phrase that must be changed so that the sentence will be corrected<sup>6</sup>.

Generally, there are two main points that are tested in this section; structure and

<sup>5</sup> Xin Zhuang, 'Practice on Assessing Grammar and Vocabulary: The Case of the TOEFL', *US-China Education Review*, 5.7 (2008), 46–57; Abboud and Hussein.

<sup>6</sup> Rizki Ananda, 'Problems With Section Two ITP TOEFL Test', *Studies in English Language and Education*, 3.1 (2016), 37 <<https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v3i1.3387>>.

written expression. Each point has some specific aspects to be answered by the test takers. The further variables for each point can be described below:

### Structure

In this part of the test, the examiner will see beneath each sentence four words or phrases. He/She must choose one answer that best completes the sentence.

#### Example:

Geysers have often been compared to Volcanoes ----- they both emit hot liquids from below the Earth's Surface.

- (A) due to
- (B) because
- (C) in spite of
- (D) regardless of

The correct choice is (B)<sup>7</sup>

There are five aspects of structure to be tested in PB TOEFL; (1) WIAS (What is a sentence), It is based on the presume that a clause consists of only one subject and one verb, (2) Word choice (It tests students to choose the correct word or phrase appropriate to the sentence), (3) Word order (It requires students to choose the appropriate word order in a sentence), (4) Verb form (It concerns with the verb form aspects based on the English Tenses), (5) Parallelism (It means choosing the parallel structure in the sentence)<sup>8</sup>.

In addition, structure questions typically test one of the following items:

#### Sentence structure.

The sentence structure questions test more than a word or two; they test your ability to make a sentence complete. A sentence must

<sup>7</sup> Abboud and Hussein.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Hilke and Paul Wadden, 'The Toefl and Its Imitators: Analyzing the Toefl and Evaluating Toefl-Prep Texts', *REL C*, 28.1 (1997), 28–53.

2 have a subject, verb, and perhaps a compliment. Sentence structure questions also test your understanding of subordinate clauses, which must not be independent clauses.

**Word order.**

Word order questions are generally more detail-oriented than sentence structure questions. They test, for example, your understanding that an adjective should appear before the noun it modifies, not after it.

**Word form.**

These questions test your ability to recognize which form of a word should be used in a given situation. For example, a word form question might require you to determine that an adjective form of a word is being used when the noun form of the word is required. Word form questions also include recognizing which end should be on a word. For example, you may need to recognize if a plural ending on a noun should be singular, a singular designation on a verb should be plural, a verb ending should indicate a different tense, and so on.

**Word choice.**

The word choice type of question tests your understanding of idiomatic expressions, of which prepositions to use with certain words, problem words that are sometimes confused, and so on.

**e. Missing or extra words.**

The missing or extra word problems can sometimes overlap with some of the other categories, but I treat them separately because sometimes they are easier to recognize than some of the other question types.<sup>9</sup>

**2) Written Expressions:**

<sup>9</sup> Pyle.

1 In this section, the examinee will find that each sentence has four underlined words or phrases. He/she must identify one underlined choice that must be changed in order for the sentence to be correct. Such sentences and their underlined words or phrases exhibited as below:

**Example:**

Direction: In question 16-40, each sentence has four underlined words or phrases. The four underlined parts of the sentences are marked (A), (B), (C), (D). Identify the one underlined word or phrase that must be changed in order for the sentence to be correct.

Guppies are sometime called rainbow fish  
A B  
because of the males' bright colors.  
C D

-The correct choice is (A)<sup>10</sup>

Generally, there are some aspects<sup>9</sup> be tested in written expression. They are Word Form, Word Choice, Verbs, Parallel Structures, Pronouns, Singular/Plural Noun, Verbals (Infinitives, Gerunds, and Participles), Prepositions, Articles, Word Order, Comparatives and Superlatives, Conjunctions, and Other Types of Errors.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, there are ten aspects tested on this section. (a). Part of speech. It is<sup>10</sup> defined as the class of word which consists of noun, verb, adverb, adjective, pronoun, conjunction, preposition and interjection; (b). Plural. It means more than one in terms of nouns; (c). Parallelism. It appears much more in part B than in part A. (d). Pronoun Errors. Pronoun is used to substitute a noun either singular or plural. (e). Prepositional Errors. It is considered one of the most difficult aspect

