



TOEFL Score Achievement as a Graduation Requirement in the Vocational Institute: Need Analysis on Maritime Institute

Laila Puspitasari Anggraini^{1*}, Nur Patria Pujitama Sari¹

¹Port and Shipping Management Study Program, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Pelayaran Jakarta, Indonesia

*Correspondence to: laila.puspita83@gmail.com

Abstract: The Jakarta Maritime Institute is one of the vocational institutions that has a special requirement for their students to achieve a TOEFL score of >500 in all majors. The TOEFL test is considered normal as a graduation requirement, but in other cases, some students are concerned about the high TOEFL passing score determined by the institution. This study is conducted to analyze whether the TOEFL score with a passing score of 500 needs to be applied to prospective vocational graduates. The data were gathered through questionnaires and interviews from three categories of respondents: level IV students, alumni, and shipping company management as users of fresh graduates from this institution. The result of this study proved that most of the respondents stated the minimum TOEFL test score of 500 was unnecessary for graduation requirements. Therefore, this study concludes that the TOEFL score is considered very difficult for students to achieve. So, the institution, particularly vocational schools, should determine the TOEFL passing grade based on the school's characteristics.

Keywords: TOEFL, graduation requirement, vocational education

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INTRODUCTION

In several ways, English for Specific Purpose (ESP) differs from English for General Purpose (EGP) in comparison. ESP is created to meet the needs of a certain group of learners, whereas GE is less specialized and less constrained (Salazar, 2017). The fundamentals of ESP are included in the curriculum and teaching materials in response to the demands of the students. ESP is an English language instruction method that focuses on the learner's requirements and preferences (Byram & Hu, 2013). Likewise, the ideal technique for Vocational Institute students since it is adapted to their learning style and focuses on their particular needs for vocational training. The ESP course should be concise to increase graduation quality by emphasizing English proficiency in line with what students need and desire in their future employment (Septiana, 2018). It refers to the teaching and learning of English for the goal of employment or higher education. Because of this, students learning English at vocational institutes would have access to materials that students studying English at universities would not have (Byram & Hu, 2013). Grammar and reading abilities are not essential for vocational institutes, but they should be scrutinized more closely in connection with the requirements of the sector in which they are to be found (Aminah & Refaldi, 2020). Its established terminology and distinctive terms, which may aid students in strengthening their educational experience, distinguish the marine English course from other English courses. Maritime English should be divided into two components: General Maritime English (GME) and Specific Maritime English (SME) (Zhang & Cole, 2018).

The various ESP branches, vocational schools, and institutes are the most effective venues for the development of ESP use in Indonesia (Basturkmen, 2010). Universities and vocational institutes are two types of higher education institutions available in Indonesia. Practical courses are more common at vocational colleges than theoretical ones, which is a good thing (Widodo, 2014). As a result, ESP is the mechanism that vocational colleges use to satisfy the language skills requirements of their students. Unfortunately, there are still some reservations concerning the use of extrasensory perception (ESP) in vocational institutions. Following the findings of a recent study, the majority of English instructors frequently use government-issued English course texts, depriving students of the necessary exposure to the language of their futures (Anthony, 2018). The majority of English instructors frequently use government-issued English course texts (Poedjiastutie, 2017).

Another problem with this implementation is similar to the one with the EGP. Indonesia's vocational institutions do not comply with the characteristics of effective learning environments. The curriculum followed by vocational institutes and universities is nearly comparable. The implementation appears to be unusual in vocational schools as a result (Poedjiastutie, 2017). The vocational school must offer students a competent curriculum and evaluation for them to be sufficiently prepared for the area of work that they have selected (Mulyah & Aminatun, 2020). They add this results in the achievement of ESP objectives.

The Maritime Vocational Institute is one of Indonesia's largest vocational schools, with a total enrolment is over 10,000 students. Maritime English is the institute's official second language. Marine English is the language used to communicate in all marine-specific settings, including onboard vessels, between vessels, and the land (Zi-hua, 2015). Marine English is unique from general English even from other branches of ESP; these characteristics are evident in numerous parts, including word usage, grammatical patterns, and spelling systems, among others (Belyaeva, 2015). In the GME, the emphasis is on the fundamental processes of the language, such as speech production, listening comprehension, and oral communication (Basturkmen, 2010). The GME recommends professionals with maritime-related skills focus on English learning rather than other areas of expertise (Khosiyono et al., 2021).

The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is a standardized test for non-native English speakers to determine their English language proficiency. In recent years, the TOEFL exam has become increasingly popular as a graduation requirement, to assess students' English language proficiency. Standardized examinations such as the TOEFL might be used to determine English competence (Raharjo, 2020). Furthermore, the TOEFL represents an accumulation of student learning outcomes and accomplishments in English language proficiency (Ma & Cheng, 2016). It is undeniable that the TOEFL exam is designed to assess a student's competency in English, which is comprised of four skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing, among others. The TOEFL exam is administered towards the conclusion of a study to assess a student's level of achievement, and the result (a certificate) can be utilized for employment entry in either government institutions or private organizations (Erfani, 2014). In addition, TOEFL results have been employed as a prerequisite for graduation in some cases (Astuti & Sudrajat, 2018).

