
PEER-DISCUSSION IN TOEFL PREPARATION CLASS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to see whether the technique of peer-discussion during the TOEFL preparation class benefits the students in increasing their score in Section Two of TOEFL Test, Structure and Written Expression. According to Porter et al. (2001), during the process of students' interaction with their peer(s), students have more open chances to ask conceptual questions; and as their peer(s) respond, they can understand more correctly and individually the questions. This study adopted quasi-experimental design involving one class consisting of 24 second semester college students at Economics Faculty, Syiah Kuala University, Aceh, Indonesia. The result showed that the technique posed positive result on the students' score in Section Two of TOEFL. The findings revealed that the H_a is accepted for the t_{value} is 0.37 (df 22, $\alpha=0.05$, $-0.404 \leq t \leq 0.404$). Also, it is significant for the sig_{value} is 0.9 ($sig_{value} \geq \alpha=0.05$). Hopefully, the result can contribute to the theoretical gap in the TOEFL domain since there have not been many experimental studies about this technique used in TOEFL class. The technique indeed helps the students in overcoming the problems that they face in the Section Two of TOEFL. Besides, it can also boost their motivation in preparing for the TOEFL test.

Key Words: peer-discussion; structure and written expression; TOEFL test; language test

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari studi ini adalah untuk melihat apakah diskusi dengan teman selama kelas persiapan TOEFL dapat memberi manfaat kepada siswa dalam meningkatkan skor mereka di bagian kedua tes TOEFL, yakni Structure and Written Expression. Seperti dikatakan oleh Porter et al. (2001) bahwa selama proses interaksi dengan teman, siswa mempunyai lebih banyak kesempatan untuk menanyakan pertanyaan konseptual; dan diwaktu mereka merespon, mereka mampu untuk mengerti dengan lebih baik dan secara individu pertanyaan tersebut. Studi ini menggunakan desain quasi-experimental yang melibatkan satu kelas yang terdiri dari 24 siswa dari semester 2 di Fakultas Ekonomi, Universitas Syiah Kuala University, Aceh, Indonesia. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa teknik ini mempunyai hasil positif terhadap skor siswa dalam bagian kedua tes TOEFL. Hasil yang didapat menerima H_a dengan nilai t 0.37 (df 22, $\alpha=0.05$, $-0.404 \leq t \leq 0.404$). Dan hasil ini juga signifikan dengan nilai signifikansi 0.9 ($sig_{value} \geq \alpha=0.05$). Diharapkan hasil dari studi ini dapat memberi kontribusi kepada kajian teoritis dalam karena masih belum banyak studi eksperiment tentang ini dalam pengajaran TOEFL. Teknik ini mampu membantu siswa dalam menghadapi masalah dalam TOEFL di bagian kedua. Di samping itu, teknik ini juga mampu meningkatkan motivasi siswa di dalam menghadapi tes TOEFL.

Kata Kunci: Diskusi dengan tema; structure and written expression; tes TOEFL; tes bahasa

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INTRODUCTION

There are various tests that are utilized to see a person's ability in English. One of them is Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). This test is seen as a high-stake testing in Indonesia. The most possible reason for this is because most English teachers provide easy questions for tests at school so that the students are not familiar with difficult questions (Rosdiana & Ismail, 2017). Hence, there are a lot of courses—even universities—that offer preparation classes for TOEFL. The main purpose of this test is to seek the test-takers' English proficiency in direct and indirect situations, whether spoken or written English. This test is considered important because English has been seen as the worldwide *lingua franca* which is used by academic and non-academic majority all over the world.

For this rationale, most universities, national and international, has stated that TOEFL score is a qualification to finish or to enter a university (Ananda, 2016). TOEFL is known for its language skill tests which are available in three types; they are paper-based, computer-based, and internet-based test. The paper-based test offers three sections—listening, structure and written expression, and reading. This type of TOEFL test was

the one used in this study. In some universities, the Test of Written English (TWE) is also administered to test the writing ability but it is still rare in Indonesia, especially in Aceh. Then, the computer-based and the internet-based tests have more intricate test instruction since they have all skills tested—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Besides, there is also integrated instructional models employed in these two types of TOEFL tests.