<sup>10</sup> 53oud and Hussein.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Rogers, *The Complete Guide to The TOEFL Test* (Boston, Massachussets: Sherrise Roehr, 2011).

in written expression part. (f). Verb form. Like in part A, in part B, problems with verbs also concern with choosing correct verb forms in terms of its tenses. (g). Deleted Words. It is a missing word that is needed to complete a sentence. (h). Word order. This aspect appears more in part A than in part B. (i). Article. Even though it appears in small percentage, article is considered the most difficult aspect in English grammar tests. (j). Conjunction. It is a connector to join a part of speech with another part of speech, a clause with another clause, and a sentence with another sentence.<sup>12</sup>

Based on the explanations above, the researcher is inspired to conduct research to find out the problems faced by nursing students in the structure and written Expression of paper-based TOEFL. The objectives of this study are to find out what kind of difficulties were faced by nursing students in the structure and the written section of paper-based TOEFL test and to figure out factors that influenced the students' difficulties in the test.

### Methodology

The design of this research was descriptive research. It aimed to investigate and identify difficulties faced by nursing students in the structure and written expression section of the Paper-Based TOEFL test. This research used mixed-method research by including both quantitative and qualitative data in the research. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provided a better understanding in answering the research questions. The quantitative data gave details information to answer the first research question about the students' difficulties in the structure and written section of TOEFL test in a numerical way. In other way, the

<sup>12</sup> Robert Hilke and Wadden.

qualitative data was used to answer the second research question about the factors influencing the difficulty in answering to the structure and written expression section.

This research was conducted in the Nursing Department of Poltekes Solok, West Sumatera. It was conducted at the first-grade nursing students of Poltekes Solok. There were 80 students registered as the population of the research. They were divided into 2 classes; class A and class B. The population of this research can be seen as follow:

Table 1. The Population of the Research

No	Classes	The number of Students
1	Class A	40
2	Class B	40
	Total	80

To get the sample, the researcher employed a cluster random sampling. It is one of the sampling technique in which the sample selection of group as similar characteristics. The procedure of choosing the sample is the researcher chose one among two classes randomly by using two rolls of small paper, in which each contains one class. These rolls of small paper were put into a bottle. Then, the bottle was shaken and one of the papers was chosen as the sample. Finally, class A was chosen as a sample of this research.

The researcher employed test and interview as the instrument of the research. The test was used to find out the most difficult element in the structure and written expression section which was administered to 40 students. The test was adapted from TOEFL books such as <sup>13</sup>. The test format was the same as the general TOEFL test which is the multiple-choice form. For this research, the researcher only employed the

<sup>13</sup> Deborah Philips, 'Longman Complete Course For The TOEFL TEST With' (New York: Addison-Wesley Longman, Inc, 2001); Pyle; Rogers.

50 structure and written expression section. It consists of two parts: part A: structure (word completion) and part B: written expression (error analysis). The total questions of the test were 40 questions, part A had 15 questions and part B consisted of 25 questions. The students were given 25 minutes to complete the test.

In addition, the items for each section in the test were based on several indicators that had been ranged appropriately. Further explanation can be seen in the following table.

**Table 2. Indicators of Structure and Written Expression Section of TOEFL test**

No	Indicators	Sub Indicators	Questions Number
1.	Structure	Sentence structure	1,2,3
		Word order	4,5,6
		Word form	7,8,9
		Word choice	10,11,12
		Missing and extra words	13,14,15
2.	Written Expression	Word form	16,17
		Word choice	18,19
		Verbs	20,21
		Parallel structure	22,23
		Pronouns	24,25
		Singular plural nouns	26,27
		Verbal (infinitives, gerund, and participle)	28,29
		Prepositions	30,31
		Articles	32,33
		Word order	34,35
		Comparative and superlative	36,37
Conjunctions	38,39,40		

Furthermore, interview aimed to get detail information about the factors influence the students' difficulty in the structure and written expression section of TOEFL test. The researcher used a semi-structured interview in case there were maybe other optional questions and information during the interview session. The students were asked their deeper reasons behind their difficulties in answering

the TOEFL structured and written expression section.

