

**INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN READING
SECTION OF TOEFL TEST**

THESIS

Submitted By

JAUZA ALYA
NIM 220203103

Student of Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan
Department of English Language Education



**FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI AR-RANIRY
BANDA ACEH
2026 M/1446 H**

**INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN READING
SECTION OF TOEFL TEST**

THESIS

Has Been Approved and Submitted to the Thesis *Munaqasyah* Defense as One the
Requirements to Obtain a Bachelor's Degree in the field of english Language
Education

By

JAUZA ALYA

NIM. 220203101

Student of English Language Education Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training
Ar-Raniry State Islamic University Banda Aceh

Approved by:

Supervisor

جامعة الرانيري

Head of Department

A R - R A N I R Y



Rita Hermida, M.Pd

NIP. 198509082011012009



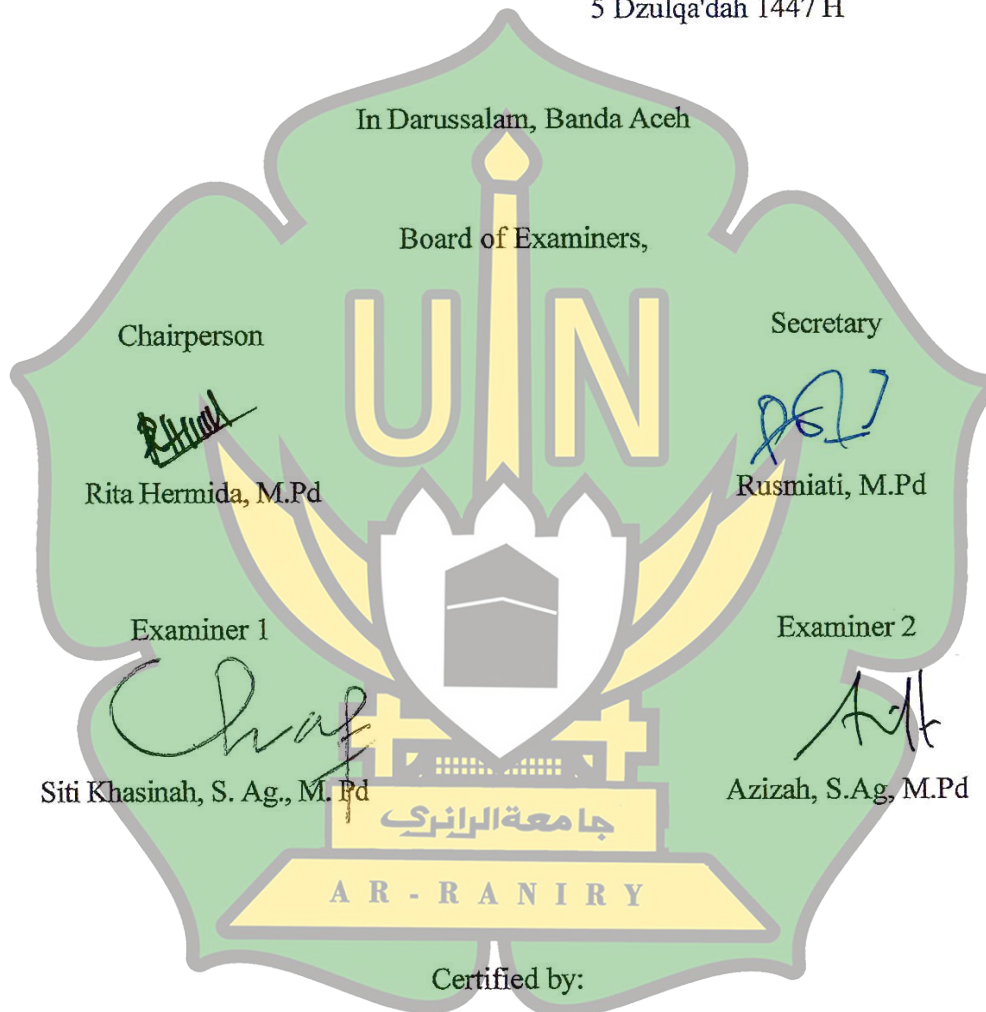
Syarifah dahliana, S.Ag., M.Ed., Ph.D.

NIP. 197504162000032001

It has been defended in *Sidang Munaqasyah* in front of the board of the Examination for the working paper and has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor Degree of Education in English Language Teaching

On:

Tuesday, April, 23rd 2026 M
5 Dzulqa'dah 1447 H



The Dean of *Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh*



Prof. Saiful Muluk, S.Ag., M.A., M.Ed., Ph.D.

NIP. 197301021997031003

SURAT PERNYATAAN KEASLIAAN
(Declaration of Originality)

Saya yang bertanda tangan dibawah ini

Nama : Jauza Alya
NIM : 220203101
Tempat/tanggal lahir : Meureudu/16 Maret 2004
Alamat : Bunot, Meureudu, Pidie Jaya

Menyatakan dengan sesungguhnya bahwa skripsi yang berjudul:

Investigating Students' Difficulties in Reading Section of TOEFL Test

adalah benar benar karya saya, kecuali semua kutipan dan referensi yang disebutkan sumbernya. Apabila kesalahan dan kekeliruan didalamnya, maka akan sepenuhnya menjadi tanggung jawab saya. Demikian surat pernyataan ini saya buat dengan sesungguhnya.

Banda Aceh, 08 April 2026

Saya yang membuat surat pernyataan



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, who has opened the doors and made my path easy throughout the process of completing this thesis. Without His guidance and blessings, this work would never have been possible. Peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad SAW, the last messenger who brought light to our lives.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Miss Rita Hermida, M.Pd, for her patience, kindness, and guidance, and to my academic advisor, Mr. Drs. Lukmanul Hakim, MA, for his advice and support. I also extend my sincere thanks to all the lecturers of the English Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry, as well as the administrative staff, for their knowledge, inspiration, and assistance throughout my academic journey.

My deepest appreciation goes to my beloved parents, whose endless prayers and support have been my greatest strength. I also thank my best friend and cousin, Ima, my friends, Aqis, Eja, Saja, Rihan, Uul, Sukma, and Hanum from the "Cepat Lulus" group chat, Atun and Dhea, and all my fellow students in the English Education Department for their encouragement, companionship, and shared struggles. May Allah bless us all.

Banda Aceh, April 08, 2026
The writer

Jauza Alya

ABSTRACT

Name : Jauza Alya
NIM : 220203101
Faculty : Education and Teacher Training
Thesis Tittle : Investigating Students' Difficulties in Reading Section of TOEFL Test
Supervisor : Rita Hermida, M.Pd
Keywords : TOEFL Reading, Students' Difficulties, Reading Strategies

This study investigates two main aspects: the types of difficulties students face in the TOEFL reading section and the strategies they use to overcome those difficulties. Using a qualitative descriptive design, eight undergraduate students from UIN Ar-Raniry were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal three main categories of difficulties: linguistic (limited vocabulary and complex sentences), cognitive (identifying main ideas and answering inference questions), and test-related (time pressure and anxiety). To address these challenges, students employed cognitive strategies (guessing from context, sentence analysis, skimming, scanning), metacognitive strategies (planning and monitoring), and test-taking strategies (answer elimination and time management). The study shows that students' difficulties and strategies are closely connected, as each difficulty tends to trigger specific strategic responses, though the effectiveness of these strategies depends on how consistently they are applied. This research contributes to understanding academic reading in test-based contexts and offers practical implications for students, lecturers, and future researchers.

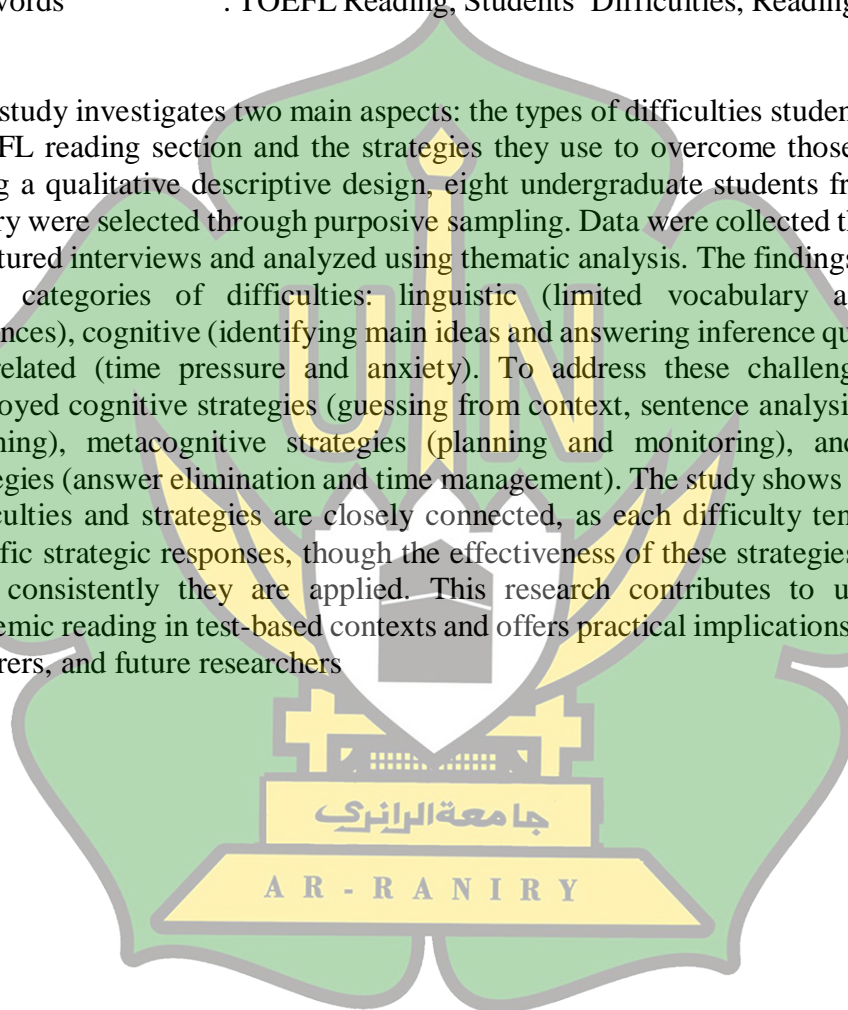


TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	vi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Background of the Study.....	1
B. Research Questions.....	5
C. Aims of the Study	5
D. Significance of the Study	5
E. Research Terminology	6
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
A. The Concept of Reading	8
B. Reading in the TOEFL Test	10
C. Types of Students' Difficulties in the TOEFL Reading Section	11
D. Types of Students' Strategies in the TOEFL Reading Section	15
E. Previous Study.....	19
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY.....	23
A. Research Design.....	23
B. Research Participants.....	24
C. Data Collection.....	25
D. Data Analysis.....	26
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	28
A. Research Findings	28
B. Discussion	62
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION	67
A. Conclusion	67
B. Suggestion	68
REFERENCES.....	70
AUTOBIOGRAPHY	74

LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A Appointment Letter of Supervisor
- Appendix B Recommendation Letter from the *Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan* to conduct field research
- Appendix C Confirmation Letter of Conducting Research at the English Language Department
- Appendix D Interview Protocol
- Appendix E Documentation of Research



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Reading is a crucial academic skill in higher education, especially for EFL students who must understand various English texts such as textbooks, research articles, and other academic materials (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). For students in English Language Education programs, this demand becomes even greater because most academic knowledge is presented in English and requires not only word recognition but also the ability to evaluate arguments and construct meaning from the text (Grabe, 2009). Academic reading in English demands high linguistic competence as well as cognitive engagement, such as making inferences, identifying main ideas, and following the logical organization of a text (Alderson, 2000).

