

**"EXPLORING EFL STUDENTS' STRATEGIES IN ACHIEVING HIGH
SCORES ON THE TOEFL TEST"**

THESIS

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THESIS

Has been Approved and Submitted to the Thesis Munaqasyah Defense
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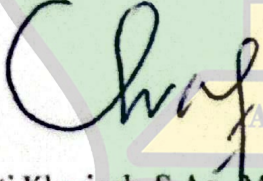
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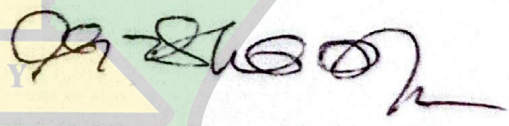
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adalah benar-benar karya saya, kecuali semua kutipan dan referensi yang disebutkan sumbernya, apabila terdapat kesalahan dan kekeliruan di dalamnya, maka akan sepenuhnya menjadi tanggung jawab saya.

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ABSTRACT

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Thesis's title : Exploring EFL Students' Strategies in Achieving High Scores on the TOEFL Test
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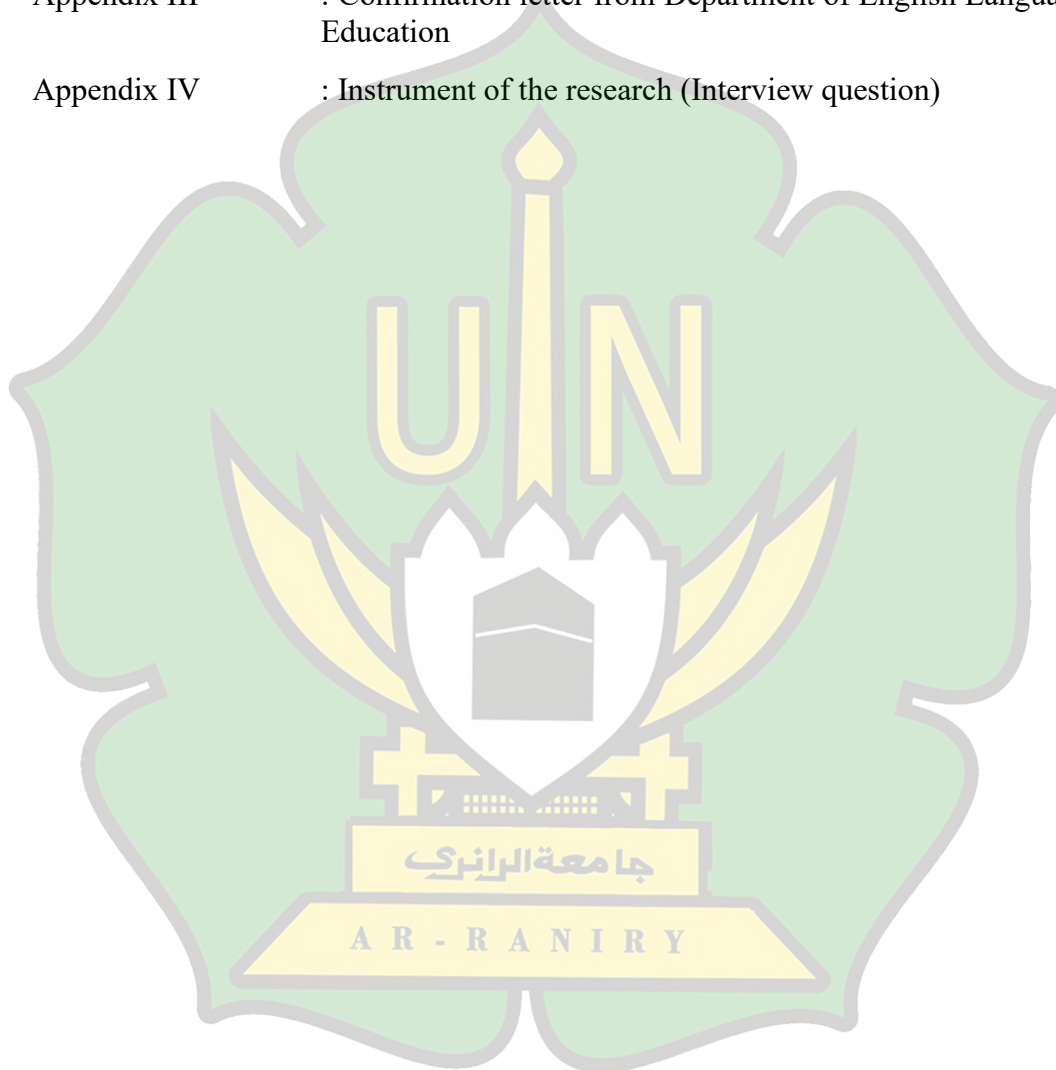
Achieving high scores on the TOEFL test is challenging, and many test-takers encounter difficulties. Therefore, the researcher does this research to know what the problem is and the strategy to solve it in the TOEFL test. This research was conducted at UIN Ar-Raniry involving 4 students majoring in English. They were selected based on a purposive sampling technique; only students who got a TOEFL score of 500 and above were selected. This research uses qualitative methods through semi-structured interviews to obtain students' strategies in answering the TOEFL test. The findings show that in answering the TOEFL test, they faced many difficulties, such as the length and speed of the speaker's talking, understanding conversations, audio that cannot be repeated, lack of mastery of grammar, and unfamiliar vocabulary. Therefore, they have some strategies to solve these problems, which are 5 strategies in listening, namely, focus on the last line, focus on the whole conversation, choose answers with synonyms, avoid similar sounds, and focus on multiple-choice options. In addition, there are 3 strategies in the structure and written expression part, such as learn grammar, focus on subject and predicate, and focus on subject and verb. Meanwhile, skimming and scanning the passage, reading the questions first, prioritizing easier questions, and reviewing the questions are strategies in answering the reading section.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a standardized language test commonly known as a product of the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which aims to measure non-English proficiency (Netta & Trisnawati, 2019). TOEFL has become popular worldwide. This is one of the ideal tests for testing proficiency in English. The TOEFL score has been used as the requirement for non-native applicants in American and English-speaking colleges and universities, so do to obtain a scholarship in those countries. For example, when students want to continue their studies in foreign countries, the university asks its applicants to submit their TOEFL grade as an indicator of their English language proficiency.