The data of this research was collected through the structure and written expression section of TOEFL test and interview. In the test, the students were asked to choose the correct answer which consists of all indicators of structure and written expression section of TOEFL test. The test consisted of 40 items it was held on August 6, 2019. The students were given 25 minutes to answer the questions in the test. After that, the researcher collected the students' answer sheet and scoring the students' answers. Furthermore, the researcher also employed interviews with 5 students who got the lowest score in the test. It might be a representative from the sample in providing detail information about factors influence students' difficulty in structure and written expression section test.

To calculate the students' score in the structure and written expression section of TOEFL test, the researcher began by checking the answers given by the students. After that, she classified the correct and incorrect answers. Then, she counted the percentage of error in each topic by using a formula by <sup>14</sup>:

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

In which:

**P** = Percentage of error in each topic

**f** = The number of wrong answer in each Topic

**N** = Total Number of students

Then, interview was used to know factors influence students' difficulty in structure and written expression section test. The researcher analyzed the result from transcription and identified the factors influence students' difficulty in the test.

<sup>14</sup> Anas Sudijono, *Pengantar Statistik Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2008).

**Findings and Discussion**  
**The Students' Test Result**

The researcher used a test to collect the data about students' difficulty in structure and written expression section on the TOEFL test. After analyzing the test, the researcher found the students' errors which were divided into two categories; structure and written expression. The followings are the result of data analysis of students' difficulties in the TOEFL structure sub-test.

**Table 3. Error Statistics in Part A**

Item No	Correct Answer	Percent age (%)	Incorrect Answer	Percent age (%)
1	25	63%	15	37%
2	22	55%	18	45%
3	30	75%	10	25%
4	4	10%	36	90%
5	22	55%	18	45%
6	11	28%	29	72%
7	12	30%	28	70%
8	15	40%	25	62%
9	19	48%	21	52%
10	10	25%	30	75%
11	12	30%	28	70%
12	15	38%	25	62%
13	15	38%	25	62%
14	15	38%	25	62%
15	4	10%	36	90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>62%</b>

Table 3 shows the results of students test in the structure and written expression section part A. The highest percentage of incorrect answer was seen in the item number 4 and 15 with 90% , item number 10 with 75 % , item

number 7 with 72%, item number 7 and 11 with 70%, and item number 8, 12, 13, 14 with 62% . The medium percentage of the incorrect answer can be seen in item number 9 with 52%. Furthermore, the lowest percentage of the incorrect answer can be seen in item number 3 with 25%.

**Table 4. Error Statistics in Part B**

Item No	Correct Answer	Percent age (%)	Incorrect Answer	Percent age (%)
16	26	65%	14	34%
17	19	48%	21	52%
18	23	58%	17	42%
19	19	48%	21	52%
20	21	52%	19	48%
21	20	50%	20	50%
22	4	10%	36	90%
23	4	10%	36	90%
24	18	45%	22	55%
25	20	50%	20	50%
26	6	15%	34	85%
27	4	10%	36	90%
28	31	77%	9	23%
29	29	72 %	11	28%
30	19	48%	21	52%
31	19	48%	21	52%
32	6	15%	34	85%
33	6	15%	34	85%
34	25	63%	15	37%
35	25	63%	15	37%
36	6	15%	34	85%
37	6	18%	34	85%
38	30	75%	10	25%



39	32	80%	8	20%
40	24	60%	16	40%
Total	442	44%	558	56%

Table 4 shows the results of students' test in structure and written expression section of TOEFL part B. In this part, the highest percentage of students' incorrect answers was in item number 22, 23, 27 with 90%, follow up with item number 26, 32, 33, 36, 37 which was 85%. The medium percentage of students' incorrect answers was shown in item number 21, 25 with 50%. Moreover, the lowest percentage of students' incorrect answers can be seen in item number 39 with 20%.