One important context where academic reading ability is assessed is the TOEFL test, particularly its reading section. This section is designed to measure students' ability to understand academic texts adapted from university-level materials, with question types that test understanding of main ideas, details, vocabulary in context, and implied meanings (Educational Testing Service, 2019). In Indonesia, TOEFL prediction tests are widely used for academic purposes such as graduation requirements and scholarship applications, making the TOEFL reading section an important academic benchmark for university students.

Despite their exposure to English learning, many students still encounter

significant difficulties in the TOEFL reading section. Linguistically, students struggle with unfamiliar academic vocabulary and complex sentence structures, which slow down their reading and hinder comprehension (Alderson, 2000; Nation, 2013). Cognitively, students find it difficult to identify the main idea of a passage, especially when the text contains multiple arguments or supporting details, as well as to answer inference questions that require reading between the lines (Grabe, 2009). Affectively, many students experience anxiety, lack of confidence, and low motivation when facing long and complex academic texts under time pressure (Hezam et al., 2021).

Several previous studies have investigated students' performance in the TOEFL reading section. Rachmawati (2018) found that students experienced significant difficulties in answering inference questions, identifying main ideas, and understanding vocabulary in context, with limited academic vocabulary and unfamiliarity with TOEFL question types as major factors. However, this research mainly focused on identifying the types of difficulties based on test results and did not explore how students attempted to overcome those problems. On the other hand, Pratiwi (2020) examined the strategies used by students in answering TOEFL reading questions, such as skimming, scanning, guessing meaning from context, and eliminating incorrect answer choices. Nevertheless, the study emphasized strategic use without deeply analyzing the specific reading difficulties faced by students, so the relationship between difficulties and strategies was not clearly explained.

Based on these studies, previous research tends to examine difficulties and

strategies separately. In fact, both aspects are closely related because strategies are often used as responses to particular difficulties. In real test-taking situations, students do not experience difficulties and strategies as isolated events; rather, they constantly move between recognizing a problem and applying a solution. For example, a student who struggles with unfamiliar vocabulary may consciously decide to guess meaning from context, while a student who feels time pressure may switch to skimming or skipping difficult questions (Cohen, 2014). Understanding this connection is essential for designing more effective TOEFL preparation programs.

Unlike previous studies, this research analyzes both students' difficulties and the strategies they use within the same framework. By integrating these two aspects, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' performance in the TOEFL reading section. This research also seeks to give voice to students' personal experiences, allowing them to explain not only what makes the TOEFL reading section difficult for them, but also how they try to solve those challenges in real time. The findings of this study are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of academic reading instruction and TOEFL preparation in the future.

B. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of difficulties do students encounter in reading section of TOEFL tests?

2. How do students solve their difficulties in reading section of TOEFL tests?

C. Aims of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Identify the types of difficulties that students encounter in reading section of TOEFL tests.
2. Explore the strategies students use to solve their difficulties in reading section of TOEFL test.

D. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of English language education, particularly in relation to academic reading and TOEFL reading assessment. From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the understanding of EFL students' difficulties in reading academic English by exploring not only linguistic problems, but also cognitive and affective challenges experienced during the reading section of the TOEFL test. Through a qualitative approach, this study offers a deeper insight into how these difficulties are experienced by students in real test situations, which may complement findings from previous quantitative studies.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study are expected to be useful for students, lecturers, and future researchers. For students, this research may help them become more aware of the common difficulties they face when dealing with the TOEFL reading section, such as understanding academic vocabulary, making inferences, managing time, and coping with test-related anxiety. This

awareness can encourage students to adopt more effective reading strategies and prepare themselves better for academic English tests.

For lecturers and instructors, especially those teaching academic reading or TOEFL preparation courses, the results of this study can provide valuable insights into students' actual needs and challenges. These insights may support the development of more appropriate teaching strategies, such as explicit strategy instruction, targeted vocabulary practice, and reading activities that reflect real test conditions.

In addition, this study is expected to serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in investigating academic reading difficulties, reading strategies, or language assessment in EFL contexts. By focusing on students' experiences and perspectives, this research may help broaden discussions on academic reading within test-based environments.

E. Research Terminology

1. Students' Difficulties

This term refers to the obstacles or challenges that students face when dealing with academic English reading tests. The difficulties may appear in different forms, including linguistic barriers such as limited vocabulary, complex grammar, or unfamiliar text structures; cognitive barriers such as problems in inference-making, comprehension, or time management; and affective barriers such as anxiety, low motivation, or lack of confidence. In this study, students' difficulties are therefore understood as multidimensional rather than limited to language problems alone.

2. Reading in the TOEFL Test

In this research, reading is conceptualized as an interactive and cognitive process in which readers decode written symbols, interpret meanings, and integrate textual information with their prior knowledge to construct understanding. Reading is not merely the recognition of words but an active meaning-making activity that requires continuous engagement between the reader and the text. This process becomes more complex in academic contexts, where texts are typically dense, formal, and conceptually demanding.

Within this study, reading is examined specifically in the context of the reading section of the TOEFL test. The reading session of the TOEFL test requires students to comprehend written academic texts through a series of reading passages followed by comprehension questions. This session is conducted under strict time constraints, creating a test-based reading situation in which linguistic competence, cognitive processing, and affective factors simultaneously influence students' reading performance. Therefore, reading in the TOEFL test context reflects not only students' ability to understand academic texts but also their capacity to manage time pressure and cognitive demands during a standardized assessment.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Concept of Reading

1. Definition of Reading

Reading is commonly defined as a complex, purposeful, and interactive activity rather than a mechanical act of recognizing printed symbols. It requires readers to decode linguistic signs, connect ideas across sentences and paragraphs, and derive meaning from the overall text. According to Sulaiman, Salehuddin, and Khairudin (2020), reading is a multi-layered cognitive process where individuals not only focus on surface elements such as words or phrases, but also employ strategies like re-reading, scanning, and evaluating coherence in order to achieve comprehension. This suggests that reading takes place simultaneously at different levels lexical, syntactic, semantic, and conceptual making it far more than a basic skill.

Ciocoi-Pop (2020) adds that reading comprehension should be viewed as an active construction of meaning rather than passive intake. In this sense, the reader plays a central role by engaging with the text, drawing connections between linguistic forms and conceptual understanding, and resolving ambiguities that arise during the process. Reading, therefore, is an interpretative act where comprehension develops through continuous interaction between the text and the reader's mental resources.

Reading can be defined as an interactive and dynamic cognitive activity

that combines decoding, interpretation, and evaluation. It requires readers to activate their linguistic knowledge, apply cognitive strategies, and build meaningful connections within the text. This understanding underlines the importance of viewing reading not simply as recognition of words, but as an intentional effort to construct meaning and knowledge through written language

2. Reading in EFL Context

Reading in EFL contexts is more demanding compared to first language reading, as learners must simultaneously deal with linguistic decoding and comprehension in a non-native language. Recent studies emphasize that reading in a foreign or second language is shaped not only by linguistic proficiency but also by the strategies learners employ. Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) point out that proficient L2 readers make use of metacognitive awareness, such as monitoring their comprehension, adjusting reading speed, and using contextual clues to infer meaning. In contrast, less skilled readers tend to struggle because they cannot efficiently integrate these strategies with their linguistic knowledge.

Moreover, research by Yamashita (2013) shows that L2 reading ability is influenced by both language-related factors (e.g., grammar and vocabulary knowledge) and non-language factors (e.g., motivation, cultural familiarity with the text). This highlights that reading in EFL contexts is not purely linguistic but also socio-cognitive, as learners must navigate unfamiliar cultural references and discourse styles.

In short, reading in EFL settings can be defined as a dual challenge that

combines decoding in a less familiar language with the use of higher-level comprehension strategies. Successful reading requires learners to activate linguistic competence, metacognitive strategies, and cultural awareness in order to make sense of texts written in a foreign language.

B. Reading in the TOEFL Test

According to Educational Testing Service (2019), the reading section of the TOEFL test is designed to measure test takers' ability to understand written English texts typically found in academic contexts. The reading passages are adapted from university-level materials and are intended to reflect the type of reading tasks students encounter in higher education. In the TOEFL reading section, students are required to comprehend information, recognize relationships among ideas, and interpret meaning based on the content presented in the text.

The TOEFL reading section assesses several key reading skills, including identifying main ideas, understanding factual information, recognizing rhetorical functions, making inferences, and interpreting vocabulary in context (Educational Testing Service, 2019). These skills are evaluated through multiple-choice questions that require careful reading and accurate comprehension. Therefore, success in the TOEFL reading session depends not only on students' knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar, but also on their ability to apply reading strategies effectively.

In addition, the TOEFL reading section is conducted under strict time limitations, which places additional cognitive demands on test takers. Students are

expected to read efficiently while maintaining comprehension accuracy within a limited amount of time. Educational Testing Service (2019) emphasizes that the reading section evaluates how well students can process written information in a test-based environment rather than in a relaxed classroom setting. As a result, reading in the TOEFL test can be viewed as a standardized assessment activity that integrates linguistic competence, cognitive processing, and strategic reading behavior.

C. Types of Students' Difficulties in the TOEFL Reading Section

Reading section of TOEFL test is often regarded as one of the most demanding tasks for EFL students because it requires both language proficiency and critical thinking. One of the most common difficulties is the limited vocabulary knowledge that prevents learners from understanding key terms, especially academic or technical words, when students encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, it not only slows down their reading speed but also interrupts their comprehension, as they struggle to connect meanings across sentences.

Another source of difficulty is the structural and cognitive complexity of academic texts. Academic writing often contains long sentences, complex grammar, and dense information, which may overwhelm students who are still developing their reading skills. Al-Jarrah and Ismail (2018) explain that many learners also struggle to identify the type and structure of texts, which makes it harder for them to grasp main ideas or recognize how arguments are organized. This indicates that reading difficulties are not limited to words and grammar but also extend to discourse-level understanding.

In addition to linguistic and structural challenges, students often face motivational and affective barriers. Anxiety, low confidence, and lack of interest in reading can reduce their willingness to engage with complex texts. As a result, they may rely on surface strategies such as memorizing words without trying to build deeper comprehension (Hezam et al., 2021). These affective factors further contribute to their struggles with academic reading.

Overall, students' difficulties are multidimensional, ranging from vocabulary and grammar limitations to challenges in comprehension, discourse awareness, and motivation. Addressing these difficulties requires not only language support but also explicit training in reading strategies that encourage learners to engage critically and meaningfully with academic texts.

1. Linguistic Difficulties

One of the main difficulties students face in the TOEFL Reading section is related to language aspects, particularly vocabulary and grammatical structure. TOEFL reading passages are typically academic in nature and contain a high density of formal vocabulary, technical terms, and abstract concepts. According to Grabe and Stoller (2011), vocabulary knowledge plays a central role in second language reading because readers need sufficient word recognition ability to build overall text meaning. When students encounter too many unfamiliar words, their comprehension becomes fragmented, and they may struggle to understand the main idea of the passage.

In addition to vocabulary, complex sentence structures also contribute to reading difficulty. TOEFL texts often include long sentences with multiple clauses,

passive constructions, and embedded information. Such structures require readers to process meaning carefully and accurately. Koda (2005) explains that second language readers must coordinate lexical processing and syntactic parsing at the same time. If students are not comfortable with complex grammar, they may misunderstand relationships between ideas in a sentence or paragraph.

Furthermore, Nation (2013) emphasizes that a high percentage of known vocabulary is necessary for adequate comprehension of academic texts. When students lack sufficient lexical coverage, they tend to read slowly, guess excessively, or lose focus. In the context of TOEFL, these linguistic limitations often affect performance on vocabulary questions, reference questions, and detailed information questions. Therefore, limited vocabulary knowledge and difficulty in understanding complex grammatical structures remain key sources of linguistic challenges in the TOEFL Reading section.