On the contrary, the problem was identified based on the author's observation: most TOEFL preparation classes only set "item discussion" as their teaching strategy. In the "item discussion" strategy, the tutor asks the learners to find the answer, and then, the tutor reveals the correct answer with some explanation. This model of learning is teacher-centered and has brought the learners to boredom and they build assumption that it is useless to learn TOEFL. Besides, they are not aware of the starting points and the hallmarks in the discussion. Apparently, a more student-oriented technique was being proposed in this study. It is the peer-discussion technique which involves students to be more active to inquire the knowledge that they need to seek during the process of learning TOEFL. The fact is that most Acehnese TOEFL students are

less proficient, generally in English. It is a profoundly good idea to have the students work on their own, while the tutor only acts as the facilitator. The phrase “less proficient” mentioned is because for advanced learners this technique might not help in enriching their strategies in facing challenges in TOEFL. Or, most advanced students choose to learn in individual mode and they get easily distracted—or even may get disruptive—when boring technique is applied (Ismail, 2016).

Specifically, this study aimed at seeing whether the peer-discussion technique can increase students’ score in TOEFL Section Two: Structure and Written Expression. This techniques has been seen as a self- can best-suit the learners as well as it can fit in with the curriculum applied in the classroom. As directly stated by Pisano & Berger (2016), “peer learning’ as an umbrella concept that encompasses a number of different mechanisms or instruments that support ‘learning’ from and with peers with regard to policies, in our case related to sustainable development” (p. 4). From this quotation, we can be sure that peer work, in this case peer discussion, can be useful for the learners themselves and also the instructors.

A study by Larson, Rydeman, and Hedvall (2012) was employed to find

out three objectives. The first one is to see the roles between the students and teacher during the implementation of peer instruction; second, the way the students collaborate with their peer during the peer instruction mode, and finally, the strategies used to increase students’ learning motivation. There were two courses taken as the data collection process. It was carried out for 20 weeks with two teachers. The results depicted that, first, in the peer interaction process, teachers tried to facilitate the students with best feedback; while among the learners, they can change perspectives among one another; second, the students’ mode in learning is that they try hard to accomplish the tasks that their teacher gave. And finally, the teachers increase the students’ motivation by giving them private feedback, instead of in forum, so that the students can learn the feedback entirely as suggestions without any shameful moments.

Next, it is a study by Zher, Hussein, and Saat (2008) which aimed at enhancing feedback via peer learning in the higher education setting. There were 75 participants as the students and one lecturer with four assistants. They were given three tasks: eportfolio, reflection, and project-based assignments. In collecting the data, the researchers used interviews and questionnaires. The result portrays that

there are a lot of advantages of peer learning, such as the fact that students can see each other's mistakes, accept others' opinion, broaden their perspectives, and be cooperative instead of competitive. Finally presented in this article, a study by Kodabux & Hoolash (2015). This study's objective was to find out lecturers' perspectives on students' schemes of learning since active engagement with the course material can promote deeper understanding of the discussed subject area. Such goals were done in effort through the application of peer learning. The result shows that lecturers assumed that the peer learning can be ineffective because of the inflexibility and more trainings for preparation is needed for more specific tutor-tutee peer learning model.

The scope of this study was to find out whether the Peer-Discussion technique works well in increasing students' score in TOEFL Section Two: Structure and Written Expression. This study is significant since it might give contribution to the theoretical basis that there are lack of studies on Peer-Discussion and other activities in TOEFL Section Two: Structure and Written Expression. Additionally, it is expected that the result can fill that theoretical gap. Practically, it can be a new teaching perception for TOEFL tutors to modify their teaching

techniques in the TOEFL preparation classes.

Departing from the explanation above, a hypothesis was formulated as follows, "*Does peer-discussion increase the students' score in Section Two: Structure and Written Expression of TOEFL?*".

METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental study which was carried out with the pretest-posttest design and it only involved a single group. The data were collected using the instruments of test, which were the pretest at the beginning of the experimentation and the post-test at the end of the process. The result comparison between the pretest and post-test can be seen in the finding section. In addition, the process of the experimentation was carried out for 5 weeks.

