

# TOEFL Preparation for University Students' Candidates from ASAK Paroki MKK

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**Abstract.** Some private universities in Jakarta use TOEFL or TOEFL-like test as the admission requirement for new students. Therefore, students' candidates should prepare well to achieve the minimum score for being admitted. Unfortunately, their high school did not give enough training in doing the TOEFL test. The purpose of this community development program is to train high school students to do TOEFL test, especially the Reading section. The participants of the program were seven 12th grade high school students who were included in ASAK Paroki MKK community. They were trying to qualify for admission in Binus University. The program was created in the form of classroom teaching and individual assignment. In this program, we taught them about the TOEFL Reading test types, strategies, and tips for doing the test. After the training, the students reported their understanding of TOEFL and confidence in preparing the university admission test.

**Keywords:** TOEFL, Reading, admission test, university, candidates

**Abstract.** Beberapa universitas swasta di Jakarta menggunakan TOEFL atau test mirip TOEFL sebagai syarat penerimaan mahasiswa baru. Karenanya, calon mahasiswa harus mempersiapkan dengan baik untuk mencapai nilai minimum agar bisa diterima. Sayangnya, sekolah menengah atas tidak memberikan pelatihan memadai untuk mengerjakan tes TOEFL. Tujuan program pengabdian masyarakat ini adalah untuk melatih murid SMA untuk mengerjakan tes TOEFL khususnya bagian Reading. Peserta program adalah tujuh siswa SMU kelas 12 yang tergabung dalam komunitas ASAK Paroki MKK. Mereka mencoba untuk dapat diterima di Universitas Binus. Program ini dibuat dalam bentuk pengajaran kelas dan tugas individu. Dalam program ini kami mengajarkan tentang jenis-jenis tes Reading dalam TOEFL, strategi dan tips untuk mengerjakan tes. Setelah training, para pelajar melaporkan bahwa mereka lebih memahami TOEFL dan lebih yakin dalam mempersiapkan ujian masuk universitas.

**Kata kunci:** TOEFL, Reading, tes masuk, universitas, calon mahasiswa

## 1. Introduction

English language has been the first foreign language taught in all schools in Indonesia. In senior high school, English is chosen as one of the subjects to be tested in National Exam (UN), which is used as the consideration for admission in higher education or university level. State universities in Indonesia admit

new students by organizing SNMPTN (Seleksi Nasional Masuk Perguruan Tinggi Negeri) However, private universities such as Bina Nusantara University hold college admission test (tes penerimaan mahasiswa) to accept new students. English is also chosen as the test subject which will determine whether the candidates are eligible or not to become the students of Binus.

The English test in this university is given in the form of TOEFL test because according Kunnan (2008), TOEFL is "arguably the most well-known and widely used large-scale language assessment in the world". TOEFL test is used to identify students who can meet their admission requirements and who are likely to succeed in completing their academic program (Abunawas, 2012). Therefore, besides being used for placement decision, TOEFL test is also used for predicting the candidates' academic success in the university (Kokhan & Lin, 2014).

TOEFL test was created by that Educational Testing Service (ETS) created TOEFL test to measure EFL/ESL students' English proficiency before continuing their education at higher institutions in English speaking countries (Gu, Lockwood, & Powers, 2015). TOEFL test evaluates the English skills of the candidates, i.e. reading, listening, writing and speaking. Testing the students' language skills and linguistic knowledge should be done before a course is begun (Benmostefa, 2008).

However, in the present training program, we only taught the Reading section of the TOEFL because of the time limitation. The objective of program is to guide students' candidates of Bina Nusantara University in doing TOEFL test to prepare them for the admission test to the university. The main reason why this training should be given is that the students have not had similar training from their high schools. In other words, their high schools have not provided enough preparation for their students to enter higher education.

Reading skill is an important skill to success in university level. Webster (2018) defines skill as the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily to execute or perform something. For some people, some skills can come naturally, but for some others skills must be obtained from multiple practices. To obtain this reading skill, strategies for reading must also be learnt and practiced.

