SMK MUHAMMADIYAH BANDA ACEH STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE TOEIC COMPETENCY TEST

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe how students at SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh feel about the TOEIC competency test and pinpoint any obstacles they may have encountered while taking the test. Using the purposive sampling technique, 30 children from class 2 at SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh were chosen as the sample for this study. Two questionnaires were used to gather data. The analysis findings suggest that most students have a favorable opinion on the TOEIC test. They believed that taking the test helped them improve their English, and they would suggest it to others. However, they also struggle to read test texts, comprehend challenging terms and settings, and respond to questions. Additionally, some students lacked confidence and were unfamiliar with the test question styles. This study found that the TOEIC test has a good effect, but also highlights the difficulties that students experience. The recommendations include improving students' comprehension of exam instructions, addressing issues by understanding challenging terms and circumstances, and offering assistance to increase students' confidence. The TOEIC test and more efficient methods of English language instruction were predicted to benefit from the findings of this study.

Keywords: *Student difficulty; student perception; SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh*; *TOEIC test*

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menggambarkan bagaimana perasaan siswa di SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh tentang uji kompetensi TOEIC dan menunjukkan dengan tepat hambatan yang mungkin mereka temui saat mengikuti tes. Dengan menggunakan teknik purposive sampling, dipilih 30 anak kelas 2 SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh sebagai sampel penelitian ini. Dua kuesioner digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data. Temuan analisis menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa memiliki pendapat yang baik tentang tes TOEIC. Mereka percaya bahwa mengikuti tes membantu mereka meningkatkan bahasa Inggris mereka, dan mereka akan menyarankannya kepada orang lain. Namun, mereka juga berjuang untuk membaca teks tes, memahami istilah dan pengaturan yang menantang, dan menanggapi pertanyaan. Selain itu, beberapa siswa kurang percaya diri dan tidak terbiasa dengan gaya pertanyaan tes. Studi ini menemukan bahwa tes TOEIC memiliki efek yang baik, tetapi juga menyoroti kesulitan yang dialami siswa. Rekomendasi tersebut termasuk meningkatkan pemahaman siswa tentang instruksi ujian, mengatasi masalah dengan memahami syarat dan keadaan yang menantang, dan menawarkan bantuan untuk meningkatkan kepercayaan diri siswa. Tes TOEIC dan metode pengajaran bahasa Inggris yang lebih efisien diprediksi akan mendapat manfaat dari temuan penelitian ini.

Kata Kunci: *Kesulitan siswa; persepsi siswa; SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh; Tes TOEIC*

INTRODUCTION

English is an essential global language in the professional world. Many companies and organizations require employees to communicate effectively in English. Consequently, numerous vocational high school (SMK) students in Indonesia take the TOEIC test as part of their preparation to enter the workforce. The TOEIC test can assist SMK students in improving their English language skills and in enhancing their prospects for securing good jobs. Proficiency in foreign languages, particularly English, is crucial for supporting competitiveness in the global job market that SMK students are aware of.

To support students' foreign language abilities, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia will implement international TOEIC certifications for SMK students in Indonesia. This program was an effort by the Ministry of Education and Culture to prepare superior human resources in Indonesia, aligning with the government's overarching plans. However, Wijayanti et al. (2022) in her research claimed that the TOEIC is unquestionably not the same as the standard final test taken by students in trade schools. Additionally, it was the first time a vocational school held the event in conjunction with a new period and new educational policy. Consequently, students need to prepare more for this event.

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is an English language test used in Indonesian vocational schools. TOEIC assesses English language proficiency. According to (Fauziati, 2016), the TOEIC is specifically designed to measure English language abilities for everyday communication in international work environments. Currently, implementing English language tests in schools or educational institutions is an effective strategy for improving students' English language skills as it serves as a benchmark for researchers and workers worldwide (Zahruni et al., 2020).

For SMK students, achieving a satisfactory TOEIC score opens up opportunities to compete in the job market at both national and international levels. Therefore, it is crucial that SMK students familiarize themselves with and master the TOEIC competency test. They were expected to understand the steps they could take to achieve their desired scores and the benefits of the test. However, there is often a discrepancy in perception between SMK students and the TOEIC test. Some students view the TOEIC test as challenging and irrelevant to their chosen major or profession. Others felt unprepared or inexperienced when facing the test due to a lack of preparation or understanding of the test format and question types. As shown by Zahruni et al. (2020), the TOEIC test has a number of issues with students' views. There were issues with vocabulary, comprehension of the TOEIC test questions, and strange voices in the listening segment.