2. Cognitive Difficulties

Beyond language problems, TOEFL Reading also demands strong cognitive skills. Reading comprehension involves not only understanding words but also identifying main ideas, recognizing text organization, and making logical inferences. According to Grabe (2009), skilled reading requires readers to integrate information across sentences and paragraphs

while maintaining coherence in working memory. This process becomes more demanding when the topic is unfamiliar or conceptually dense, as is often the case in TOEFL passages.

Many TOEFL questions require higher-level thinking, especially inference questions. In these items, the answer is not directly stated in the text. Students must combine pieces of information and draw conclusions based on implicit meaning. Perfetti and Stafura (2014) argue that successful comprehension depends on the quality of lexical representations and the ability to integrate information efficiently. If students struggle with word recognition or sentence processing, their ability to make accurate inferences is reduced.

Another important factor is cognitive load. Reading long academic texts under time constraints requires students to manage attention, memory, and reasoning simultaneously. When the mental demand exceeds the reader's capacity, comprehension may decline. This explains why some students who understand the text during practice sessions still experience difficulty during the actual TOEFL test.

3. Test-Related Difficulties

In addition to linguistic and cognitive factors, the characteristics of the TOEFL test itself create specific challenges. TOEFL is a standardized, time-limited test, and students must complete several reading passages within a fixed duration. According to Alderson (2000), reading in a testing situation is different from reading for learning because readers must balance comprehension with time

management and answer selection strategies.

Time pressure is one of the most frequently reported difficulties. Students often feel they do not have enough time to read carefully, which forces them to rely on skimming or scanning strategies. While these strategies can be helpful, they may lead to a superficial understanding if not used effectively. Poor time management can result in unanswered questions or rushed decisions.

Moreover, TOEFL uses a multiple-choice format in which distractors are carefully designed to appear plausible. Cohen (2014) explains that language test performance is influenced not only by language ability but also by test-taking strategies. Students who are unfamiliar with the structure of TOEFL questions may choose answers that seem correct but do not fully match the question's requirement. Because TOEFL is often considered a high-stakes test for academic or graduation purposes, psychological factors such as anxiety can also affect performance. Test anxiety may reduce concentration and interfere with information processing. As a result, even students with adequate reading ability may underperform in the actual testing situation.

D. Types of Students' Strategies in the TOEFL Reading Section

Reading strategies in the context of the TOEFL Reading section can be defined as conscious, purposeful, and goal-directed actions that test takers employ to understand academic texts and answer questions accurately within a limited time. In a standardized test environment such as TOEFL, reading is not merely about comprehending the content of a passage, it also involves managing time, analyzing

question types, and selecting the most appropriate answer among several options. Therefore, strategic competence becomes an essential component of successful performance (Cohen, 2014).. Grabe (2009) explains that reading involves lower-level processes such as word recognition and syntactic parsing, as well as higher-level processes such as integrating ideas across sentences and activating background knowledge. In academic reading contexts like TOEFL, texts are often dense and conceptually demanding. Without effective strategies, learners may experience cognitive overload, which can negatively affect comprehension and test performance (Grabe, 2009).

In the field of language learning strategies, Oxford (2011) categorizes strategies into cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies are directly related to processing the text, while metacognitive strategies involve awareness and regulation of one's own reading process. In addition, test-taking strategies also play a crucial role in standardized test performance. Cohen (2014) emphasizes that language test performance is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by strategic competence. The following sections discuss three interconnected dimensions: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and test-taking strategies. The integration of these strategies enables learners to manage academic texts more effectively under time constraints (Grabe, 2009; Cohen, 2014).

1. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies are direct mental actions that readers use to process, understand, and manipulate textual information. In the context of the TOEFL Reading section, cognitive strategies help students decode linguistic input and

construct meaning from academic texts. According to Oxford (2011), cognitive strategies involve analyzing and reasoning, as well as creating structure for input and output. One of the most frequently used cognitive strategies is guessing meaning from context, where students rely on surrounding words or sentence structure to infer the meaning of unknown vocabulary. Nation (2013) emphasizes that using contextual clues is an essential skill for second language readers, especially during timed tests.

Another important cognitive strategy is sentence analysis, particularly when dealing with complex grammatical structures. Grabe (2009) explains that skilled readers break down complex sentences into smaller units and identify main clauses to reduce cognitive load. Skimming and scanning are also classified as cognitive strategies. Skimming refers to reading quickly to identify the main idea, while scanning involves locating specific information such as keywords or numbers (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). In the TOEFL Reading section, these strategies help students read more efficiently under time constraints.

2. Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own reading process. Unlike cognitive strategies which operate directly on the text, metacognitive strategies focus on regulating how reading is performed. Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) argue that metacognitive awareness distinguishes skilled from less skilled readers, as effective readers are conscious of their comprehension and can take corrective actions when problems arise. Planning is

the first stage, which includes setting goals, determining purpose for reading, and deciding how much time to allocate to each passage (Oxford, 2011).

Monitoring occurs during reading and involves checking comprehension continuously. When comprehension breaks down, skilled readers take corrective actions such as rereading difficult sentences or adjusting reading speed (Grabe, 2009). Evaluating is the final stage, which takes place after reading to assess whether strategies were effective. Cohen (2014) adds that metacognitive strategies help learners become more autonomous and strategic in their approach to language tests. In the TOEFL context, these strategies are particularly important for maintaining focus and managing time effectively.

3. Test Taking Strategies

Test-taking strategies are specific actions that students employ to navigate the unique demands of standardized testing environments. Unlike general reading strategies, test-taking strategies address particular characteristics of tests such as time limits, multiple-choice formats, and the presence of distractors. Cohen (2014) emphasizes that performance on language tests is influenced not only by language ability but also by strategic competence. Answer elimination is one of the most widely used test-taking strategies, where students remove clearly incorrect options to increase their chances of selecting the correct answer (Grabe, 2009).

Time management is another critical strategy. Alderson (2000) explains that reading in a testing situation differs from reading for learning because readers must balance comprehension with time efficiency. Effective time management includes

allocating specific time to each passage and skipping difficult questions to return to them later. Additionally, recognizing question types enhances efficiency, as each question type (main idea, inference, vocabulary, etc.) requires different approaches (Educational Testing Service, 2019). Students who are familiar with these question types can read more purposefully and answer more accurately.

E. Previous Study

Several previous studies have examined students' performance in the TOEFL Reading section, particularly focusing on their difficulties and the strategies they use. These studies provide important foundations for understanding the challenges faced by EFL learners in academic reading contexts.

The first study was conducted by Rachmawati (2018) entitled "Students' Difficulties in Answering TOEFL Reading Comprehension Questions." This research aimed to identify the types of difficulties experienced by university students when answering TOEFL Reading questions. Using a descriptive quantitative design, the researcher analyzed students' TOEFL reading test results to determine which question types were the most problematic. The findings revealed that students encountered significant difficulties in answering inference questions, identifying main ideas, and understanding vocabulary in context. Many students struggled with academic vocabulary and complex sentence structures, which affected their overall comprehension. The study also found that limited familiarity with TOEFL question patterns contributed to students' low performance. However, this research mainly focused on identifying areas of

difficulty without exploring how students attempted to overcome those challenges through specific strategies.

The second study was conducted by Pratiwi (2020) entitled “An Analysis of Students’ Strategies in Answering TOEFL Reading Comprehension Questions.” This study focused on identifying the strategies used by students during the TOEFL Reading section. The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative approach and collected data through questionnaires and interviews. The results showed that students used several strategies, such as skimming to understand general ideas, scanning to locate specific information, guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words through context, and eliminating incorrect answer choices. Nevertheless, the study also revealed that not all students applied these strategies effectively. Some participants relied heavily on word-by-word reading, which slowed them down and reduced their comprehension under time constraints. Unlike the first study, this research emphasized students’ strategic behavior rather than identifying specific reading difficulties in detail.

In terms of similarities, both studies investigated university students in the context of the TOEFL Reading section and aimed to better understand students’ performance in academic reading tests. Both studies also highlighted the importance of vocabulary mastery and familiarity with question types as key factors influencing TOEFL Reading success.

However, there are notable differences between the two studies. The first study concentrated on identifying the types of reading difficulties based on test performance, while the second focused on exploring the strategies students used

during the test. Methodologically, the first study applied a quantitative approach, whereas the second employed a qualitative design. More importantly, each study examined only one aspect either difficulties or strategies without integrating both components into a single analytical framework.

Based on this review, a research gap can be identified. Previous studies have not sufficiently explored the relationship between students' difficulties and the strategies they use in the TOEFL Reading section. In practice, strategies are often developed as responses to specific difficulties. For example, students who struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary may use context clues to guess meaning, while those who experience time pressure may rely on skimming and scanning techniques. Without examining both aspects simultaneously, it is difficult to fully understand how students manage the challenges of TOEFL Reading.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by analyzing both students' difficulties and the strategies they employ within the same research framework. By examining these two aspects together, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' reading performance and to offer practical implications for improving TOEFL Reading preparation.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter described a study method in depth, including the research design, research participants, method of data collection, and method of data analysis. In summary, each section provides some clarification of the definition.

A. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach. The choice of a qualitative design is based on the aim of this research, which is to explore in depth the difficulties experienced by students when reading academic English tests and to understand the strategies they employ to address such difficulties. Unlike quantitative research that focuses on numerical data and statistical relationships, qualitative research seeks to capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives in a more detailed and contextualized manner.

The descriptive approach is considered appropriate because the study does not attempt to manipulate variables or measure causal effects. Instead, it is intended to provide a rich and comprehensive account of the nature of students' challenges in reading session of TOEFL test. Through this design, the researcher focuses on describing the types of difficulties encountered by students, and the strategies students use in responding to them.

This design also allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon in its

natural setting. By using interviews, the data are collected directly from participants to ensure authenticity and reliability. In line with Creswell (2014), qualitative descriptive research emphasizes giving voice to participants, enabling their lived experiences to be represented in the findings.

B. Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of eight undergraduate students from the English Language Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. They were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the participants had relevant and meaningful experiences related to the research focus.

The selection process involved several specific criteria. First, the participants had to be students in the sixth and eighth semesters, as they were assumed to have sufficient exposure to academic reading activities. Second, they were required to have prior experience in taking the TOEFL test, particularly the reading section.

However, to obtain more in-depth and reliable data, additional criteria were applied. The participants were expected to have sufficient familiarity with the TOEFL reading section, such as having taken the test more than once or having a clear memory of their experience. More importantly, they had to be able to reflect on their experiences by explaining the difficulties they encountered and the strategies they used in a detailed manner.

Furthermore, the participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in in-depth interviews and their ability to provide relevant and meaningful responses. Not all students who met the initial criteria were able or willing to fulfill these requirements. As a result, the number of participants who met all the criteria was limited to eight students.

This number is considered sufficient in qualitative research, as the study emphasizes depth rather than quantity. In addition, data saturation was achieved, as no new significant themes emerged from the data collected.

C. Data Collection

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the sole primary instrument for data collection. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to obtain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of students' difficulties in the reading section of the TOEFL test and the strategies they used to overcome them. Through this method, the researcher was able to explore participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and challenges in detail, while still maintaining a flexible and open dialogue during the interview process (Creswell, 2014).