In this program, the instructors use the REAP strategy. Cahyaningtyas & Mustadi (2018) researched the effectiveness of REAP as a strategy for comprehending reading and found that it can improve the students ability in understanding the English texts. REAP is the abbreviation of Read, Encode, Annotate and Ponder. Basically, the activities in this strategy consist of activating background knowledge, reading the text silently, identifying important items in the text, and writing the meaning in their own words.

## 2. Method

The participants of this program are 7 high school students of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade from ASAK Paroki MKK. ASAK (Ayo Sekolah Ayo Kuliah) is a non-profit organization managed by Paroki MKK to help the children of low-income families to get proper education. The community development program was given by English Department, Binus University in the form of extracurricular lesson (*bimbingan belajar*) every Saturday. This particular session on 'TOEFL Reading Training' was delivered on Saturday, 22 December 2018, from 10.00 to 12.00 AM. The location for this program was Gedung PSE, Gereja Maria Kusuma Karmel, Jalan Kusuma no 1, Jakarta Barat. The program was funded by ComDev Binus University with the amount of Rp. 1.500.000, -. The materials for this tutorial program were samples of TOEFL reading passage from <http://www.ets.org>.

## 3. Result and Discussion

The training began with Read phase. In this phase, the teacher gave the text to the students and asked the students to read one paragraph loudly, so that the instructor can also guide them if they make mistake in

pronunciation. After all the students had their turn for reading, they were instructed to read the whole passage silently by themselves.

In the second phase, **encode**, the students were told to underline or highlight the vocabulary that they do not understand, and try to encode or decipher the meanings of those words from the context. If they cannot figure the meanings, they could look up the dictionary or discuss them with their friends.

Understanding the vocabulary is important to understand the reading passage as a whole. In this step, the teacher was just circulating and monitoring the students as they worked individually or in group.

The next step, **annotate**, was done together. In this phase, the instructor discussed all the vocabularies that the students had collected in the previous phase. We discussed whether the meanings are suitable in the contexts or not. We also used the students' background knowledge to clarify the meanings of some words. For example, in the first paragraph, the difficult word is 'edifice'. To know its meaning, the context or surrounding words 'a number of massive religious edifices' should be taken into account. The word 'edifice' is related to 'religious' so it can be related to the place for religious affairs. An edifice is actually a large building, so in this context it might be a shrine or a church or a mosque or any other building used for practicing religion.

After all words were discussed, they can annotate or make notes in their paper. In this phase, the instructor asked the students to retell the contents of each paragraph in their own words, to make sure that they understood the passage completely.

The last step, **ponder**, was done by giving the students a series of questions that they have to answer to show their understanding of the passage. However, since the students were not familiar with the types of questions in TOEFL, the exercises were done and discussed together with the whole class.

Below is the complete text for the exercise.

