The TOEFL Benchmark Policy as Graduation Requirement at Universitas Teuku Umar: Students' Perspective and Belief

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Abstract: Having a good English proficiency is undeniable demand in this globalization era. English proficiency can be measured by English proficiency tests, one of them is TOEFL. TOEFL has become assessment tool to assess English competence and determine exit requirement in higher education. The recent study investigated Universitas Teuku Umar students' perspective to the implementation of TOEFL benchmark score as graduation requirement. The interview from ten students were analyzed descriptively to know the students' believe and perception. The results showed that most students agree with the TOEFL benchmark as graduation requirement however they face obstacles in answering the test. From the interview found that they had difficulties in answering listening and grammar section. This is caused by unfamiliar with foreigner sound and lack of practice. Besides, students felt that the minimum score criteria of TOEFL was not their expectation since most students at Universitas Teuku Umar did not introduce TOEFL from the beginning of study. On the other hand, this policy encourages the students to learn English by searching some materials from internet as well as from the module they got from course. They believe that the TOEFL benchmark policy raises their awareness of learning English and the importance of mastering a foreign language.
Keywords: TOEFL; Benchmark Policy; Graduation Requirement.

Introduction
English is recognized as the most powerful language in the world (Chen, 2002) and is learned as second and foreign language in several countries (Sindkhedkar, 2012). The demand of learning foreign languages is very important in this globalization era. In Higher Education, English is studied as a general subject and also as a language proficiency test. In Indonesia, Test of English as A Foreign Language (TOEFL) is handled by English Language System (ELS), which is known as Institutional TOEFL (Mahmud, 2014). The University carries out the TOEFL-like or TOEFL equivalent test. This may be conducted by language center or language laboratory in the university for internal purpose such as script defense or students' English proficiency test.

TOEFL has been enacted as one of graduation requirements at Universitas Teuku Umar (UTU) since 2018. English is introduced at the beginning of the semester as a general subject. Then, in 2018, UTU declared the new policy for graduate students to pass the TOEFL test for exit requirement. For the tertiary level, especially Universitas Teuku Umar students who are going to do the script examination, they are required to obtain a minimum TOEFL score of 400 for all majors. This is stated in the rector's regulation number 132 / UN59 / EP / 2017 concerning the implementation of the TOEFL score. The implementation of the minimum TOEFL criteria for Teuku Umar University graduates is carried out in stages, namely:
1. 400 for graduates of the 2018 and 2019 academic years
2. 450 for graduates of the academic year 2020 - 2024
3. 475 for graduates of the academic year above 2025.

With the graduation requirements that are still categorized as very low, it is the first step for students to master the TOEFL and can be improved further. Because 2018 is the first year for students to take TOEFL, of course not all students are familiar with TOEFL and of course students find it difficult to achieve the score determined by the campus. In addition, students only learn English as a General Course and the subject is not about TOEFL. TOEFL scores will be required when students will complete their final studies. So, it is not surprising that students are not ready to achieve the expected score because there is not enough TOEFL mastery and introduction. This policy becomes a new challenge for Universitas Teuku Umar students in taking the test for the first time. According to Tsai and Tsou (2009), setting a graduation benchmark seems to be a good way to monitor students' English learning outcomes or to promote the quality of foreign language education. Thus, this is important to know the quality of learners' English learning capacity. As stated by Chen and Lee (2004), students' performances in English at a university should be fully understood in order to determine what can be adopted to assess their English learning outcomes for graduation.

Data from the researchers when teaching TOEFL course for students at Teuku Umar University, most of them get low scores and below the expected scores. This might be caused by lack of grammar knowledge. Besides, students are still not familiar with the TOEFL test. Consequently, Most of them failed to reach the expected scores because students are not used to answering TOEFL test questions. As mention the statement above that students must get the minimal criteria of 400 score. The other problem was the form of questions in the TOEFL test is not the same as the test questions in their English courses.

Some previous studies about the graduation benchmark policy have been conducted by researchers (Chen and Lee, 2004; Tsai & Tsou, 2009; Shih, 2013; Chu & Yeh, 2017; Hsieh, 2017; Netta & Trisnawati, 2019;). A study from Salam, Fergina and Suparjan (2012). They analyzed the TOEFL policy at Universitas Tanjungpura. They found that students had low English proficiency which proven from their TOEFL score. This happened since there was no linguistics environment to support them to learn English. Besides, the absence of continuing English program to help the students in improving English proficiency is the problem from this study. The last problem is the absence of learning facilities such as English book provided at library. It indicates that the students were not ready to face the TOEFL policy at Universitas Tanjungpura. The present study examined the students' washback to the implementation of TOEFL policy as graduation requirement. The objective of this study is to explore the students' perception to the graduation benchmark policy and challenges in taking the TOEFL test.