1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' experiences,

perceptions, and challenges in reading section of TOEFL tests. This method was chosen because it offers both flexibility and structure, allowing the researcher to focus on predetermined topics while giving participants the freedom to elaborate on their thoughts (Creswell, 2014). An interview guide was designed prior to data collection and consisted of open-ended questions focusing on four major themes:

(1) the types of difficulties encountered in reading session of TOEFL tests, (2) the linguistic and cognitive factors contributing to these difficulties, (3) affective factors such as motivation and anxiety, and (4) the coping strategies students used to manage these challenges. The interviews were conducted primarily in English, but participants were allowed to switch to Bahasa Indonesia when necessary to ensure clarity and comfort.

D. Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis as proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, which consists of six systematic steps for analyzing qualitative data. This method was selected because it allows the researcher to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns (themes) within the data related to students' difficulties and strategies in the TOEFL reading test. Although the process is presented in sequential steps, in practice, the analysis was conducted in a flexible and recursive manner, where some steps overlapped during the process.

First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading and

re-reading the interview transcripts several times. This step aimed to gain a deep understanding of the participants' responses and to become fully immersed in the data. Important points and initial ideas were noted during this stage.

Second, the researcher generated initial codes by identifying meaningful units from the data. The researcher highlighted significant statements and labeled them with codes related to students' difficulties and strategies in reading comprehension. This coding process helped to organize the data into smaller and more manageable parts.

Third, the researcher searched for themes by grouping similar codes into broader categories. Codes that shared similar meanings were combined to form potential themes. In this study, the emerging themes were mainly categorized into types of difficulties and types of strategies used by the students.

Fourth, the researcher reviewed and refined the themes to ensure their accuracy and relevance. At this stage, the researcher checked whether the themes were consistent with the coded data and the entire dataset. Any overlapping or unclear themes were revised, merged, or removed to improve clarity and coherence.

Fifth, the researcher defined and named the themes more clearly by identifying the essence of each theme. Each theme was given a specific label, such as linguistic difficulties, cognitive difficulties, and test-related difficulties, along with the corresponding strategies used by the participants.

Finally, the researcher produced the report by organizing and presenting the findings in a structured and meaningful way. The themes were explained in detail and supported by selected excerpts from the participants' responses to strengthen the analysis and interpretation.



CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study and the discussion of those findings. The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section presents the research findings, which describe the types of difficulties faced by students in the reading section of the TOEFL test and the strategies they use to overcome those difficulties, as revealed through the semi-structured interviews. The second section provides a discussion that interprets the findings by connecting them to the theoretical frameworks and previous studies presented in Chapter II. This study aims to answer two research questions: (1) the types of difficulties faced by students in the TOEFL reading section, and (2) the strategies they use to overcome those difficulties. Based on the interview data, students' difficulties can be categorized into three major areas: linguistic difficulties, cognitive difficulties, and test-related difficulties. In response to these challenges, students also employ various strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, and test-taking strategies.

A. Research Findings

1. Student's Difficulties in the TOEFL Reading Section

a) Linguistic Difficulties

1) Limited Vocabulary

Most participants said that limited vocabulary is the main problem when they read TOEFL texts. When they find words they don't know, they

struggle to follow the flow of ideas and often fail to fully understand what the passage is about. This problem appeared again and again in almost all of the interviews. Here is what AFR said about this:

AFR: "When I find unfamiliar words in the text, sometimes I feel confused and worried... I find it difficult to get the main idea because unfamiliar vocabulary interferes with my comprehension."

From this statement, we can see that AFR does not only have trouble understanding the text, but she also feels worried and confused. This is important because it shows that vocabulary problems are not just about not knowing words. They also create emotional barriers. When she sees too many words she does not recognize, she starts to doubt whether she can understand the text at all. The word "interferes" is also interesting because it suggests that unknown words act like obstacles that block her path. Instead of reading smoothly from one sentence to the next, she has to stop, think, and often feel stuck. KA said something very similar, but she made it clear that vocabulary is her biggest challenge:

KA: "Yes, vocabulary is the main problem for me. I often come across words I haven't heard before. If they appear in important sentences, I get confused and don't understand the meaning."

KA says vocabulary is one of the problems. She says it is "the main problem." This means that for her, other difficulties like long sentences or time pressure are secondary. The real issue is not knowing enough words. She also makes an important point about where unknown words appear. She says that

if unknown words appear in important sentences, then she gets confused. This implies that sometimes she can still understand the general idea even if she misses a few words. But when those unknown words are in key sentences, everything falls apart. One word can ruin her understanding of an entire sentence, and that sentence might be the one that carries the main idea of the paragraph. Another participant, MSL, added a different perspective: *MSL: "If there are several unfamiliar words in one paragraph, that makes it harder for me to understand the overall idea."*

MSL's statement highlights something called cumulative difficulty. This means that problems add up. One or two unknown words in a paragraph might still be okay because she can guess or just skip them. But when there are several unknown words in the same paragraph, her brain gets overloaded. She cannot keep track of what is happening because too many pieces of the puzzle are missing. This is a common experience for language learners. At first, missing a few words is not a big deal. But when too many words are missing, the whole text becomes impossible to understand.

Other participants who shared similar experiences include DSN and AR. DSN said that unfamiliar words make it difficult for her to understand sentences or even whole paragraphs. AR admitted that unfamiliar words really affect his understanding of the sentence. He said that when he sees a word he has never heard before, he feels stuck and stressed, especially if that word looks important. So overall, it is very clear that limited vocabulary is not just a small problem. It is a major barrier that affects almost every student,

and it affects them in multiple ways: it slows them down, confuses them, makes them anxious, and stops them from grasping the main idea.

2) Complex Sentence Structure

Besides vocabulary, many students also struggle with long and complex sentences. TOEFL reading passages often contain sentences that have multiple clauses, passive voice, and extra information inserted in the middle. These kinds of sentences take more time and mental energy to process. Several participants in this study mentioned that complex sentences are a major source of difficulty for them. ZN explained how complex sentences affect her:

ZN: "Yes, long and complex sentences make me confused... Sometimes I have to reread the sentences several times."

From ZN's answer, we can understand that reading a complex sentence once is usually not enough for her. She needs to go back and read it again, sometimes more than once. This is a problem because rereading takes time. In a test like TOEFL where time is very limited, spending extra time on just one sentence can cause her to rush through the rest of the passage or even leave some questions unanswered. The fact that she says "several times" (lebih dari satu kali) also suggests that even after two readings, she still might not fully understand. She needs multiple tries to get the meaning. KA had a similar problem, but she described it with more physical detail:

KA: "Long sentences make me dizzy and my eyes get tired quickly. Sometimes I forget the beginning of the sentence because it's too long, so I have to reread

it several times."

KA's response adds something new. She does not just say that long sentences are hard to understand; she says they make her dizzy and tired. This shows that reading long sentences is not just mentally demanding but also physically draining. When her eyes get tired, she cannot focus well. But the most interesting part of her statement is about forgetting the beginning of the sentence. This is a very common problem when reading long sentences. By the time she reaches the end of a long sentence, she has already forgotten how it started. This happens because our working memory has a limited capacity. When a sentence has too many clauses or too much information inserted in the middle, our brain struggles to hold onto the beginning while processing the end. So KA is not alone in this; many language learners experience the same thing. DSN also shared her experience with complex sentences:

DSN: "Long and complex sentences make me confused and take more time to understand. I often need to reread them several times."

DSN focuses on the time aspect. She says complex sentences "take more time to understand." In a normal reading situation, taking more time might not be a big problem. But in the TOEFL reading section, time is strictly limited. Every extra second she spends trying to untangle a complex sentence is a second she cannot use for other questions. This is why complex sentences are not just a comprehension problem; they are also a time management problem. The more complex sentences there are in a passage, the more time she needs, and the more pressure she feels.

Other participants also expressed similar difficulties. AFR said that when she encounters long and complicated sentences, she loses track of the main idea because there are too many clauses in one sentence. She specifically mentioned that structures like relative clauses (who, which, that) and passive voice make things even more confusing for her. MSL said that she often needs to slow down her reading speed when she sees long sentences, and sometimes she reads a sentence once but still cannot understand it, so she has to read it again. AR also said the same thing; he mentioned that he sometimes has to read the same sentence two or three times, and that takes a lot of time.

So, based on all these responses, we can see that complex sentence structures create multiple problems. They confuse students, force them to reread, slow down their reading speed, cause mental and even physical fatigue, and take away precious time that could be used for answering other questions. In short, complex sentences increase cognitive load, disrupt reading flow, and negatively affect both comprehension and efficiency.

b) Cognitive Difficulties

1) Identifying the Main Idea

Finding the main idea of a passage is not as simple as it sounds. It requires students to do more than just understand each sentence one by one. They also need to put all the information together, figure out which details are important and which ones are just there to support the main point, and

then build a clear picture of what the whole text is about. Many students in this study said that this process is very hard for them, especially when the passage contains a lot of details. MSL explained why this is difficult for her:

MSL: "For me, finding the main idea can be difficult when the passage contains many details or examples. Sometimes I feel confused about which information is the main point and which information is just supporting."

From MSL's explanation, we can see that her main problem is filtering. When she reads a passage that has many details and examples, she gets overwhelmed. She cannot tell which information is the central idea and which information is only there to support that idea. This is a common issue for many readers, not just language learners. When a writer gives too many examples or too many supporting details, the main point can get buried. Instead of helping the reader understand, the details actually make things more confusing. MSL says she feels "confused," which suggests that she experiences cognitive overload. Her brain is trying to process too much information at once, and as a result, she cannot build a clear understanding of the text. AR shared a similar difficulty, but he described it a little differently:

AR: "I think it's hard when the passage has too many details. I sometimes focus too much on small things instead of the big picture." What AR describes is a problem of attention. He does not necessarily get confused about which details are important. Instead, he admits that he often focuses too much on small, specific pieces of information and then forgets to look at the overall

message. This is different from MSL's problem. MSL gets confused because she cannot tell what is important. AR, on the other hand, knows what the small details are, but he gets so caught up in them that he never steps back to see how they all fit together. He can understand parts of the text, but he fails to integrate those parts into a meaningful whole. This reflects a limitation in higher-level reading skills, particularly the ability to synthesize information. KA also had the same opinion:

KA: "Yes, it's difficult because the text is full of distracting details. I tend to focus on examples or data and forget the main point."

KA uses the word "distracting," which is very telling. She sees details not as helpful information but as distractions that pull her away from the main point. She admits that she tends to focus on examples or data, which are usually meant to support the main idea, but then she forgets what those examples are supposed to support. This is like focusing so much on the trees that you forget you are in a forest. The examples and data are there to make the main point clearer, but for KA, they have the opposite effect. They make her lose sight of the main point entirely.

Other participants also expressed similar challenges. ZN said that it is difficult to find the main idea especially when the text contains too much information, and she sometimes focuses on unimportant details. US said that when a passage has too many details, it is hard to identify which one is the main idea. AFR also said that too many details make it difficult for her to see the bigger context, and she sometimes spends a lot of time on passages she

does not understand because she gets stuck thinking about them.

So, They tell us that identifying the main idea is not just about understanding the words on the page. It is also about managing attention, organizing information, and knowing what to prioritize. Students who struggle with these skills tend to get lost in the details and fail to capture the central message of the passage. This is a cognitive difficulty, not just a language problem, and it requires explicit training to overcome.

2) Inference Question

Inference questions are often considered the most difficult type of question in the TOEFL reading section. Unlike factual questions where the answer can be found directly in the text, inference questions require students to read between the lines. They need to take clues from the text, combine them with their own reasoning, and then draw a conclusion that is not explicitly stated. This demands higher-order thinking skills such as analyzing context, making logical connections, and evaluating possible interpretations. Many students in this study said that inference questions are particularly challenging for them. AFR clearly expressed this difficulty:

AFR: "I feel confused, and I find them difficult... the answers are not directly stated in the text. I need to think more critically to understand the implied meaning."