Table 5. Total Percentage of Part A and Part B

Test Part	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage
Part A	231	38%	369	62%
Part B	442	44%	558	56%
Total	673	41%	954	59%

From table 5, it can be seen the results of 40 questions from all parts of the structure and written expression section. The total percentage of students' incorrect answers of part A was 62%. While part B acquires lower incorrect answers with a total of 56%. The average of students' incorrect answer from each total percentage of the two parts were 59%. On the other hand, the total percentage of students' correct answers was 18% lower than the incorrect score with 41%.

Table 6. Statistics of the Highest Frequency of Error

Item No.	Table	Types of Error	Frequency of Error	Percentage
4	3	Word order	36/40	90%
15	3	Missing and extra words	36/40	90%
22	4	Parallel structure	36/40	90%
23	4	Parallel structure	36/40	90%
27	4	Singular and plural nouns	36/40	90%
26	4	Singular and plural nouns	34/40	85%
32	4	Articles	34/40	85%
33	4	Articles	34/40	85%
36	4	Comparative and superlative	34/40	85%
37	4	Comparative and superlative	34/40	85%
10	3	Word choice	30/40	75%
6	3	Word order	29/40	72%
7	3	Word form	28/40	70%
11	3	Word choice	28/40	70%
8	3	Word form	25/40	62%
12	3	Word choice	25/40	62%
13	3	Missing and extra	25/40	62%

		words		
14	3	Missing and extra words	25/40	62%

Table 6 shows the results of the highest frequency of students' error in answering the structure and written expression section in the TOEFL test. From the table, it can be seen that there were 8 items considered as the most difficult questions over all the 40 questions. The explanation for each item can be explained in the following:

### Word Order

Word order is the most difficult items faced by the students in the TOEFL test. It got the highest percentage for incorrect answer with 90%. Word order questions can be found in the item 4 and 6.

#### Item number 4

The professor has not written a book \_\_\_\_\_ to the masses to generate interest from a publisher.

- (A) enough appealing
- (B) **appealing enough**
- (C) appeal enough
- (D) enough appeal

For this item, only 4 students chose (B) as the correct answer, and the rest of students' answers were varied, choosing (A), (C) or (D). It indicated that understanding the use of appropriate word order in a sentence still become the biggest problems by the students. They could not able to choose the correct answer while facing it in the test.

#### Item number 6

Never before \_\_\_\_\_ in an earnest attempt to resolve their differences.

- (A) **have the leaders of these two countries met**

- (B) the leaders of these two countries have met
- (C) have the leaders the two countries meet
- (D) met the leaders of the two countries

In addition, the other difficulty in word order also can be found from item number 6. In this item, 29 students chose incorrect answer varied from (A), (B), or (C). As a result, the total percentage of incorrect answer was 72%. It still indicated the students' understanding about word order was low.

### Parallel Structure

Nursing students also faced difficulty in figuring out parallel structure in the TOEFL test. The question of parallel structure was included in part B of the test. It had been put into item number 22 and 23. From the test result, it showed that most of the students failed to answer the questions correctly. The total percentage of incorrect answer was 90%. the detail questions can be seen in the following:

#### Item number 22

Ceramics can be harder, **light**, and more \_\_\_\_\_  
**A**  
 resistant to heat than metals.  
**B**      **C**      **D**

#### Item number 23

Chemical engineering is based **on** the \_\_\_\_\_  
**A**  
 principles of physics, **chemists**, and  
**B**      **C**  
 mathematics.  
**D**

For those items, only 4 students could choose correctly and 36 students failed to answer correctly. The total

percentage of incorrect answer was 90% which indicated as one of the highest difficult item for the students in the structure and written expression section of TOEFL test.

### Singular and Plural Noun

Singular and plural noun had been used as one of criteria to be tested in the TOEFL test. It had been put in the item number 26 and 27. The followings are the explanation for each items.

#### 34 Item number 26

Sharks can detect minute electrical discharges coming from its prey.