There are many English Proficiency Tests that students in Indonesia take, including the TOEIC, IELTS, and TOEFL. The majority of higher education institutions agree that these assessments are a good instrument for measuring students' English proficiency (Raharjo, 2020). Based on the official, it is possible to take the TOEFL in three different formats: paper-based testing (PBT), computer-based testing (CBT), and internet-based testing (IBT) (ETS, 2023). On top of all that, the TOEFL PBT is a three-part assessment that is available in places where the TOEFL IBT is not offered. In addition to listening and writing abilities that reflect comprehension of English standards, the PBT examines listening, structure, and written expression abilities as well as reading abilities. A thorough evaluation of each of the four abilities will ensure that the exam provides an accurate assessment of an individual's English proficiency. The highest possible TOEFL IBT score is 120. The TOEFL ITP is significantly more affordable in the local industry. The fact of the matter is that this form of TOEFL is becoming increasingly popular and has been well-tested. It is carried out in a less secure environment and combines previously conducted TOEFL English-language tests into the process of certification. Approximately 500,000 ITP tests are conducted annually throughout the world, and the number is increasing (Taufiq & Fedyanto, 2017). Several factors impact the choice of the TOEFL ITP. This is due in large part to the inexpensive cost of the TOEFL as well as its well-deserved reputation for authenticity and dependability.

As vocational institute students, they have the majority of their practical studies focused on a certain sector, such as maritime institutes, which employ a nautical environment to teach English their topic (Septiana, 2018). Additionally, a high TOEFL score implies that they are capable of communicating in English in the future, whether oral or written, for their employment. As a result, it is difficult for students to acquire the 500 TOEFL score that is unrelated to their studies. Furthermore, they are not English Department students. Meanwhile, the TOEFL may be utilized to apply for a job. Even though it is required, the institution does not offer TOEFL as an option for general education or elective credit (Samad et al., 2017). Because of this, many students are unable to perform well on the TOEFL exam. The students have a hard time learning English and don't have a lot of help from the environment (Rahma et al., 2021). Most of them know how important it is to learn English by indicating that they agree TOEFL is a graduation requirement and that studying TOEFL helps them get better grades. According to various research, a TOEFL score of 500 is necessary for students enrolled in the English Department. Meanwhile, students from departments other than the English Department must get a score lower than 500. Students in Indonesia's maritime institutes, on the other hand, are required to achieve a 500-point average to graduate. The purpose of the TOEFL score is to classify students based on their level of English ability. The TOEFL score of 500 indicates that the test takers are proficient in the English language.

In vocational education, English Specific Purpose (ESP) is used to teach students at marine institutes; this type of English is known as Maritime English. Seafarers must have a supply of competent professional competencies as well as communication competencies (in English) to function effectively in the maritime business. When it comes to developing certified seafarers with good communication skills, particularly in English, this fact poses both possibilities and problems for maritime education and training (MET) providers (Dirgeyasa, 2015). It is expected that seafarers would be able to compete with seafarers from other nations across the world if they gain a solid command of the English language throughout their training. Additionally, the International Maritime Organization and Standard Training, Certification, and Watch-keeping for Seafarers 1995 (STCW 1995), which has now been amended to be STCW 2010 (STCW 2010 amendments), requires graduates

of maritime academies to have a high level of English proficiency as a requirement.

Communication abilities are commonly listed as a need for work in the marine business, according to issues. Based on their experience with their sea/land project, (Nicolas, & Fauziningrum, 2018) believe that good communication and listening skills will be essential for their work in the future. Furthermore, listening and speaking abilities are critical for maritime students, because they will be engaging and communicating with one another on a more frequent basis (Dirgeyasa, 2018). The students at the Marine Institute, on the other hand, are better at reading skills than they are at speaking and listening abilities (Nicolas & Fauziningrum, 2018). If one possesses outstanding listening and speaking talents, as well as excellent reading and writing abilities, it is believed that the number of obstacles in the maritime industry would decrease with time. Additionally, it is critical to train competent seafarers and marine sector professionals who have excellent communication skills to protect the maritime industry (English) (Dirgeyasa, 2018). They must compete with other sailors and personnel from other countries to be successful.