### The Rise of Teotihuacán

1. The city of Teotihuacán, which lay about 50 kilometers northeast of modern-day Mexico City, began its growth by 200 –100 B.C. At its height, between about A.D. 150 and 700, it probably had a population of more than 125,000 people and covered at least 20 square kilometers. It had over 2,000 apartment complexes, a great market, a large number of industrial workshops, an administrative center, a number of massive religious edifices, and a regular grid pattern of streets and buildings. Clearly, much planning and central control were involved in the expansion and ordering of this great metropolis. Moreover, the city had economic and perhaps religious contacts with most parts of Mesoamerica (modern Central America and Mexico).
2. How did this tremendous development take place, and why did it happen in the Teotihuacán Valley? Among the main factors are Teotihuacán's geographic location on a natural trade route to the south and east of the Valley of Mexico, the obsidian<sup>1</sup> resources in the Teotihuacán Valley itself, and the valley's potential for extensive irrigation. The exact role of other factors is much more difficult to pinpoint—for instance, Teotihuacán's religious significance as a shrine, the historical situation in and around the Valley of Mexico toward the end of the first millennium B.C., the ingenuity and foresightedness of Teotihuacán's elite, and, finally, the impact of natural disasters, such as the volcanic eruptions of the late first millennium B.C.
3. This last factor is at least circumstantially implicated in Teotihuacán's rise. Prior to 200 B.C., a number of relatively small centers coexisted in and near the Valley of Mexico. Around this time, the largest of these centers, Cuicuilco, was seriously affected by a volcanic eruption, with much of its agricultural land covered by lava. With Cuicuilco eliminated as a potential rival, any one of a number of relatively modest towns might have emerged as a leading economic and political power in Central Mexico. The archaeological evidence clearly indicates, though, that Teotihuacán was the center that did arise as the predominant force in the area by the first century A.D.
4. It seems likely that Teotihuacán's natural resources—along with the city elite's ability to recognize their potential—gave the city a competitive edge over its neighbors. The valley, like many other places in Mexican and Guatemalan highlands, was rich in obsidian. The hard volcanic stone was a resource that had been in great demand for many years, at least since the rise of the Olmecs (a people who flourished between 1200 and 400 B.C.), and it apparently had a secure market. Moreover, recent research on obsidian tools found at Olmec sites has shown that some of the obsidian obtained by the Olmecs originated near Teotihuacán. Teotihuacán obsidian must have been recognized as a valuable commodity for many centuries before the great city arose.
5. Long-distance trade in obsidian probably gave the elite residents of Teotihuacán access to a wide variety of exotic goods, as well as a relatively prosperous life. Such success may have attracted immigrants to Teotihuacán. In addition, Teotihuacán's elite may have consciously attempted to attract new inhabitants. It is also probable that as early as 200 B.C. Teotihuacán may have achieved some religious significance and its shrine (or shrines) may have served as an additional population magnet. Finally, the growing population was probably fed by increasing the number and size of irrigated fields.
6. The picture of Teotihuacán that emerges is a classic picture of positive feedback among obsidian mining and working, trade, population growth, irrigation, and religious tourism. The thriving obsidian operation, for example, would necessitate more miners, additional manufacturers of obsidian tools, and additional traders to carry the goods to new markets. All this led to increased wealth, which in turn would attract more immigrants to Teotihuacán. The growing power of the elite, who controlled the economy, would give them the means to physically coerce people to move to Teotihuacán and serve as additions to the labor force. More irrigation works would have to be built to feed the growing population, and this resulted in more power and wealth for the elite.

<sup>1</sup> obsidian: a type of volcanic glasslike rock used for manufacturing tools and ceremonial objects.

In this exercise, there are 10 questions that should be answered. TOEFL questions are given in the form of Multiple Choice questions, but based on their contents these questions can be categorized into several types. Each type of question will be described with its sample questions and the strategies to answer them.

The first type is basic comprehension factual information. The purpose of this type is to measure the ability of the test takers to identify responses to questions of factual information which is stated explicitly in the text (ETS, 2003). In this exercise, this type of question appears in questions number 5, 6 and 7.

5. Which of the following allowed Teotihuacán to have "a competitive edge over its neighbors"?

- A. A well-exploited and readily available commodity
- B. The presence of a highly stable elite class
- C. Knowledge derived directly from the Olmecs about the art of toolmaking
- D. Scarce natural resources in nearby areas such as those located in what are now the Guatemalan and Mexican highlands

To answer this kind of question, the readers should read the question and then read the passage/portion to look for clues to the answer (Cohen and Upton, 2006). Besides looking at sentence level, the basic factual question can also be found in paragraph level, as can be seen in question number 6.

6. According to paragraph 4, what has recent research on obsidian tools found at Olmecsites shown?

- A. Obsidian's value was understood only when Teotihuacán became an important city.
- B. The residents of Teotihuacán were sophisticated toolmakers.
- C. The residents of Teotihuacán traded obsidian with the Olmecs as early as 400 B.C.
- D. Some of the obsidian used by the Olmecs came from the area around Teotihuacán

The strategy for answering this question is the same; reader has to read the whole paragraph to find out the factual information from the paragraph.

Factual information question can also take the following format.