A B  
C D

In this question, the percentage of incorrect answers was 85%. Only 6 students chose the correct answer. Most of them chose (B) as the correct answer for this question, while a few of them chose (A) and (D).

#### 9 Item number 27

The fossil remains of much extinct mammals have been found in the tar pits at Rancho La Brea in Los Angeles.

A B C D

Similarly to the question number 26, this question also asking about singular and plural noun. 36 students failed to give the correct answer or 90% in the percentage. 2 students thought (C) was the correct answer, followed with 1 student who chose (B), and 1 student who chose (D).

### Missing and Extra words

The question for these criteria was provided in part A of the test. It was the the item number 13, 14, and 15. The result score for each item varied and the highest percentage of incorrect answer

was in the item number 15 with 90%. the explanation for each items can be seen in the following:

#### 2 Item number 13

This course is one of \_\_\_\_\_ few English courses offered by the college each month.

- (A) the
- (B) only
- (C) mostly
- (D) Almost

1 In this question, the total percentage of error is 62%.it was gotten from 25 students failed to choose correct answer. Only 15 students answered correctly by choosing (A).

#### 2 Item number 14

One of the two students is studying to be a doctor, but \_\_\_\_\_ wants to be a musician.

- (A) other
- (B) others
- (C) another
- (D) the other

Similarly, it also happened with the item number 14. 25 students also failed to choose the correct answer in the test. As a result, 62% students could not answer the question in the item yet.

#### 2 Item number 15

Whether there should be more control over handguns \_\_\_\_\_ long been a topic of debate in the United States.

- (A) Having
- (B) has
- (C) is
- (D) have

1 Furthermore, this question is considered as the difficult question because most students failed with 90% in

percentage. There were only 4 students passed and got the correct answer while 36 others failed. Most of them chose C "is". The researcher considered that the students were not really understood to the pattern of the sentence, thus being failed.

### Article

Articles became one criterion to be tested in part B. It was included in the item no 20 and 33. The analysis of students' test result can be seen in the following:

#### Item no 32

The most butterfly eggs are coated with a sticky substance that holds them to plants.

A B C D

In this question, the percentage of incorrect answers was 85%. Only 4 students chose the correct answer. Most of them chose (B) as the correct answer for this question, while a few of them chose (C) and none students chose (D).

#### Item no 33

Wilmington is an only large city in the state of Delaware.

A B C D

Similarly to the question number 32, only 4 (15%) students chose the correct answer. 36 (85%) students failed to choose the correct answer. It indicated that understanding articles was also the biggest problem for the students in the TOEFL test.

### Comparative and Superlative

Comparative and superlative was also one of the difficulties faced by the students in the TOEFL test. The students could not be to identify the use of correct comparative and superlative in a sentence.

It was proved from the students test result which failed to get high score in the test.

#### Item number 36

The most small vessels in the circulatory system are capillaries.

A B C D

For this item, most of the students fail to get a good score. 85% students failed to choose the correct answer. Only 15% students could choose the correct answer. It showed that the students have difficulty in identifying the use of comparative and superlative in a sentence.

#### Item number 37

The period is probably the most easiest punctuation mark to use.

A B C D

Similar to the item number 36, this item got the same percentage of students' error in comparative and superlative. Most of the students could not be able to identify the use of correct comparative and superlative in the test. 85 % students failed to choose the correct answer, meanwhile only 15 % students could chose correct answer.

### Word Choice

Understanding the word choice in a sentence was also one of difficulty faced by nursing students in the TOEFL test. It could be seen from the students' test result which failed to choose the correct answer in the test. Word choice had been put in the item no 10, 11 and 12, and the explanation of students' result can be seen below:

#### Item number 10

The children became ill after taking medicine that was \_\_\_\_\_ date.

(A) off the

- (B) outside
- (C) out of
- (D) over

1 This question was considered as the difficult question because more than half students failed with 75% in percentage. There were only 10 students passed and got the correct answer while 30 others failed.

**Item number 11**

\_\_\_\_\_, these students are among the best prepared who have been through this university.