There were 24 TOEFL preparation student participants. They were the second semester Economics students at Syiah Kuala University, Aceh, Indonesia. The instrument used was test—pretest and post-test. In both tests, the researcher used 50 questions of Section Two TOEFL which were taken from Sharpe (2008). And for the post-test, there were also 50 questions—but different ones from the pretest—on Structure and Written Expression.

Afterward, the data obtained from both tests were used to determine the normality, homogeneity, and mean score, to eventually be calculated for its t_{value} in attempt to test the hypothesis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The requirements that are needed to be met to prove the hypothesis through t-test are normality, homogeneity, and mean score. They are presented in the following table.

Table 1. *t*-test Requirements

	Pretest	Posttest
Normality (<i>Kolmogorov-smirnov</i>)		0.74
Homogeneity (<i>Levene</i>)		0.32
Mean score	57.3	66.8

The tabel above shows that the data distribution of the pre-test and post-test are normal since the *kolmogorov-smirnov*_{value} is 0.74 which is higher than the degree of freedom $\alpha=0.05$. The normality means that there is no score that lies far away from the mean score, or known as the outliers. Next, homogeneity of the data means that the F_{value} (0.32) is higher than $\alpha=0.05$. Lastly, it can be seen from the mean score that there is an increase in from 57.3 to 66.8 after the Peer-Discussion strategy during the TOEFL preparation (for Section Two: Structure

and Written Expression) was implemented.

Since all of the requirements have been met, so the process of data analysis can be proceeded, and the result of the hypothesis testing is provided in the following table. *Hypothesis Testing* assembles the pre-test and post-test. The hypothesis testing was conducted to configure whether the mean comparison between the pretest and post-test are significantly different or not.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testings

Tests	t_{value}	sig_{value}	H_a	H_0
Pre-post	0.37	0.9	✓	✗

In the Table 2 above, it is shown that in pretest and post-test, the t-test result is 0.37; since t_{table} for df 22 (two-tailed) is within -0.404 and 0.404, so that the t_{value} is still under the critical area and H_a is accepted. To see whether it is significant, the sig_{value} is also provided in the table showing the value of 0.9; the value is considered significant if $sig_{value} \geq \alpha=0.05$. Briefly, the score increase is statistically significant.

There are two points that can be drawn from these results. First, regarding the increase that is gained by the group exposed to the technique of peer-discussion in the TOEFL preparation class, it can be said that

while doing the peer discussion, they can see each others' strengths and weaknesses. As argued by Moore and Teather (2013) that students need to be able to identify their own weaknesses and find ways to bridge the gap. As added by Xia, Fielder, and Siragosa (2013) that there are, indeed, other techniques and strategies in maximizing the result of the students' performance, but it reveals better results when the students work with other students. Statistical measurements also shows that there are more objective judgements and effective evaluation in peer learning process. Besides, this techniques can also create positive environment to all students as it narrows the marginalization between bright and weak students. Furthermore, it is effective to develop academic and social skill; and, it also gives more value toward others' intelligence as well as personal growth and development (Wessel, 2015). Second, this technique can promote learners' higher motivation. Postholm (2010) stated that an interaction with the learning environment is seen as a motive for people to develop themselves, so it is a great idea to build positive culture and environment in the learning environment.

Shortly, there have been a lot of studies on peer-learning and most of

them concluded that peer-learning gives positive contribution, such as building students' skills in communication, critical thinking, and self-confidence. Peer learning was shown to be as effective as the conventional classroom lecturing method in teaching undergraduate nursing students (Stone, Cooper, & Cant, 2013). For instance, in writing skill, learners can learn to correct meanings and ideas as well as provide the feedbacks and corrections (Miftah, 2016). It is helpful for the helpers as much as for the helped students as it depends on both students (helper and helped) to contribute to the process with integrity (Topping, 2005).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

To conclude, this research study has shown some new perspectives that the implementation of social activity such as peer-discussion in TOEFL preparation class is effective to be used to enhance the students' ability in the Section Two of TOEFL, which is Structure and Written Expression. Firstly, this strategy can increase the students' score in the performance test. It is clearly shown in the pretest-posttest score comparison. Secondly, it has also promoted students to be more motivated during the learning process because they can directly share the

challenge that they find during the process with their peers. The suggestion is that this technique is worth to be deliberated for TOEFL instructors on its application in TOEFL preparation classes.

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