As previously indicated, administering the TOEFL test is one method of ensuring students' English language competency among other things. The TOEFL ITP test, which consists of listening comprehension, structure and writing expression, and reading comprehension, is required by most vocational institutes. Indeed, the majority of research has found that communication (oral skills) is essential in the maritime industry. Aside from that, students at the maritime institution who work for the Ministry of Transportation must get a score of 500, which is higher than the national average for other universities. There are several differences between the criterion mentioned and the requirement in the real world in this case. Furthermore, while the TOEFL goal is 500, the majority of higher education institutions need less than 500 for students who do not study in the English Department. Because of this, this research focuses on whether or not students need a TOEFL score of 500 to graduate from a maritime vocational institution and whether or not they are prepared for professions in the maritime industry. This study would find out whether TOEFL with a minimum score of 500 is needed and useful as a graduation requirement for students in vocational institutes, especially in the maritime institutes in Indonesia under the Ministry of Transportation.

METHODS

A descriptive qualitative method was used in this study that carried out to analyze the data by describing the collected data as per real conditions (Sugiyono, 2015). Data collection was carried out by interviews and questionnaires to find out whether the achievement of a TOEFL score with a minimum passing grade of 500 is required as a condition for graduating students in the Maritime Institute of Jakarta (Sugiyono, 2015). This need is expected to be found through some perceptions from students, alumni who worked in the shipping industry, and stakeholders who employ the graduates. The questionnaire set consisted of some items covering participants' perceptions of their TOEFL scores concerning their working performance. The answer requested is only two, agree or disagree, to avoid neutral opinions for the possibility of answering it. In total, 39 questionnaires were shared with the respondents consisting of 7 from the company with the position of HRD, 10 from fresh graduates who had worked for about 1-2 years in the maritime industry, and 19 students of the final level of the semester. Another instrument used was an interview to explore further information obtained in the questionnaire format considering the responses given were too limited to "agree or disagree". Therefore, the respondents in the interview session were the same as in the questionnaires but not all of them were interviewed. Only the ones who considered different answers from the most responses were asked for further confirmation. By these two instruments, the writers collect data from the participants, analyze each response, and compare and contrast them to obtain interpretations. A collection of information would be obtained which can be concluded whether the achievement of a minimum TOEFL score for graduates is very much needed or not due to its strong relevance to their communication performance in the maritime industry.

There were 180 students of 5 classes from the Port and Shipping Management Department in the final semester as prospective graduates who would take a TOEFL test and a minimum score of 500 is required. 25 students were taken by a simple random sampling for this study, which allows to selection of participants for the study randomly (Noor et al., 2022). Only 19 students were involved in data collection. They were asked to fill out the questionnaire. This group was not included in the interview formally because no further information is needed regarding the relevance of their TOEFL test results to their working performance. But in the end, confirmation was done directly due to the results found in the questionnaire were considered doubtful and needed to be questioned further. Ten alumni from different majors and those who work in different shipping companies were also chosen as the participants of this study. They were the Maritime Institutes graduates who had just worked in the shipping industry for 1-2 years since graduation. They also had taken the TOEFL test with a score above 500 and passed the study on time. Nevertheless, only 3 participants were interviewed to corroborate the data due to the lack of detailed information obtained from the questionnaire. About 7 stakeholders were invited to participate in this study by both filling out the questionnaire and interview. The

participants were heads or staff in the Human Resources Department (HRD) of a shipping company and other businesses related to the maritime industry. As it is known the job is to seek potential and qualified candidates to place the applicants in predetermined positions. For this reason, they were expected to provide significant information related to the need for applicants' TOEFL scores when they applied for jobs. The information was quite important as evidence of whether achieving a minimum TOEFL score is necessary or not for graduates and whether it is closely related to their performance in the company where they work.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following are several findings obtained from questionnaires and interview session that consists of three analysis parts.

Table 1. The Result of the Questionnaire to the Students

Question/Option	Percentages	
	Agree	Disagree
The TOEFL score achievement is suitable as a graduation requirement	21	79
The minimum TOEFL score (500) is too high for prospective maritime institute graduate	89	11
The TOEFL test brings benefits to students, especially for applying for the job	15,7	84,3

Table 1 above describes the data collection of Maritime Institute students at the last semester level. Nineteen students were part of the process of completing surveys and conducting interviews. There 79% of students had only taken the TOEFL test once, 16% of students had taken the TOEFL test twice, and about 5% of students had taken the test three times in the last two years. The intensity of experience in doing this test may have an impact on the response to the following questions. This can be proven by all students, who had taken the TOEFL test twice or more than three times in the last two years, about 21% agreed the TOEFL score achievement can be used as a graduation requirement. Further proof was obtained during the interview session, and the participants claimed that their scores had improved the second time they took the TOEFL test. It signifies their consent to administer a TOEFL test as part of their graduation requirements as long as they have many times practices, formally provided by institutions. Yet it was 79% disagreed with this statement. Some believe that the importance of the TOEFL test is only to measure whether or not their English language abilities have improved. For this reason, 15.7% of students agreed that the TOEFL test brought some benefits for students because it was only limited to measuring their ability, not improving their English skills.