7. Select the TWO answer choices that are mentioned in paragraph 5 as being features of Teotihuacán that may have attracted immigrants to the city. **To receive credit, you must select TWO answers.**

- A. The prosperity of the elite
- B. Plenty of available housing
- C. Opportunities for well-paid agricultural employment
- D. The presence of one or more religious shrines

So in this question, examinees are asked to find two correct choices. The strategy to answer this question is by reading the selected passage carefully and identifying the words/phrases that fulfill the criteria.

The second type is comprehension vocabulary item. The purpose of this type is to measure the basic ability of test takers in comprehending meanings of individual words and phrases used in the context of the passage (ETS, 2003). Test takers should choose one of the options that can replace the targeted word without changing the original meaning as stated in the text context. This type can be found in the questions number 2.

2. The word "ingenuity" in paragraph 2 is closest in meaning to:

- A. ambition
- B. sincerity
- C. faith
- D. cleverness

Vocabulary type question can be answered by returning to the question to clarify the meaning, paraphrasing the question then reading the passage/portion and looking for the clues to the answer (Cohen and Upton, 2006).

The third type is negative fact item (also called not/except items). Negative fact items measure test takers ability to validate the which information is true and which one is NOT true or whether the information is not included in the passage or not explicitly stated in the passage. The examinees have to discover the relevant information in the passage and confirm that one of the options is false and the other three options are true (ETS, 2003). In this exercise, this type appears in number 1 and 3 as can be seen below.

1. In paragraph 1, each of the following is mentioned as a feature of the city of Teotihuacán between A.D. 150 and 700 EXCEPT:

- A. regularly arranged streets
- B. several administrative centers spread across the city
- C. many manufacturing workshops
- D. apartment complexes

In item number 1, the question uses the word EXCEPT, that means three options are correct but one option is false. For question number 3, examinees have to find information that is NOT stated explicitly in the passage.

3. Which of the following is NOT mentioned in paragraph 2 as a main factor in the development of Teotihuacán?

- A. The presence of obsidian in the Teotihuacán Valley
- B. The potential for extensive irrigation of Teotihuacán Valley lands
- C. A long period of volcanic inactivity in the Teotihuacán Valley
- D. Teotihuacán's location on a natural trade route

The strategy for answering this type of question is by reading the question carefully, after that read part of the passage to find out the clues to the answer. Finding the clues in the passage can be done before or while considering the option (Cohen and Upton, 2006). Readers can also select the option by way of eliminating unreasonable options or those that cannot be found in the passage.

The next type of question is basic inference item. It is intended to assess the ability of the examinees to understand an idea or an argument which is implied but not stated implicitly in the text (ETS, 2003). For example, if the passage contains an effect, then the question might ask about its cause. In this exercise, basic inference questions occur in question number 4 and 8.

4. What can be inferred from paragraph 3 about Cuicuilco prior to 200 B.C.?

- A. It was a fairly small city until that date.
- B. It was located outside the Valley of Mexico.
- C. It emerged rapidly as an economical and political center.
- D. Its economy relied heavily on agriculture

To answer question number 4, readers should understand the helping word “prior to” which means ‘before’. So, readers should go back to the passage (passage 3) in particular and reread the passage carefully to find out the words or phrases that have similar meaning with the options.

8. In paragraph 6, the author discusses "The thriving obsidian operation," in order to:

- A. explain why manufacturing was the main industry of Teotihuacán
- B. give an example of an industry that took very little time to develop in Teotihuacán
- C. illustrate how several factors influenced each other to make Teotihuacán a powerful and wealthy city
- D. explain how a successful industry can be a source of wealth and a source of conflict at the same time

This question asks for the purpose of discussing the obsidian operation. To answer this question, readers should reread the passage and try to understand the whole context and search for hints to answer (Cohen and Upton, 2003).

The following item type is inference - insert text. The objective of this type is evaluating the ability of the examinees to comprehend the lexical, grammatical and logical connections between consecutive sentences. In this type of question, readers are asked to decide where to place a new sentence into a section of reading shown in the problem (ETS, 2003). This type occurs in question number 9 below.

9. In paragraph 1 of the passage, there is a missing sentence. The paragraph is repeated below and shows four letters (A, B, C, and D) that indicate where the following sentence could be added.