Method
This is descriptive qualitative research. The data were taken from interview and questionnaire from ten students. Ten students from six faculties participated in this research. They were interviewed and asked about their perception to the implementation of TOEFL as a graduation requirement. The participants experienced to take the TOEFL test and they were senior and completing the script. The data from interview were analyzed into three steps; data reduction, data display and conclusion as stated by Sugiyono (2008). Th first step, the researchers did reduction from interview based on the students' perception whether most of them agree or disagree to the TOEFL policy. The second step, they narrated and simplify the data in form of pattern such as table or percentage. The last step, the researchers conclude the data based on the strong evidence and the previous theories. To get the validity of the data, the data from interview is supported by questionnaire. Questionnaires contain the students' problems in

answering the TOEFL test and their efforts in preparing the test. The questionnaire were adopted from Zuhrayana (2018).

Result and Discussion
Students' Perspective and Believe to TOEFL Benchmark Policy as Graduation Requirement
To answer the research problem, the following table shows the result of this study. The table demonstrates information of the participants.

The Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Variable	Respondents	%
Gender:		
Male	4	40
Female	6	60
Age:		
20	2	20
21	2	20
22	2	20
23	4	40
Major:		
Social and Political Science	2	20
Public Health	2	20
Engineering	1	10
Fisheries and Marine Science	2	20
Agriculture	2	20
Economics	1	10
Year Intake:		
2015	3	30
2016	5	50
2017	2	20
TOEFL Score:		
400	3	30
> 400	7	70

As seen from the table above, the participants were non English major from variant faculties. The age range from 21 to 23 and year intake were from 2015 to 2017. They are in completing the script. Most of them are female students (60%), age of 23 (40%) and year intake of 2016 (50%). Majority of them reached the TOEFL score above 400 (70%).

The data from interview to the students' responses of the implementation of graduation benchmark policy is very positive. It can be showed from the respond from Respondent 1.

> *I am ready with the policy, but the grammar mastery is not very good, but I still have plenty of time to deepen my grammar through practicing TOEFL questions. My goal to learn English is to develop myself in the future, where if I am proficient in English, the future work prospects will be broader and there will be more opportunities to get S2 or S3 scholarships. (Respondent 1)*

Based on the result from interview 1, it can be concluded that they had positive respond to the TOEFL policy, however they got problems in grammar. The student believes that he is able to sharpen the grammar knowledge through practicing and had motivation to learn English to get

the scholarships. It is confirmed a study from Rahma and Setiyana (2020) who seek out the motivation of learning English at tertiary students. They found that University students are affected by instrumental motivation to learn English including to get the scholarship and study abroad. Nevertheless Mahmud (2014) stated that grammar is the most problem for EFL learners when taking the TOEFL test. Based on Mahmud's finding, the students' problems in taking the TOEFL test are they have fewer basic skill in English, less practice and less motivation. While the other respondent also commented:

> *Yes, TOEFL is one of my motivations for learning English because the TOEFL as a graduation requirement can trigger students to learn TOEFL. Besides that, TOEFL is a test that states a person's ability score in understanding or mastering English well. (Respondent 2)*

She had positive response which can be proven that TOEFL motivate her to learn English. She agreed that TOEFL as a graduation requirement yet it can measure someone's English proficiency. It is line with Tsai's and Tsou's statement (2009) that setting a graduation benchmark is a good way to measure students' outcomes in learning English. Based on the result above, majority of Universitas Teuku Umar's students have positive response to the implementation of TOEFL as one of graduation requirement. In other word, the students agree to the policy. The problem is they are not able to master grammar knowledge and other problems mentioned by Mahmud (2014). Therefore in the following explanation is the students' problems in answering the TOEFL test. It is necessary to know the obstacles to get the solution for students.

Students' Challenge in Answering the TOEFL test
To answer the students' perspective from questionnaire, the following table shows the students' problem in answering the TOEFL test. The table presents the students' challenges in answering the listening, structure and reading section.

Table 2. Students' Challenges in Answering the TOEFL Test.

| Problems	Percentage (%)
Problems in answering the TOEFL test: 1. Listening 2. Structure and Written Expression 3. Reading	 66.1 50 12.5

The most difficult part in listening:
  1. Short Dialogue
  2. Long Conversation
  3. Long talk
	
	39.3
	53.6
	37.5

Problems in Answering Listening Part: 1. Speaker Sound Problems 2. Lack of Grammar Understanding 3. Lack of Vocabulary 4. Lack of Dialect Understanding 5. Lack of Idiomatic Understanding	 39.3 26.8 48.2 25 17.9

Problems	Percentage (%)
Problems in Answering Structure & Written Expression Part:	
1. Grammar	48.3
2. Limited Time	28.3
3. Subject and Verb	30
4. Word Form	21.7
5. Tenses	21.7
Problems in Answering Reading Comprehension Part:	
1. Main Idea/ Topic	21.7
2. Vocabulary	20
3. Pronoun Referent	15
4. Unstated Details Questions	30
5. Implied Details Questions	51.7