Studying in foreign countries demands a high English proficiency level, which can be seen from the TOEFL grade. As of 2025, admission committees at more than 13,000 colleges, universities, and institutions in over 160 countries worldwide, including the United States, Canada, Australia, and many others, require international applicants to submit TOEFL scores, along with academic transcripts and letters of recommendation, as part of their admission process. The TOEFL test is currently available at approximately 4,500 test centers across more than 190 countries and territories, and has been taken by over 35 million test-takers globally since its launch (ETS Global, 2025). The TOEFL test has been used internationally, including in Indonesia.

The TOEFL test was developed in the middle of the 20th century. This test is also used in Indonesia as an English proficiency test. In Indonesia, the TOEFL test was initially conducted by the English Language System (ELS), a specialized institution for the TOEFL test, known as Institutional TOEFL. Although many Indonesian students have a basic understanding of the English language, achieving a high level of proficiency needed to get a good TOEFL score can be difficult. Many universities in Indonesia have TOEFL score requirements for admission, especially for programs taught in English. Generally, the minimum score required ranges from 500 to 600 for TOEFL PBT (Paper-Based Test) or around 61 to 80 for TOEFL iBT (Internet-Based Test).

In addition, TOEFL is also a graduation requirement in universities. This means that this is important and must be taken when graduating from university. TOEFL is not the only graduation requirement; there are several other requirements, such as a comprehensive test, taking a computer class, etc. Students have to meet all the requirements before graduation. When students do not fulfill all the requirements, they will not be able to have a graduation.

TOEFL is one of the graduation requirements in tertiary institutions, including Ar-Raniry State Islamic University. Students must take the TOEFL test and achieve a certain minimum TOEFL score, depending on departmental requirements. It is appropriate for students majoring in English to fulfill this requirement, as students who have studied English specifically. This requirement is not only for students majoring in English but also for all students at the university. However, they achieve lower scores than English majors. However, they still have

obstacles to achieving a lower score to meet these requirements. Most of them have to take the test several times to achieve a minimum score of at least. As we know, other departments, such as physics, mathematics, or the chemistry education department, only take English lessons at the beginning of the semester for approximately two hours a week.