From AFR's statement, we can see that she relies heavily on explicit information. She is used to finding answers that are clearly written

somewhere in the text. When the answer is not directly there, she does not know what to do. She knows that she needs to "think more critically," but knowing that she needs to do it and actually being able to do it are two different things. She finds the process confusing, which suggests that she has not yet developed a systematic way to approach inference questions. Instead of having a strategy, she just feels lost. MSL gave a much more detailed explanation of why inference questions are so hard for her:

MSL: "Yes, inference questions are one of the most difficult questions for me... the answer is not stated directly. So I need to think more deeply about the meaning of the text. Sometimes when I read a paragraph, I feel like I understand the information, but when I look at the answer choices, I become confused because more than one option seems possible."

MSL's response reveals two key problems with inference questions. First, they require deeper thinking. This is not the kind of thinking you do when you are just trying to understand what a sentence says. This is the kind of thinking where you have to hold multiple pieces of information in your head at the same time, look for connections between them, and then decide what the author is implying. This takes more time and more mental effort. Second, the answer choices in inference questions are often designed to be very similar. The test makers know that students will be confused, so they create options that all seem possible. Even when MSL feels like she understands the text, she still gets confused when she looks at the answer choices because more than one option looks correct. This is a common

experience for many test-takers. AR gave a very honest response about what he does when he faces inference questions:

AR: "Inference questions are honestly tricky. I remember feeling unsure because the answer wasn't directly in the text. Sometimes I feel like more than one option could be correct, so I just choose the one that makes the most sense. Other times I look at A, B, C, D and just guess."

AR's statement shows that when students do not have effective strategies for inference questions, they often resort to guessing. He admits that he sometimes just picks the option that sounds most logical, and other times he guesses randomly. This behavior suggests two things. First, he lacks confidence in his ability to answer inference questions correctly. Second, he does not have a clear method or strategy for eliminating wrong answers or finding clues in the text. Guessing is what students do when they have run out of options and do not know what else to do. This is not a good situation to be in during a high-stakes test like TOEFL.

Other participants also struggled with inference questions. ZN said that inference questions are difficult because the answers are not directly stated in the text. DSN said that he needs to draw conclusions and connect ideas from the passage to find the correct answer. KA said that inference questions often make her frustrated because she has to read between the lines and look for implied meanings, and she sometimes chooses answers that sound right but do not actually match the text.

Overall, these findings confirm that inference questions are particularly challenging because they require students to move beyond literal comprehension. They need to interpret implicit meaning, evaluate answer choices carefully, and apply critical thinking. For many students, these are still developing skills, and without explicit instruction and practice, they will continue to struggle with this question type.

c) Test-Related Difficulties

1) Time Pressure

Time pressure is one of the most frequently mentioned difficulties in this study. Almost every participant talked about how the strict time limit in the TOEFL reading section affects their performance. Unlike reading for pleasure or reading for a class assignment where you can take as much time as you need, the TOEFL reading section forces students to read several long passages and answer many questions within a fixed amount of time. This means they have to balance speed and comprehension at the same time, and this is very hard to do. Many students said that time pressure makes them feel rushed, anxious, and less accurate in their answers. ZN described how time pressure affects her reading:

ZN: "The limited time makes me feel rushed, so I often use skimming techniques."

From ZN's statement, we can understand that she feels rushed because of the time limit. She tries to deal with this by using skimming, which

means reading quickly to get the general idea without focusing on every word. Skimming can be helpful in some situations, but it is not always effective for every type of question. Some questions, especially detail questions and inference questions, require careful reading. When ZN skims too much, she might miss important information that she needs to answer those questions correctly. So, while skimming helps her save time, it might also reduce how well she understands the text. She is basically trading comprehension for speed, which is not always a good trade-off. KA had a much stronger reaction to time pressure:

KA: "The time limit makes me panic. I'm afraid of being late, so I can't read carefully or enjoy the text."

KA's statement is different from ZN's because she does not just feel rushed; she feels panic. The word "panic" is much stronger than "rushed." Panic is an intense fear response. When someone panics, their heart beats faster, they cannot think clearly, and they often make mistakes. KA says she is afraid of being late, which means she is constantly worried about the clock. This fear stops her from reading carefully. Instead of focusing on understanding the text, she is focused on how much time is left. She also says she cannot "enjoy the text," which suggests that the pressure takes away any pleasure she might get from reading. For KA, the TOEFL reading section is not just difficult; it is a stressful experience that affects her emotionally. AR shared a similar experience:

AR: "The time limit makes me nervous. Sometimes I rush too much and don't

fully understand the passage. If I see time running out, I might just guess some answers."

AR says he gets nervous, which is similar to what ZN and KA feel but not as extreme as KA's panic. He admits that he rushes too much, and when he rushes, he does not fully understand the passage. This is a direct cause-and-effect relationship: time pressure causes rushing, and rushing causes poor comprehension. Then, when he sees that time is almost over, he stops trying to understand altogether and just guesses. This shows that time pressure does not just affect how well students read; it also affects how they make decisions. When there is no time left, they abandon careful thinking and rely on guessing. This is not a good strategy, but it is what students do when they feel trapped by the clock.

Other participants also shared similar experiences. AFR said that the time limit puts pressure on her and makes her read too quickly, and she also mentioned that she experiences panic and anxiety because of the time limit. MSL said that reading too fast makes it harder for her to fully understand the text, and she sometimes feels nervous when she sees that there are still many questions left but time is almost finished. US said that she feels rushed and has to skim instead of reading carefully. DSN said that the time limit makes the reading section difficult because the texts are long and there are many questions, and she realized that reading the entire text is not always necessary and can waste time.

So, time pressure affects students in several ways. First, it forces them to read faster than they are comfortable with, which reduces comprehension. Second, it causes negative emotions like nervousness, panic, and anxiety, which further interfere with their ability to think clearly. Third, it pushes them to make poor decisions, such as guessing answers instead of carefully analyzing them. In short, time pressure is not just a practical problem; it is also a psychological problem that makes the TOEFL reading section much harder than it needs to be.

2) Anxiety and Stress

Anxiety and stress also play a big role in how students perform on the TOEFL reading test. These emotional factors are often overlooked because people tend to focus on language skills like vocabulary and grammar. But this study found that anxiety and stress are just as important. When students feel anxious, they cannot concentrate well. Their minds wander, they worry about failing, and they have trouble processing information. Some students even experience physical symptoms like nausea or headaches. This makes the test even harder than it already is. AFR admitted that she often feels nervous during the test:

AFR: "I feel nervous when I'm doing the TOEFL reading section. The time limit makes me pressure... I had panic and anxiety, which makes it hard for me to understand passages and questions."

From AFR's statement, we can see that she directly links her anxiety to difficulty in understanding. She says that panic and anxiety make it hard for her to understand the passages and questions. This is important because it shows that anxiety is not just an uncomfortable feeling; it actually affects her cognitive performance. The more anxious she feels, the harder it becomes for her to comprehend what she is reading. This creates a vicious cycle: she gets anxious because the test is hard, and then the anxiety makes the test even harder. AR described a much more extreme physical reaction:

AR: "When I don't understand the text, I start to panic. The reading session is really overwhelming and makes me nauseous."

AR's response shows a direct relationship between comprehension difficulty and emotional response. When he fails to understand the text, he experiences panic. But it does not stop there. He also says that the reading session makes him feel nauseous. Nausea is a physical symptom, not just an emotional one. This means that for AR, test anxiety is not just in his head; it affects his body too. He feels sick to his stomach. This is a serious level of anxiety that can completely ruin his ability to perform well on the test. When you feel like you might throw up, it is very hard to focus on reading and answering questions.

KA shared a similar experience, with a strong emphasis on fear:

KA: "The time limit makes me panic. I'm afraid of being late, so I can't read carefully or enjoy the text."

KA's statement shows that fear is a major source of her anxiety. She is afraid of not finishing on time. This fear is so strong that it prevents her from reading carefully. She cannot enjoy the text because she is too busy worrying about the clock. This is another example of how anxiety creates a negative cycle. The fear of running out of time makes her read less carefully, which makes her more likely to make mistakes, which then makes her even more anxious. Once this cycle starts, it is very hard to break. In contrast, MSL described a milder form of anxiety:

MSL: "Sometimes I also feel a little nervous when I see that there are still many questions left but time is almost finished."

MSL's response shows that not all students experience extreme anxiety. She uses the phrase "a little nervous," which indicates a more manageable level of stress. She does not panic, and she does not feel nauseous. However, even this mild anxiety can affect her performance. When she sees that time is running out and there are still many questions left, she feels nervous, and that nervousness can cause her to rush or second-guess herself. So even though her anxiety is not as severe as AR's or KA's, it still has a negative impact on her focus and decision-making.

ZN, US, HSR and DSN also mentioned feeling stressed or rushed, which are related to anxiety. ZN said the limited time makes her feel rushed. US said she feels a bit pressured. DSN said she feels stressed due to the time limitation. So almost all participants experienced some level of anxiety or stress during the TOEFL reading test.

So, Students experience different levels of anxiety. Some feel mild nervousness, like MSL. Others feel panic, like KA. And some feel extreme panic with physical symptoms like nausea, like AR. Anxiety can lead to a cycle of difficulty: lack of understanding causes anxiety, and anxiety further reduces comprehension. This creates a negative loop that affects performance. The more anxious a student feels, the harder it is for them to think clearly, and the harder it is to think clearly, the more anxious they become. Breaking this cycle is not easy, but it is important for students to be aware of their anxiety and learn strategies to manage it.

2. Students' Strategies in the TOEFL Reading Section

a) Cognitive Strategies

1) Guessing Meaning from Context

When students do not know the meaning of a word, they do not just give up and stop reading. Instead, they try to guess what the word means by looking at the words around it. This is called guessing from context, and it is one of the most common strategies that students use to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary. By doing this, they can keep reading without getting stuck on every unknown word. AFR explained how she does this

AFR: "When I get an unfamiliar word, the strategy I use is to look at the surrounding words of the text."

From AFR's statement, we can see that she does not stop reading when she finds a word she does not know. Instead, she looks at the words

around that unknown word to find clues. This is a good strategy because it helps her maintain the flow of reading. If she stopped every time she saw an unknown word, she would never finish the passage. By using context clues, she can keep moving forward even when her vocabulary is limited.

MSL described a more specific technique:

MSL: "I look at the words before and after the unfamiliar word to see if they give clues about the meaning."

MSL's response shows that she pays close attention to the immediate context. She does not just look anywhere in the sentence; she looks specifically at the words right before and right after the unknown word. This is a smart approach because the closest words often give the strongest clues. For example, if the unknown word is an adjective, the noun it describes might be right next to it. MSL's strategy is based on evidence from the text, not just random guessing. AR shared a similar approach:

AR: "Usually, I try to guess from context. I look at surrounding words or sentences. If it's not too important, I skip it."

AR's response adds something important. He not only guesses from context, but he also decides whether the unknown word is important enough to spend time on. If the word seems unimportant, he just skips it and continues reading. This shows that AR prioritizes his time and energy. He knows that not every word in a passage is equally important. Some words can be ignored without losing the main idea. This is a smart strategy, especially in a timed test like TOEFL.

Other participants also used this strategy. ZN said she looks for keywords and pays attention to examples in the text to help her guess meaning. DSN said she looks at the previous sentence and the surrounding words. KA said she looks at surrounding sentences and also uses connectors like "whoever" or "because" to give her clues. US said she looks at the sentences before and after the unknown word. So, almost all students in this study used guessing from context as a way to deal with unknown words. This shows that even though their vocabulary is limited, they are active readers who try to find solutions rather than giving up.