In fact, artifacts and pottery from Teotihuacán have been discovered in sites as faraway as the Mayan lowlands, the Guatemalan highlands, northern Mexico, and the Gulf Coast of Mexico.

Where would the sentence best fit?

The city of Teotihuacán, which lay about 50 kilometers northeast of modern-day Mexico City, began its growth by 200 –100 B.C. At its height, between about A.D. 150 and 700, it probably had a population of more than 125,000 people and covered at least 20 square kilometers. **(A)** It had over 2,000 apartment complexes, a great market, a large number of industrial workshops, an administrative center, a number of massive religious edifices, and a regular grid pattern of streets and buildings. **(B)** Clearly, much planning and central control were involved in the expansion and ordering of this great metropolis. **(C)** Moreover, the city had economic and perhaps religious contacts with most parts of Mesoamerica (modern Central America and Mexico). **(D)**

A. Option A

B. Option B

C. Option C

D. Option D

The strategy for answering this type of question is repeating the question, paraphrasing the missing sentence, translating or summarizing the sentences or the paragraph if necessary in order to improve the comprehension of the sentences (Cohen and Upton, 2006). Moreover, it is also useful to understand the logical connections between the sentences, so that the missing sentence can be inserted in the correct position.

The last type is reading prose summary. In this type of question the examinee should comprehend the major ideas of the text as a whole. The question usually asks the readers to choose three options that can correctly represent the major ideas in the text. These three options will form a summary of the text (ETS, 2003). This type appears in question number 10 below.



**10. Directions:** An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by **selecting the THREE answer choices** that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. **This question is worth 2 points.**

- A. The number and sophistication of the architectural, administrative, commercial, and religious features of Teotihuacán indicate the existence of centralized planning and control.
- B. Teotihuacán may have developed its own specific local religion as a result of the cultural advances made possible by the city's great prosperity.
- C. Several factors may account for Teotihuacán's extraordinary development, including its location, rich natural resources, irrigation potential, intelligent elite, and the misfortune of rival communities.
- D. As a result of its large number of religious shrines, by the first century A.D., Teotihuacán became the most influential religious center in all of Mesoamerica.
- E. In many important areas, from the obsidian industry to religious tourism, Teotihuacán's success and prosperity typified the classic positive feedback cycle.
- F. Although many immigrants settled in Teotihuacán between A.D. 150 and 700, the increasing threat of coerced labor discouraged further settlement and limited Teotihuacán's population growth

In this question, there are six choices, of which three options are the summary of the text. Thus, to answer this question, readers should read all the options and discover the overall meanings of vocabulary, sentences, paragraphs and the whole passage. After all the options have been understood, examinees should throw away the options that are not related or connected with the overall meaning of the passage. Moreover, the discourse structure of the passage should also be taken into account.

After the entire questions have been discussed together, the participants were given time to ponder the answers to these questions individually for about 15 minutes. Then, we discussed the answers together and evaluated the mistakes and strategies of answering the questions.



Figure 1. Students in Read phase



Figure 2. Students doing the exercise

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lama

Nama	Sekolah	Nilai
Michael.k	SMK Yadika 4	14
Yohanes B.	SMU Yadika 4	12
Johanes. S	SMA Budi Murni 2	15
Maria Sheylla	SMAN 57	13
Christian Kelvin S.	SMA Abdi Siswa	12
Amanda ardhia P	SMK YMIK	22
Natalie Ayu R-B	SMA Yadika 1 Duri kepa	9

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Figure 3. List of Participant

#### 4. Conclusion

The Reading TOEFL training that was given to high school students was very beneficial for the students in preparing them to take the university admission test, especially in English test. Through this training, the students have learnt the basic reading skill and especially the strategies for doing English reading test. After the training, the students feel more confident in reading English texts and doing the test.

This program needs to be continued in the future because learning English skills cannot be done occasionally. It should be done continuously to improve the English proficiency of the university student candidates. Moreover, the training can be given for other skills such as listening, speaking and writing.

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