EFL students often face various challenges in learning English, including limited vocabulary, difficulty in understanding grammatical structures, and a lack of opportunities to practice speaking with native speakers. This can affect their performance on the TOEFL test. Various learning strategies can be used by EFL students to improve their English language skills. These can include self-study techniques, the use of online resources, study groups, and practicing speaking with friends or tutors. Understanding effective strategies can help students achieve higher scores.

To achieve a high score on the TOEFL, students need to analyze the strategies that EFL students use. EFL students must have more English language skills and the right study techniques. These strategies can be used to make it easier for students to learn. Several factors cause students to have difficulty passing the TOEFL test. According to Mahmud (2014) (as cited in Zalha et al., 2020), one of the factors that contributes to students' difficulties in taking the TOEFL is the presence of several abilities that are evaluated together in one test. One solution to this problem is to have useful strategies for each skill. Furthermore, in the study, Antoni (2014) explained that having a strategy is an important component in facing the test. They even said that having good strategies is more important than having

skills. As the TOEFL prediction test consists of three sections: listening, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension, the test-takers need to have good strategies for each of those sections.

Based on the experience of English learners, some of them have taken the TOEFL test several times to get a high score. Students need a high score in this test as a requirement for graduation from university, and also to continue their studies abroad. The researcher found several factors that cause students to have difficulty achieving high scores on the TOEFL test. Based on the researcher observation, achieving a high score in the TOEFL test is indeed a challenge for many students. The limited vocabulary owned by students and the lack of practice questions are one of the causes. Vocabulary serves as an important component in communication. In everyday life, vocabulary enhances personal expression and understanding (Syahabuddin et al., 2024). Students often feel anxious about the exams they will face due to poor preparation and a less supportive learning environment. So, to achieve high scores, students need to make careful preparations, practice regularly, and use strategies.

The problems expressed in the statement above show that students need the right strategy in taking the TOEFL test. Moreover, the strategies that students use are very important in improving TOEFL scores. This is the reason why the researcher is interested in analyzing the strategies used by EFL students in taking the TOEFL test so that they get a high score. It is hoped that the analysis process can be effective in improving students' TOEFL test results.

B. Research Questions

Based on the research background, the researcher would like to propose the research questions in this study. The following research questions are:

1. What are the strategies used by EFL students in answering the TOEFL test?
2. What are the difficulties students face in answering TOEFL test questions?

C. Research Objective

Based on the formulation of the above, the research objectives to be achieved are :

1. To analyze strategies used by EFL students in improving their English language skills, particularly in the context of the TOEFL test.
2. To learn how to overcome difficulties in answering TOEFL questions.

D. Significance of the Study

This study has three important implications for students, lecturers or teachers, and for future researchers. First, for students, this study is expected to provide insights into the effective strategies used by other students to achieve high scores on the TOEFL test. Additionally, this study aims to help students recognize and understand the challenges they face when answering questions, thereby motivating them to improve and enhance their skills independently.

Second, for lecturers or teachers, the results of this study can serve as a guide to identify the difficulties that students often experience in preparing for the TOEFL. This study also provides information on commonly used and proven

effective learning strategies, enabling lecturers to adjust their teaching methods to better assist students, particularly in English grammar courses. As a result, lecturers can provide appropriate solutions to help students overcome their difficulties.

Third, for other researchers, the results of this study can be used as a reference or guideline for conducting further research on the same topic. It is hoped that future research can develop more in-depth and useful information.

E. Terminology

1. EFL Students

EFL stands for "English as a Foreign Language". The term is widely used to help students (whose first language is not English) who are learning English while they are traveling abroad. For example, consider Indonesian people learning English in Indonesia. EFL is defined by Richards & Schmidt (2010) as "EFL refers to the teaching and learning of English in countries where English is not the primary language of communication."

2. Strategies

The word "*strategies*" is defined as subjects that are intentionally and purposively used for particular processes (Cohen, 2006). According to Longman's Dictionary, this can be defined as a specific plan to achieve success (Longman Dictionary of American English, 2000). Based on the above description, a strategy is a plan or method to achieve desired goals.

3. TOEFL

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is a standardized test that

is used to measure the ability of non-native speakers tool used to enroll in universities. The test is established and developed by the Educational Testing Service, or ETS. The TOEFL comes in two types: Paper-Based Test (PBT). Internet-based testing (IBT). The Paper-Based Test (PBT) is the most commonly used at the State Islamic Universitas Negeri Ar-Raniry. In this study, the researcher would like to research Paper Paper-Based Test (PBT) TOEFL.