2) Sentence Analysis

Another strategy that students use is sentence analysis. This means breaking down long and complex sentences into smaller, more manageable parts. Instead of trying to understand the whole sentence at once, students look for the main subject and main verb first. Once they understand the core meaning, they add the extra information step by step. This strategy helps them handle complicated grammar structures without getting overwhelmed. DSN explained her step-by-step approach:

DSN: "I try to divide the sentence into smaller parts. First, I identify the subject and the main verb, then I try to understand the additional information step by step."

From DSN's response, we can see that she has a clear system for dealing with complex sentences. She does not just stare at the sentence and

hope to understand it. She actively breaks it down. First, she finds the subject and verb because these are the core of the sentence. Once she knows who did what, she can then look at the other parts of the sentence, like adjectives, clauses, or phrases, and see how they relate to the core meaning. This step-by-step method reduces cognitive load and makes comprehension more manageable. AFR described a similar technique:

AFR: "When I get a long or complex sentence, I try to identify the subject and the main verb first, then temporarily ignore additional information."

AFR's response adds the concept of "temporarily ignoring." She does not try to understand everything at once. She first focuses only on the subject and verb, and she sets aside the extra information for a moment. This is a smart strategy because the extra information (like relative clauses or prepositional phrases) is often there to add details, but it is not essential for understanding the basic meaning of the sentence. By ignoring it temporarily, AFR can understand the core meaning first, and then go back to the details if she has time. KA also shared a similar approach:

KA: "I usually look for the verb first and then the subject. I break down long sentences into smaller, simpler ones."

KA's response is slightly different from the others. She looks for the verb first, then the subject. Some people find it easier to find the verb because verbs are often easier to spot than subjects. Either way, the goal is the same: find the core elements of the sentence. Once she has the verb and subject, she breaks the rest of the sentence into smaller, simpler parts. This helps her

understand the sentence piece by piece instead of trying to swallow it all at once.

Other participants also used sentence analysis. ZN said she tries to identify the subject and main verb first, then rereads the sentence if necessary. MSL said she identifies the main subject and main verb first, then breaks the sentence into smaller parts. AR said he breaks the sentence into smaller parts and looks for the subject and verb first. US said she reads slowly and tries to identify the main subject and verb first. So, almost every participant in this study used some form of sentence analysis to deal with complex sentences. This shows that breaking sentences down is a natural and effective way for students to handle difficult grammar.

3) Skimming and Scanning

Skimming and scanning are two related strategies that help students read more efficiently, especially when time is limited. Skimming means reading quickly to get the general idea or main topic of a passage. Scanning means looking for specific information, like a keyword or a number, without reading everything. Many students in this study used these strategies to save time and find answers faster. ZN explained how she uses skimming:

ZN: "I often use skimming techniques. I look for repeated keywords or concepts and pay attention to the introduction, usually in the first paragraph. Sometimes I also skim the conclusion."

From ZN's response, we can see that her skimming is not random. She has a clear purpose. She looks for repeated keywords because if a word

appears many times, it is probably important. She also pays attention to the introduction because the first paragraph often tells you what the passage is about. And she sometimes skims the conclusion because the last paragraph often summarizes the main points. This shows that ZN uses skimming strategically, not just reading fast without thinking. MSL described a selective reading approach:

MSL: "I usually start by reading the introduction carefully... then I try to look at the first sentence of each paragraph. I also pay attention to repeated ideas or keywords."

MSL's response shows that she combines careful reading with skimming. She reads the introduction carefully because it sets up the whole passage. Then, instead of reading every paragraph in full, she looks at the first sentence of each paragraph. This is a common skimming technique because the first sentence of a paragraph often contains the main idea of that paragraph. By doing this, MSL can understand the structure of the passage without reading every single word. AR also shared his use of skimming: *AR: "I also use skimming reading the first paragraph fast to get the main idea."*

AR's response is simpler. He uses skimming specifically to get the main idea from the first paragraph. He knows that the introduction is the most important part for understanding the topic. By reading it fast, he can quickly grasp what the passage is about and then decide whether he needs to read more carefully or not.

b) Metacognitive Strategies

1) Monitoring

Monitoring is a strategy that happens while students are reading. Instead of just reading and hoping they understand, they actively check whether they actually understand what they are reading. If they realize that they are confused or that they missed something, they take action. This action might be rereading the sentence, slowing down, or in some cases, skipping the difficult part and coming back later. AFR demonstrated monitoring through rereading:

AFR: "When I got long and complicated sentences, I reread the text several times."

From AFR's response, we can see that she is aware when her comprehension is not complete. She does not just keep reading and hope things will make sense later. She stops and rereads. This shows that she is monitoring her understanding in real time. She knows that if she does not understand a sentence, she needs to go back and try again. This is a sign of a strategic reader. MSL also showed the same monitoring behavior:

MSL: "Sometimes I read the sentence once but I still cannot fully understand it, so I need to read it again."

MSL's response is very clear. She reads a sentence once, checks whether she understands it, and if she does not, she reads it again. This is a simple but effective monitoring strategy. The key point is that she does not just assume she understands. She actively checks. This takes a little extra

time, but it saves her from misunderstanding the whole passage. ZN expressed the same approach:

ZN: "Sometimes I have to reread the sentences several times."

ZN's response is shorter, but the meaning is the same. She rereads when she does not understand. She does not just give up or skip ahead. She tries again. This shows that she is committed to understanding the text, not just finishing it. However, one participant showed a different response:

US: "If I feel stuck, I skip it first and come back later if I still have time."

US's response is different from the others. Instead of rereading immediately, she chooses to skip the difficult part and come back later if she has time. This is also a form of monitoring because she is aware that she is stuck, and she makes a decision about what to do. But her decision is different. She prioritizes time management over immediate comprehension. This can be a good strategy in a timed test because it prevents her from spending too much time on one question. However, the risk is that if she runs out of time, she might never come back to the skipped part.

Other participants also used monitoring. DSN and KA said they reread sentences multiple times. AR said he sometimes reads the same sentence two or three times. So, most students in this study actively monitor their understanding and take action when they do not understand. The most common action is rereading, but some students choose to skip and come back later. Both are valid strategies, but they have different risks and benefits.

2) Planning

Planning is a strategy that students use before they even start reading. Instead of just opening the passage and reading blindly, they take a moment to think about what they need to do. They set a purpose for reading, decide what information to look for, and sometimes even read the questions first. This helps them read more efficiently because they know exactly what they are looking for. AR explained his planning strategy:

AR: "First, read the question before reading the passage... The better way is to read the question first, then find the answer."

From AR's response, we can see that he does not start by reading the passage. He starts by reading the questions. This might seem backward to some people, but it is actually a very effective strategy. When you read the questions first, you know what information you need to find in the passage. Then, when you read the passage, you are not reading everything equally. You are looking for specific answers. This saves a lot of time and makes your reading more focused. DSN described a similar planning approach:

DSN: "I usually look at the questions first and identify which ones require more time. I answer easier questions first."

DSN's response adds another layer to planning. She not only reads the questions first, but she also identifies which questions are harder and will take more time. Then, she answers the easier questions first. This is a smart time management strategy. By answering easy questions first, she builds

confidence and ensures that she does not waste too much time on hard questions at the beginning. If she has time left at the end, she can go back to the harder ones. ZN also shared a similar strategy:

ZN: "I focus on identifying keywords and eliminating incorrect answers. I also tend to skip difficult questions and answer the easier ones first."

ZN's response shows that her planning involves knowing what to look for (keywords) and knowing how to approach the questions (eliminating wrong answers and skipping difficult ones). She does not just read randomly. She has a plan. This kind of planning is what separates strategic readers from non-strategic readers.

Other participants also used planning strategies. MSL said she allocates time for each passage and skips difficult questions to return later. KA said she allocates less time for reading and more for answering questions. So, planning is an important metacognitive strategy that helps students approach the TOEFL reading section with a clear purpose and a efficient method.

c) Test-Taking Strategies

1) Answer Elimination

Answer elimination is a strategy that students use when they are answering multiple-choice questions. Instead of trying to find the correct answer right away, they first look for answers that are clearly wrong and eliminate them. This narrows down the choices and makes it easier to pick

the correct answer. This is especially useful when students are unsure or when the answer choices look very similar. ZN explained how she uses answer elimination:

ZN: "I focus on identifying keywords and eliminating incorrect answers. If I encounter repeated words in the options, I tend to eliminate them."

From ZN's response, we can see that she does not just guess randomly. She actively looks for wrong answers to remove. She also has a specific clue she looks for: repeated words in the options. If the same word appears in multiple answer choices, she tends to eliminate those options. This is a smart test-taking trick because correct answers in TOEFL are usually not the ones with repeated words. By eliminating these, she increases her chances of picking the right answer. AFR described a more comprehensive elimination process:

AFR: "I try to match the question with the relevant part of the text, then eliminate the incorrect options until I find the most appropriate answer."

AFR's response shows that her elimination process is based on the text. She does not just eliminate randomly. First, she finds the part of the passage that is relevant to the question. Then, she uses that information to eliminate wrong answers. This is a text-based elimination strategy, which is more reliable than just guessing. By matching the question to the text, she ensures that her elimination is based on evidence, not just intuition.

AR also shared his elimination strategy:

AR: "I try to look for clues in the passage and eliminate wrong answers first."

In TOEFL, there are four answers: A, B, C, D. Sometimes two answers don't make sense, so I eliminate them."

AR's response adds an interesting observation. He says that in many TOEFL questions, two of the four answers are obviously wrong. Once you eliminate those two, you only have two options left to choose from. This makes the decision much easier. Even if you have to guess between the last two, your chance of being correct is 50%, not 25%. This is a very practical test-taking strategy that can significantly improve a student's score.

Other participants also used answer elimination. MSL said she eliminates answer choices that are clearly not consistent with the information in the text. KA said she eliminates obviously wrong answers. So, answer elimination is a common and effective strategy that helps students simplify the decision-making process and improve their accuracy

2) Time Management

Time management is a strategy that students use to deal with the limited time in the TOEFL reading test. Instead of spending too much time on one difficult question, they make strategic decisions about when to move on, when to skip, and when to come back. This helps them complete the test without leaving too many questions unanswered. AFR explained her time management strategy:

AFR: "I try not to spend too much time on one difficult question. If I feel stuck, I will move on to the next question and come back later if I still have time."

From AFR's response, we can see that she is aware of the risk of spending too much time on a single question.

By moving on when she feels stuck, she ensures that she can answer other questions that might be easier or more within her ability. This prevents one difficult question from ruining her performance on the rest of the test. The key phrase is "come back later if I still have time." She does not abandon the difficult question forever; she just postpones it. US expressed a similar approach:

US: "If I feel stuck, I skip it first and come back later if I still have time."

US's response is almost identical to AFR's. This shows that skipping difficult questions and returning to them later is a common time management strategy. The principle is simple: do not get trapped. Answer the questions you can answer first, and then go back to the harder ones if there is time. MSL provided a more detailed time management plan:

MSL: "If I feel stuck or confused, I usually skip that question first and move to the next one so I can answer easier questions. I also try to allocate time for each passage."

MSL's response adds the element of allocation. She not only skips difficult questions but also plans how much time to spend on each passage. This shows a more comprehensive approach to time management that includes both macro-level (per passage) and micro-level (per question)

planning. By allocating time for each passage, she makes sure she does not spend too long on one passage and leave no time for the others.

Other participants also used time management strategies. ZN said she skips difficult questions and answers easier ones first. DSN said she answers easier questions first and guesses if time is almost over. AR said he skips and comes back later. KA said she marks and skips difficult questions to return later.