Based on the table above it can be conclude that most students are difficult to answer the TOEFL in listening past (66.1%) because they mostly had obstacles in longer conversation (53.6%). These are some factors that listening is the most difficult among the other part of the TOEFL test; students chose speaker sound problem (39.3%) and vocabulary problem (48.2%). While obstacles in answering the grammar section are dominantly caused by lack of grammar knowledge. The last problem is from reading comprehension part. Majority of students agreed that implied details question (51.7%) is the hardest question among the other type of reading questions. The table have clearly stated the English Foreign Language Problems in answering the TOEFL test. The study from Zuhrayana (2018) also confirms that listening is the most difficult part for non-English major students because the result from her study state that bad quality of sound system, lack of grammar understanding, vocabulary and idiom understanding are the problems in answering the TOEFL test.

Students' Efforts in Preparing the TOEFL Test
To know the students' preparation in taking the TOEFL Test, the following graph explains the percentage of Universitas Teuku Umar students' effort in taking the test.
Graph 1. Students' Efforts in Preparing the TOEFL test.
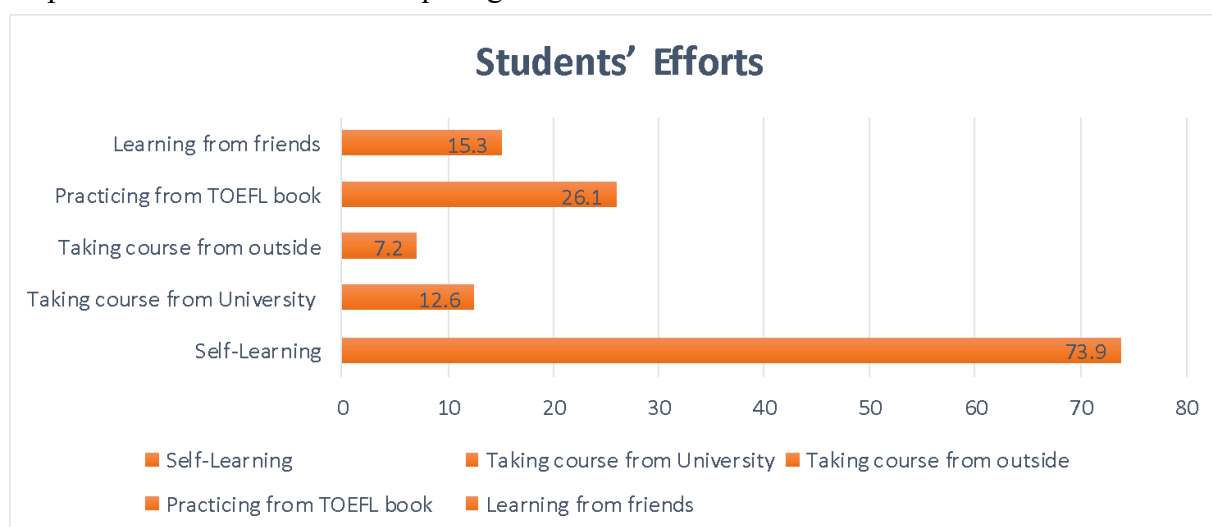
The graph shows that 73% of students learn the TOEFL by themselves. The other efforts are practicing from the TOEFL book (26.1%) and learning from friends (15.3%). Only 12.6 % of

them chose to take course from university and 7.2 % chose to take it from outside. This finding is similar to the study from Netta and Trisnawati (2019) which found that most the EFL students preferred to self-study to prepare for the TOEFL test. They get material from listening to English song and watching movies. In this study, UTU's students seemed to prepare the TOEFL by themselves which involved listening to music and watching the video from internet. This study still has limitation, which is only few participants involve. Thus for future research is expected to do in form of the large participants. However, this study provides the information about students' obstacles in taking the TOEFL test and their response to the implementation of the graduation requirement policy. As mentioned by Tsai and Tsou (2009) that graduation benchmark policy promotes the quality of students' foreign language education.

Conclusion and Recommendation
1. The most difficult in answering the TOEFL test is listening because EFL students are not familiar with English sound and lack of practice.
2. Students agree for this TOEFL benchmark policy, however they are not ready for this policy because of lack of English mastery and lack of facility and linguistics environment support.
3. Students believe that TOEFL test can motivate them to improve English ability and they are aware of the importance of learning English in this era.
4. The University authorities should provide the standard criteria for language center as the TOEFL test implementer such as reasonable facilities and resources.
5. University stakeholder should support this policy.
6. Students are expected to prepare the policy by deepen English skill by self-learning, taking course or building English environment in campus.
7. Further research about TOEFL Policy should be broadened at many other higher institutions in Indonesian context.

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