- (A) At the whole
- (B) On the whole
- (C) In the general
- (D) In generally

Similarly to the question number 10, only 12 (30%) students chose the 24 correct answer. 28 (70%) students failed to choose the correct answer. It indicated 24 understanding word choice was also the biggest problem for the students in the TOEFL test.

**2 Item number 12**

Bill took not only a French class \_\_\_\_\_ a Japanese class.

- (A) but also
- (B) and
- (C) too
- (D) but too

Finally, in this last item about word choice, it also showed students' difficulty by showing students' low score in choosing the correct answer. Only 15 (38%) students could chose the correct answer, while 25 (62%) students failed to give the correct answer.

**Word Form**

5 The last difficult item faced by nursing students in the TOEFL test was word form. The questions for this item had been put in the question number 7 and 8. the followings are the analysis for each question:

**25 Item number 7**

A cupful of stagnant water may \_\_\_\_\_ millions of microorganisms.

- (A) contains
- (B) to contain
- (C) contain
- (D) containing

1 On the question number 7, the researcher found that the students also had the high percentage of error with 70%. Only 12 students chose the correct answer. 28 students failed to choose the correct answer. The researcher assumed that not many of them were aware of the use of correct word form in the question.

**Item number 8**

9 Sarah Knight \_\_\_\_\_ a fascinating account of a journey she made from Boston to New York in 1704.

- (A) written
- (B) write
- (C) wrote
- (D) writing

1 In this question, the percentage of incorrect answers was 62%. Only 15 students chose the correct answer. Most of them chose (B) as the correct answer for this question, while a few of them chose (A) and none students chose (D).

**The Students' Interview Result**

23 After analyzing the students' test results and find the students' difficulties in the structure and written expression section of TOEFL test, the researcher began to interview with some students to find detail information

about their difficulties in the TOEFL test. The researcher interviewed with 5 students. They were chosen based on the score that they got in the test which was the lowest score compared with the other students. The focus of the interview was significantly to find out what factors influence students' difficulty in structure and written expression section test. Some of the factors were as follows:

#### Unfamiliarity with the TOEFL Test

One of the main problems encountered by the students was that they were not familiar with the TOEFL test. Some students stated their reasons as follows:

- a. "I have never had a TOEFL test before. This is the first time, so I do not have the slightest knowledge about TOEFL test."
- b. "Although I used to take the TOEFL test in senior high school, my score was still low, only around 375, and I never studied strategy in answering the TOEFL questions."
- c. "I am not familiar with the TOEFL test, just take a test this time. So, I do not know about the item being tested in TOEFL."
- d. "TOEFL is difficult for me because I do not know clearly what the TOEFL test is. It is new to me. After taking the test, I just knew what was being tested. So, I was not ready before being tested."
- e. "I only took the TOEFL test once in senior high school and that was just the TOEFL prediction. And I still do not understand the material tested in the TOEFL test."

From the above comments, it can be stated that the difficulties of the students in answering the TOEFL test were due to their lack of familiarity with TOEFL test. Most of the students never took the TOEFL test before, as a result, they did not have knowledge and experience in answering the questions in the test. Furthermore, they also did not know the strategy and technique in answering the question in the test. Also, they

said that TOEFL test was something new for them. TOEFL test was a new thing in their academic life.

#### Lack of practice

Some students indicated that the difficulties came from their lack of practice before attending the test. Some of them responded:

- a. "I have never attended training on TOEFL tests, just learning tenses when I was in senior high school."
- b. "Before taking the test in senior high school, I had been given practice about TOEFL test, but not so significantly helped me in answering questions in the test. And until now I have no more practice in preparation for the TOEFL test."
- c. "I did not have preparation for the TOEFL test because I did not know what the TOEFL test was."
- d. "I have never got practice in TOEFL"
- e. "I got a little practice on TOEFL when I was in senior high school. It was given before we attended the test, but it only helped very little and did not influence much on our score. Until now I have not had more intensive TOEFL training."

From the students' respond above, it showed that they did not get enough time to get practice in the TOEFL test, moreover some of them never had practice before attending the test. Many of them did not familiar with the items/questions to be tested in the test. They only took the test with very little knowledge about the test. Consequently, less practice makes them fail to get a good score in the test.