Overall, time management is a crucial strategy for the TOEFL reading section because time is very limited. Almost all participants in this study use some form of time management, whether it is skipping difficult questions, answering easier ones first, or allocating time for each passage. The most common strategy is to skip a question when feeling stuck and come back to it later. This prevents students from wasting too much time on one question and allows them to maximize their score by answering as many questions as possible. However, as some students mentioned, if time runs out, they might never come back to the skipped questions. So this strategy works best when students are disciplined about keeping track of time.

The following table presents the students' difficulties and the strategies they used in the TOEFL reading section.

Participant	Difficulties	Strategies
MSL	Unfamiliar vocabulary, long and complex sentences, identifying main ideas, inference questions, and time pressure	Guessing meaning from context, rereading difficult sentences (monitoring), sentence analysis, skipping difficult questions (managing time)
AFR	Unfamiliar vocabulary, long and complex sentences, identifying main ideas, inference questions, and time pressure	Guessing meaning from context, identifying main ideas through skimming, focusing on key information, skipping difficult questions, and returning to unanswered questions
KA	Unfamiliar vocabulary, long and complex sentences, identifying main ideas, inference questions, and time pressure	Guessing unfamiliar vocabulary; focusing on important/key sentences; identifying relevant parts of the text (Scanning)
HSR	Unfamiliar vocabulary; long and complex sentences; difficulty identifying main ideas; inference questions; time pressure	Answering easier questions first; skipping difficult questions; guessing answers when unsure; managing limited time
US	Unfamiliar vocabulary; long and complex sentences; difficulty identifying main ideas; inference questions; time pressure	Skipping difficult questions; returning later; focusing on easier items first
ZN	Unfamiliar vocabulary; long and complex sentences; difficulty identifying main ideas; inference questions; time pressure	Prioritizing easier questions; skipping time-consuming questions; managing time effectively
DSN	Unfamiliar vocabulary; long and complex sentences; difficulty identifying main ideas; inference questions; time pressure	Answering easier questions first; guessing answers due to time pressure; managing time
AR	Unfamiliar vocabulary; long and complex sentences; difficulty identifying main ideas; inference questions; time pressure	Using context clues; breaking down complex sentences; focusing on sentence structure

B. Discussion

This section interprets the main findings of this study by linking them to the theoretical frameworks established in Chapter II. The discussion focuses on the core themes that emerged from the participants' experiences, namely: linguistic

difficulties, cognitive difficulties, test-related difficulties, and the strategies students use to cope with these challenges. Rather than repeating individual quotations, this section synthesizes the key patterns and connects them to existing theories.

1. Students' Difficulties in the TOEFL Reading Section

a. Linguistic Difficulties and Theoretical Connections

The findings of this study indicate that limited vocabulary knowledge is a primary obstacle for students in the TOEFL reading section. Most participants reported that unfamiliar academic words disrupt their reading flow and prevent them from grasping the main ideas of passages. This finding is consistent with the theory proposed by Grabe and Stoller (2011), who argue that vocabulary knowledge plays a central role in second language reading because readers need sufficient word recognition ability to build overall text meaning. Similarly, Nation (2013) emphasizes that a high percentage of known vocabulary is necessary for adequate comprehension of academic texts. When students lack this lexical coverage, their comprehension becomes fragmented, and they struggle to connect ideas across sentences.

In addition to vocabulary, complex sentence structures were identified as a major linguistic challenge. Participants consistently reported that long sentences with multiple clauses force them to reread and slow down their reading speed. This finding supports Koda's (2005) explanation that second language readers must coordinate lexical processing and syntactic parsing simultaneously. When sentences are too long, students experience difficulty retaining earlier information while processing later parts, which reflects the limitation of working

memory as discussed in cognitive reading theories. Thus, the linguistic difficulties found in this study align with theoretical claims that both vocabulary and grammar are fundamental barriers in academic reading.

b. Cognitive Difficulties and Theoretical Connections

The findings also reveal that cognitive difficulties, particularly in identifying main ideas and answering inference questions, significantly affect students' performance. Many participants struggled to distinguish between main ideas and supporting details, often getting lost in excessive information. This difficulty reflects what Grabe (2009) describes as the challenge of integrating information across sentences and paragraphs while maintaining coherence in working memory. When students cannot filter relevant from less important information, they experience cognitive overload, which reduces their ability to construct a clear understanding of the text.

Inference questions were reported as the most challenging type of question because the answers are not explicitly stated in the text. This finding is consistent with Perfetti and Stafura's (2014) theory that successful comprehension depends on the ability to integrate information efficiently and draw logical conclusions based on implicit meaning. Students who struggle with inference questions tend to rely on surface-level reading and have difficulty moving beyond literal comprehension. This supports Alderson's (2000) claim that reading in a test context requires not only linguistic knowledge but also higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.

c. Test-Related Difficulties and Theoretical Connections

Time pressure emerged as a significant test-related difficulty. Participants reported that the strict time limit forces them to rush, reduces their reading depth, and leads to hasty decision-making. This finding aligns with Alderson's (2000) observation that reading in a testing situation is fundamentally different from reading for learning because students must constantly balance comprehension with time management. When time is limited, students cannot engage deeply with the text, which negatively affects their accuracy.

Anxiety and stress were also identified as important affective barriers. Participants described feeling nervous and panicking when they encountered difficult texts or when time was running out. This finding supports the theoretical perspective of Hezam et al. (2021), who argue that affective factors such as anxiety, low confidence, and lack of motivation reduce students' willingness to engage with complex academic texts. The findings also reflect a negative cycle in which lack of comprehension triggers anxiety, and anxiety further impairs cognitive processing, as discussed in theories of foreign language reading anxiety.

2. Students' Strategies in the TOEFL Reading Section

a. Cognitive Strategies and Theoretical Connections

The findings show that students employ several cognitive strategies to cope with their reading difficulties. Guessing meaning from context was widely

used to address limited vocabulary. This strategy reflects Nation's (2013) emphasis on using contextual clues to compensate for insufficient word knowledge. Sentence analysis, such as identifying subjects and verbs or breaking long sentences into smaller parts, was used to handle complex grammatical structures. This supports Koda's (2005) claim that careful syntactic processing is essential for comprehension. Skimming and scanning were also used to improve reading efficiency under time constraints, which is consistent with Grabe's (2009) theory that flexible reading strategies help students manage dense academic texts.

b. Metacognitive Strategies and Theoretical Connections

Metacognitive strategies such as planning and monitoring were also observed. Some participants read the questions first before reading the passage, which reflects planning behavior. This strategy helps readers set a purpose for reading and focus on relevant information. Other participants reported rereading difficult parts to check their understanding, which demonstrates monitoring. According to Mokhtari and Reichard (2002), skilled readers are those who plan, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension. The findings of this study confirm that students who actively monitor their understanding are better able to address comprehension breakdowns. However, some participants admitted to skipping difficult parts without attempting to understand them, indicating that metacognitive awareness is not yet fully developed among all students.

c. Test-Taking Strategies and Theoretical Connections

Test-taking strategies, particularly answer elimination and time management, were also used by participants. Answer elimination helps students narrow down possible choices by removing clearly incorrect options, which increases the probability of selecting the correct answer. This strategy aligns with Cohen's (2014) theory that test-taking strategies influence performance beyond language ability. Time management, such as skipping difficult questions to save time, reflects an awareness of test constraints. However, the findings also suggest that some strategies, such as random guessing or skipping without understanding, may be counterproductive. This nuance highlights the importance of explicit strategy instruction.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

A. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that students face three main types of difficulties in the TOEFL reading section: linguistic (limited vocabulary and complex sentences), cognitive (identifying main ideas and answering inference questions), and test-related difficulties (time pressure and anxiety). These challenges often interrupt comprehension and reduce students' confidence during the test.

However, students do not remain passive. They apply various strategies to overcome these difficulties. To address vocabulary problems, they guess meaning from context. To handle complex sentences, they break down the sentences or identify subjects and verbs. For efficiency, they use skimming and scanning. Metacognitively, they plan by reading questions first and monitor by rereading difficult parts. In addition, they use test-taking strategies such as eliminating wrong answers and managing time by skipping difficult questions.

Overall, the difficulties students face are closely related to the strategies they use. Each difficulty encourages students to apply certain strategies. However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on how well and consistently they are applied. Therefore, students need to further develop their strategic awareness to improve their performance in the TOEFL reading section.

B. Suggestion

Based on the results of this study, several suggestions are proposed. For students, it is important to become more aware of the strategies they use. Students should not only rely on guessing but also practice sentence analysis, time management, and regular exposure to TOEFL-like texts to build confidence. For teachers, it is recommended to explicitly teach reading strategies, not just deliver material. Teachers can provide clear examples of how to apply strategies such as skimming, scanning, and answer elimination, and give students opportunities to practice them in class.

For future researchers, it is suggested to explore this topic further with a larger number of participants or different research settings. Future studies could also examine the effectiveness of specific strategies in improving TOEFL reading comprehension.



REFERENCES

- Ahmadi, M. R., Ismail, H. N., & Abdullah, M. K. K. (2013). The importance of metacognitive reading strategy awareness in reading comprehension. *English Language Teaching*, 6(10), 235–244. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n10p235>
- Alderson, J. C. (2000). *Assessing reading*. Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Jarrah, H., & Ismail, N. S. B. (2018). Reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners in higher learning institutions. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 8(7), 32–41. <https://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ijel/article/view/0/37588>
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., & Sorensen, C. (2010). *Introduction to research in education* (8th ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Certeau, M. de. (2002). *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press.
- Ciocoi-Pop, M.-M. (2020). Reading comprehension for ESL students: Processes of perceiving texts. *Knowledge-Based Organization*, 26(2), 278–282. <https://doi.org/10.2478/kbo-2020-0090>
- Cohen, A. D. (2014). *Strategies in learning and using a second language* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Cohen, A. D. (2014). *Strategies in learning and using a second language* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

- Cui, Y. (2023). *The impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on EFL learners' reading comprehension*. *Journal of Language Education Research*, 12(3), 45–57.
- Derakhshan, A., & Nazari, N. (2015). The implications of reading strategies in EFL/ESL contexts. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 2(5), 1–10.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Educational Testing Service. (2019). *TOEFL® iBT® test framework and test development*. Educational Testing Service. <https://www.ets.org/pdfs/toefl/toefl-ibt-test-framework.pdf>
- Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2012). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2011). *Teaching and researching reading* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Grellet, F. (1981). *Developing reading skills: A practical guide to reading comprehension exercises*. Cambridge University Press.

- Hezam, T. A., Ali, J. K. M., Imtiaz, S., & Saifi, M. A. (2021). Challenges and problems of reading comprehension experienced by EFL learners. *Journal of English Studies in Arabia Felix*, 1(1), 14–25. <https://journals.arafa.org/index.php/jesaf/article/view/28>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mokhtari, K., & Reichard, C. A. (2002). Assessing students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(2), 249–259. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.94.2.249>
- Mokhtari, K., & Reichard, C. A. (2002). Assessing students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(2), 249–259. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.94.2.249>
- Nation, I. S. P. (2013). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Nguyen, T. M. N. (2013). *Implementation of skimming and scanning techniques in teaching reading comprehension*. University of Economics, Ho Chi Minh.
- Oxford, R. L. (2011). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies*. Pearson Education.
- Perfetti, C. A., & Stafura, J. (2014). Word knowledge in a theory of reading comprehension. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 18(1), 22–37.
- Pratiwi, D. (2020). An analysis of students' strategies in answering TOEFL reading comprehension questions. *Journal of English Education Research*, 5(1), 45–53.