Table 2. The Result of the Questionnaire to the Graduates

Question/Option	Percentages	
	Agree	Disagree
The company requires the TOEFL score to be >500 for the applicant	70	30
The company requires the TOEFL certificate from the applicant	50	50
The achievement of a TOEFL score is suitable as a graduation requirement	20	80
The minimum TOEFL score (500) is too high for prospective maritime institute graduate	100	0

10 respondents of alumni were former employees of the shipping company. Table 2 shows that the first response indicated only 50% agreed that a TOEFL certificate was essential when applying for a position with the shipping firm. Following the second response, about 70% of respondents agreed that a TOEFL score was also required in applying for the job. In this case, there was a slightly different trend with the statement from shipping companies which previously indicated that 72% did not require a TOEFL certificate and score in applying for jobs. Therefore, the writers explored the response through interviews with the same respondents, and the statement of the need for a TOEFL certificate was not dependent on their previous work experience or qualifications. All they were doing was assuming that possessing a TOEFL certificate, particularly one with a strong score, would be a factor in their favor when applying for jobs. The results within the scope of difficulty in achieving a minimum TOEFL score of 500 indicated that 100% of alumni agreed and 80% believed it was inappropriately applied as one of the graduation requirements.

Table 3. The Result of the Questionnaire to the Users of Maritime Institute Graduates

Question/Option	Percentages	
	Agree	Disagree
The company requires the TOEFL score to be >500 for the applicant	28	72
The company requires the TOEFL certificate from the applicant	28	72
TOEFL score reflected the employees' English competencies and communication skill	43	57
TOEFL score reflected the employees' work performance	25	75

Data gathered through surveys from seven shipping companies revealed to Human Resources Management that 72% of these organizations did not have applicants to have a TOEFL certificate or a TOEFL score to be considered for a position. Through interviews, it was further confirmed that the company did not require the TOEFL certificate and score, but that if the applicant submitted a document in the form of a TOEFL certificate and the score showed a satisfactory grade, it would be used as an additional point in determining whether or not the applicant would be accepted as an employee of the company. In addition, 57% of shipping organizations agree that the TOEFL score reflects an employee's capacity to communicate effectively in English with international colleagues in a professional setting. This is supported by 75% of shipping companies admitting that a person's English proficiency did not represent his or her knowledge of working in the shipping industry, such as freight forwarding, export-import, sea transportation, and other related fields. It is summed up in [Table 3](#). Based on the results from three categories: students, alumni, and the shipping industry charge persons, it can be revealed that they have the same tendency to a minimum TOEFL score of 500 was extremely tough. It was irrelevant if the minimum score of 500 was used as one of the graduation requirements for those who in their learning program do not discuss the materials related to the general English study deeply. As stated in the study, one of the student's difficulties in taking the TOEFL test is less practice ([Mahmud, 2014](#)). English books used in vocational schools are not associated with the function of a language system ([Sudar, 2018](#)). The teaching-learning process in the vocational school is mostly concerned with systemic functional linguistics. This means that students and teachers use English according to the context situation, in this case, the Maritime context. The curriculum encourages the teacher to lead and provide the learning program in the scope of Maritime English specification.

The importance of learning the English language at a vocational institution does not only focus on the educational side, but also it is very crucial for its use later in the work environment where people are interacting. One of the language teaching aspects is the language testing. TOEFL is the most commonly used language test which is highly recognized as a standard language test in English and has been recognized and respected internationally ([Warfield et al., 2013](#)). Reflecting on the TOEFL as a common language test, the researchers simplified TOEFL as considered normal as a graduation requirement, but the passing grade requirement for a TOEFL score of 500 is not wise to be implemented in vocational schools such as maritime institutes in Indonesia. Moreover, TOEFL scores should not be used in admission/final requirements beyond assessing individual students' English proficiency ([Wait & Gressel, 2009](#)). The need for a student's TOEFL score of 500 may indicate academic succession but does not indicate a person's work performance after they graduate from the institution because the scores do not accurately reflect students' knowledge and skills for their working performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and the discussions, the finding in this study shows that almost all respondents did not agree that the minimum TOEFL score of 500 need to be set to become the requirement of graduation for vocational institute students, especially in maritime studies. A minimum score of TOEFL is clearly not required following the alumni's statement that 100% agreed that the minimum TOEFL score (500) is too high for prospective maritime institute graduates. The implication of this research is as material for consideration for vocational institutes, especially maritime institutes in Indonesia, where required a fairly high TOEFL passing grade without providing benefits to the students themselves after graduation. The impact is also on fairness for students, where they take a test that they have studied in class instead. Besides, students are not eligible to take the remedial TOEFL test to achieve the minimum score.

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