#### Lack of grammatical competence

Grammatical competence became one of the important aspects which make students difficult in answering the questions in the TOEFL test. From the interview, it seems that the students had a lack of grammatical

competence and thus make them struggle in the test. Some of them said: (a). "I know a little bit about tenses and some aspect of grammar that I have learned in senior high school but when it is already dealing with long and more complicated sentences, it becomes difficult especially to determine the error words."; (b). "I feel the burden when it comes to determining the error in part B. It is like every word in the sentence was correct"; (c). "Tenses are difficult for me, and I do not know how to identify the correct use of it."; (d). "I do not understand English grammar. The item for each part was difficult and all about grammar."; (e). "It was difficult to determine the Subject and Verb and the other aspects of grammar in the TOEFL test. I did not know the name of each aspect in detail and did not know how to use it appropriately in a sentence. Besides, in part B, every word looks correct in the sentence."

From the students' answered above, it stated that the students' grammatical competence was poor. It makes them struggle in answering the test. They have no idea about subject-verb agreement, preposition, article, and other aspects of grammar which is tested in the test.

From the findings above, it was found that there were items considered as the most difficult items in the structure and written expression section of the TOEFL test. The items were word order, parallel structure, singular and plural noun, missing and extra words, article, comparative and superlative, word choice, word form. Furthermore, from the interview result, it revealed that the students got difficulty in the test because of some factors; unfamiliarity with the TOEFL test, lack of practice, and lack of grammatical competence.

For nursing students, taking the TOEFL test was a new experience. Only a few students ever took the test when they were in senior high school, and the rest of the students never took the TOEFL test. Unfamiliarity with the

test makes them hard to acquire the items or topics assessed in the structure and written expression section of TOEFL test. This is in line with<sup>15</sup> which states that many participants failed in the test because they never studied TOEFL before.

Also, the lack of practice becomes an important aspect influence students' difficulty in the TOEFL test. In this case, the nursing students were rare to get practice and training about TOEFL. They were not trained intensively to gain their knowledge of TOEFL. They only got a little explanation on TOEFL from their previous senior high school, and it did not improve their basic skills on TOEFL yet. Students need to have an intensive practice such as TOEFL classroom preparation in preparing them for the real test. As a result, they will have a greater familiarization with the test and a clear direction as to what and how to prepare for it<sup>16</sup>.

Finally, the students also had low grammatical competence that makes them hard to answer the questions in the test. This result also supported by<sup>17</sup> which say that the students' difficulty in section 2 of TOEFL test show that students do not have a good comprehension in grammar. The students do not have a well understanding of the sentences' structure and they do not have a well understanding of the form of the words.

<sup>15</sup> Murni Mahmud, 'The EFL Students' Problems in Answering the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): A Study in Indonesian Context', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4.12 (2014), 2581–87 <<https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.4.12.2581-2587>>.

<sup>16</sup> Yi-ching Pan, 'Test Impact: English Certification Exit Requirements in Taiwan', *TEFLIN Journal*, 48 (2009), 119–39 <<https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v20i2/119-139>>.

<sup>17</sup> Titin Hajri, Jufrizal, and Delvi Wahyuni, 'An Analysis Of Difficulties In Answering Structure And Written Expression Of Toefl Made By English Students Of Universitas Negeri Padang', *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 7.1 (2018), 93–105.

## Conclusion

From the findings of the research, it can be concluded that nursing students got difficulties in the structure and written expressions section on the TOEFL test. These difficulties were the main reasons behind the students' failure in passing this test successfully. The research findings revealed that there were 8 items considered as the most difficult elements in grammar use found in the TOEFL test. The items were word order, parallel structure, singular and plural noun, missing and extra words, article, comparative and superlative, word choice, and word form.

Besides, the findings also showed that there were some factors influence the students' difficulty in the structure and written expression section of the TOEFL test. The factors were unfamiliarity with the TOEFL Test, lack of practice, and lack of grammatical competence

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