- Putra, M. A., & Riswanto, A. (2022). *Foreign language reading anxiety among EFL university students*. Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 12(1), 112–124.
- Putro, G. A. J. S., & Basikin. (2025). The effect of critical thinking in academic reading: How students build their cognitive skills – A study case in Bulukumba, Makassar. *Global Journal of Innovation in Language, Social Science, and Sustainability*, 3(2), 392–404.
- Rachmawati, N. (2018). Students' difficulties in answering TOEFL reading comprehension questions. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 7(2), 123–130.
- Rahayu, P. M. (2019). *The effectiveness of skimming and scanning strategies in improving students' reading comprehension* (Undergraduate thesis). University of Islam Malang.
- Rahman, A., & Weda, S. (2020). *Time pressure, anxiety, and reading performance among EFL learners*. Journal of English Language Teaching and Studies, 8(2), 89–101.
- Saragih, W. (2012). A quick look at academic reading. *Bahas Journal*, 80(1), 46–56. <https://jurnal.unimed.ac.id/2012/index.php/bahas/article/view/2379>
- Sari, S. M. (2023). Using scanning and skimming strategy to improve the students' reading comprehension. *JETLING: Journal of English Teaching and Learning*, 3(1), 43–48.
- Shen, M. (2013). Toward an understanding of technical university EFL learners' academic reading difficulties, strategies, and needs. *Electronic Journal of*

Foreign Language Teaching, 10(1), 70–79. <http://e-flt.nus.edu.sg/>

Sohail, S. (2015). Academic reading strategies used by Leeds Metropolitan University graduates: A case study. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 2(2), 115–133. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1161457.pdf>

Sulaiman, N. A., Salehuddin, K., & Khairudin, R. (2020). Reading English academic texts: Evidence from undergraduates' eye movement data. *3L: Language, Linguistics and Literature*, 26(1), 60–78. <https://ejournal.ukm.my/31/article/view/32990>

University of Jyväskylä. (2023). *Reading academic texts*. Academic Study Skills. <https://www.jyu.fi/en/for-students/instructions-for-bachelors-and-masters-students/academic-study-skills/reading-academic-texts>


Widdowson, H. G. (1979). The process and purpose of reading. In *Explorations in applied linguistics* (pp. 168–176). Oxford University Press.

Yamashita, J. (2013). Effects of extensive reading on reading attitudes in a foreign language. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 25(2), 248-263.



APPENDICES

Appendix A : Appointment Letter of Supervisor



**KEPUTUSAN DEKAN FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN UIN AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH
NOMOR: 1712 TAHUN 2025**

**TENTANG:
PENGANGKATAN PEMBIMBING SKRIPSI MAHASISWA
DENGAN RAHMAT TUHAN YANG MAHA ESA**

DEKAN FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN UIN AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH

Menimbang :

Mengingat :

Menetapkan :

KESATU :

Untuk membimbing Skripsi :

Nama : Jauza Alya
NIM : 220203101
Program Studi : Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Judul Skripsi : Investigating Students' Difficulties in Reading Session of TOEFL Test

KEDUA :

KETIGA :

KEEMPAT :

KELIMA :

MEMUTUSKAN

1. bahwa untuk kelancaran bimbingan skripsi mahasiswa pada Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh maka dipandang perlu menunjuk pembimbing skripsi;

2. bahwa yang namanya tersebut dalam Surat Keputusan ini, dianggap cakap dan mampu untuk diangkat dalam jabatan sebagai pembimbing skripsi mahasiswa;

3. bahwa berdasarkan pertimbangan sebagaimana dimaksud dalam huruf a dan huruf b, perlu menetapkan Keputusan Dekan Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh.

1. Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003, tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional;

2. Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005, tentang Guru dan Dosen;

3. Undang-Undang Nomor 12 Tahun 2012, tentang Pendidikan Tinggi;

4. Peraturan Presiden Nomor 74 Tahun 2012, tentang perubahan atas peraturan pemerintah RI Nomor 23 Tahun 2005 tentang pengelolaan keuangan Badan Layanan Umum;

5. Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 4 Tahun 2014, tentang penyelenggaraan Pendidikan Tinggi dan Pengelolaan Perguruan Tinggi;

6. Peraturan Presiden Nomor 64 Tahun 2013, tentang perubahan Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Menjadi Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;

7. Peraturan Menteri Agama RI Nomor 44 Tahun 2022, tentang Organisasi dan Tata Kerja UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;

8. Peraturan Menteri Agama Nomor 14 Tahun 2022, tentang Statuta UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh;

9. Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 492 Tahun 2003, tentang Pendelegasian Wewenang Pengangkatan, Pemindahan dan Pemberhentian PNS di Lingkungan Depag RI;

10. Keputusan Menteri Keuangan Nomor 293/KM/05/2011, tentang penetapan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh pada Kementerian Agama sebagai instansi Pemerintah yang menerapkan Pengelolaan Badan Layanan Umum;

11. Surat Keputusan Rektor UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Nomor 01 Tahun 2015, Tentang Pendelegasian Wewenang kepada Dekan dan Direktur Pascasarjana di Lingkungan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh.

Keputusan Dekan Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh tentang Pembimbing Skripsi Mahasiswa.

Menunjuk Saudara :
Rita Hermida, M. S. Pd. I., M.Pd


Kepada pembimbing yang tercantum namanya diatas diberikan honorarium sesuai dengan peraturan perundang-undangan yang berlaku.

Pembayaran akibat keputusan ini dibebankan pada DIPA UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Nomor SP DIPA-025.04.2.423925/2025 Tanggal 02 Desember 2024 Tahun Anggaran 2025.

Keputusan ini berlaku selama enam bulan sejak tanggal ditetapkan.

Keputusan ini berlaku sejak tanggal ditetapkan dengan ketentuan bahwa segala sesuatu akan dirubah dan diperbaiki kembali sebagaimana mestinya, apabila kemudian hari ternyata terdapat kekeliruan dalam Surat Keputusan ini.

Ditetapkan di : Banda Aceh
Pada tanggal : 22 Desember 2025
Dekan


Saiful Muluk

Terbaca

1. Sekjen Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;

2. Dipten Pendidikan Islam Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;

3. Direktur Persewaan Tanah Keasmasan Islam Kementerian Agama RI di Jakarta;


4. Kantor Pelayanan Perbendaharaan Negara (KPPN), di Banda Aceh;

5. Rektor UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh di Banda Aceh;

6. Kepala Bagian Keuangan dan Akuntansi UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh di Banda Aceh;

7. Yang bersangkutan;

8. Arsip.



Appendix B: Recommendation Letter from *Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan* to conduct the research



**KEMENTERIAN AGAMA REPUBLIK INDONESIA
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH
FAKULTAS TARBİYAH DAN KEGURUAN**

Jl. Syekh Abdur Rauf Kopelma Darussalam Banda Aceh Telp/Fax. : 0651-752921

Nomor : B-2608/Un.08/FTK.1/TL.00/4/2026
Lamp : -
Hal : *Penelitian Ilmiah Mahasiswa*
Kepada Yth,
Ketua Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh
Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.
Fakultas Tarbiyah Dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry dengan ini menerangkan bahwa:

NIM : 220203101
Nama : JAUZA ALYA
Program Studi/Jurusan : Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Alamat : Pidie Jaya, Meureudu, Bunot

Saudara yang tersebut namanya diatas benar mahasiswa Fakultas Tarbiyah Dan Keguruan bermaksud melakukan penelitian ilmiah di lembaga yang Bapak/Ibu pimpin dalam rangka penulisan Skripsi dengan judul *INVESTIGATING STUDENT'S DIFFICULTIES IN READING SECTION OF TOEFL TEST*

Banda Aceh, 17 April 2026
An. Dekan
Wakil Dekan Bidang Akademik dan Kelembagaan



Prof. Dr. Buhori Muslim, M.Ag.
NIP. 197508152001121002

Berlaku sampai : 29 Mei 2026

جامعة الرانيري
AR - RANIRY

Appendix C: Confirmation Letter from English Education Department



KEMENTERIAN AGAMA REPUBLIK INDONESIA
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI AR-RANIRY
FAKULTAS TARBIYAH DAN KEGURUAN
PRODI PENDIDIKAN BAHASA INGGRIS

Jln Syekh Abdur Rauf Kopelma Darussalam Banda Aceh
Email : pbi.ftk@ar-raniry.ac.id. Website : <https://ar-raniry.ac.id>

SURAT KETERANGAN

Nomor: B-164/Un.08/PBI/Kp.01.2/4/2026

Ketua Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Darussalam Banda Aceh menerangkan bahwa yang nama tersebut di bawah ini:

Nama : Jauza Alya
NIM : 220203101
Prodi : Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Alamat : Bunot, Meureudu, Pidie Jaya


Benar telah melakukan pengumpulan data untuk penelitian pada Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh dalam rangka penyusunan Skripsi yang berjudul:

"Investigating Students' Difficulties in Reading Section of TOEFL Test"

Demikianlah Surat Keterangan ini kami buat agar dapat dipergunakan seperlunya.

Banda Aceh, 20 April 2026

Ketua Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris,


Syarifah Dahliana

AR - RANIRY

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview Protocol

Research Project Title : Investigating students' Difficulties in Reading

Section TOEFL Test

Time of Interview :

Date :

Place:

Research Investigator :

Jauza Alya Participant :

Position of Interview : Student of English Language Education
Department

This research is about the difficulties faced by students in the reading section of the TOEFL test and the strategies they use to overcome those difficulties. The purpose of this study is to identify the types of difficulties students encounter in the TOEFL reading section and to explore the strategies they employ to solve those difficulties. Data will be collected through a semi- structured interview, and the conversation will be audio-recorded with the participant's consent. All data will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes to ensure the participants' privacy. During the interview, the participant will be asked several questions related to their

experience with the TOEFL reading section. The interview will take approximately 15–20 minutes.



Interview Questions

1. Could you please share your experience in taking the TOEFL test, in the Reading section?
2. How would you describe in your own word based on your overall experience on TOEFL reading section? Did you find it interesting? Did you find it stressful? Did you find it manageable? Did you find it challenging?
3. Can you share your experience when you encounter words in TOEFL reading passages that you don't know? How do these words affect your understanding of the passage?
4. Do you think that long sentence is a trouble? How do such sentences affect the way you read and understand the text?
5. Thinking about the main idea of a passage, what makes it hard for you to figure out? How do you usually try to understand what the passage is really about?
6. Inference questions can be tricky because the answer isn't stated directly. Can you explain a situation where an inference question was difficult for you?
7. TOEFL reading has a strict time limit. How does having limited time influence the way you read and answer questions?
8. When you find unfamiliar words while reading, what do you usually do to guess or understand their meaning?
9. How do you approach long or complex sentences? Can you explain any steps you take to break them down and make them easier to understand?

10. When trying to figure out the main idea of a passage, what methods or tips do you use? How do you deal with passages that have a lot of details?
11. How do you handle inference questions in reading? Can you explain how you try to read between the lines and find clues in the text?
12. Time management is important in TOEFL reading. How do you plan your time when reading passages and answering questions so that you can finish without rushing?



Appendix E: Documentation of Research



AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Name : Jauza Alya

Student Number : 220203101

Place/Date of Birth : Meureudu/16 March 2026

Gender : Female

Religion : Islam

Status : Single

Occupation : Student

Nationally : Indonesia

Address : Bunot, Meureudu, Pidie Jaya

Email : 220203101@student.ar-raniry.ac.id

Phone Number : 082215220537

Parents

Name of Father : Hadi Sofyan Name of Mother : Julia

Father Occupation : Civil Servant Mother Occupation : Civil Servant

Address : Bunot, Meureudu, Pidie Jaya

Education

Elementary : MIN Meureudu (2010-2016) Junior High

School : MTs Jeumala Amal (2016-2019)

Senior High School : MAS Ruhul Islam Anak Bangsa (2019-2022)

University : UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh (2022-2026)