Furthermore, in practice, not all SMK students perceive the TOEIC test as important or relevant to their desired future career. Some students may consider the test too difficult and not particularly useful in their field of interest. Some may also feel that preparing for the TOEIC test requires significant time and expenses. Divergent perceptions of SMK students regarding the TOEIC competency test can impact the quality and effectiveness of SMK education. Students who lack motivation or feel unprepared for the TOEIC test may struggle to achieve good

scores and face challenges in meeting graduation requirements or securing their desired jobs after graduation.

Although studies have addressed students' general views on English language proficiency tests, the specific perceptions of SMK students towards the TOEIC test, especially in the context of the new educational policy and the distinct challenges faced by vocational students, remain under-researched. This study seeks to address this particular gap. Therefore, this research aimed to explore SMK students' perceptions of the TOEIC test. By understanding the nuanced views and challenges faced by these students, this study offers fresh insights that have been previously overlooked. It is anticipated that the findings will not only shed light on why some SMK students may not prioritize TOEIC preparation, but also provide actionable recommendations for educators and policymakers to better align the TOEIC competency test with the needs and aspirations of SMK students. Through this research, a bridge is constructed between the existing body of knowledge and the unique perspective of SMK students in the context of Indonesia's evolving educational landscape.

Literature review

TOEIC stands for Test of English for International Communication, which is an English language test for communication purposes. TOEIC is a globally recognized assessment that provides an equitable and accurate measure of listening and reading skills in English, specifically tailored for professional environments (Hoang et al., 2021). The purpose of this test is to measure an individual's English language proficiency, which can be used for job applications abroad. According to Fauzi (2020), TOEIC is used to secure better employment opportunities in English-speaking countries. TOEIC is also utilized for job applications, and many educational institutions, particularly vocational schools and polytechnics, incorporate this standardized test as part of their graduation requirements. Zahruni et al. (2020) add that the majority of schools in Indonesia, including vocational schools, use this test. Therefore, TOEIC is designed for non-native English speakers to assess their communication skills in English for business, trade, and industry (Dari & Zasrianita, 2021).

The TOEIC test consists of two separate sections: the first assesses receptive English skills (Listening and Reading), and the second assesses productive English skills (Speaking and Writing). Students can choose to take both sections or only one, depending on their needs (Education First, n.d.). Each test has a unique structure and different evaluation methods. However, in this text, the focus is on the receptive skills, namely Listening and Reading. Fauzi (2020) states that Listening is one of the language skills taught in vocational high schools. Listening is a crucial oral skill taught to vocational students for effective communication and career preparation after graduation. The listening section of the TOEIC test evaluates how well test takers understand English speakers. This section consists of four parts with 100 questions that are listened to through a cassette or CD within a time limit of 45 minutes (ETS, 2008).

On the other hand, reading comprehension, according to OxfordOwl (n.d.), refers to the ability to read, analyze, and understand literature. It depends on two interconnected skills: language comprehension and word reading (the ability to

interpret symbols on the page) (the ability to understand the meaning of words and sentences). The reading section of the TOEIC test is divided into three parts, examining how test participants comprehend written English texts. Participants will read various texts and answer 100 questions based on the content of the given texts within a total time limit of 75 minutes (ETS, 2008).

Challenges in Listening

Listening is one of the most difficult skills for non-native English speakers, especially in English tests. A language student frequently encounters challenges in listening when trying to comprehend a new language. The most significant issue with listening comprehension stems from the unique attributes of spoken language, particularly the representation of sound (Kurniawan & Sardison, 2016). Anandapong, cited by Rugsakorn et al. (n.d.), states that the challenges faced in listening can be attributed to inadequate auditory abilities of test takers and poor quality of audio media. Sarair et al. (2022) mention several obstacles experienced by test participants in the listening comprehension section, such as their inability to understand native speakers whose pronunciation differs from their own, their difficulty in comprehension due to fast-paced speech, and encountering unfamiliar topics or terms. Chonprakai, noted by Rugsakorn et al. (n.d.), also adds that test takers struggle to differentiate sounds or identify the main ideas in listening due to the fast pace of the recording. (Nurani & Widiati, 2021) highlight the complexity of the listening learning process and emphasize the importance of creating a comfortable and enjoyable environment for students to effectively engage with it. Fauzi (2020) also added that students often face challenges in listening comprehension, particularly when exposed to English listening tasks. They struggle to accurately perceive the sounds of the native language and rely on understanding key words for comprehension. While they can comprehend slower speech, they find it difficult to understand fast, natural native-sounding speech. They require multiple repetitions to grasp the content and tend to experience fatigue and decreased concentration during prolonged listening activities.

Dari & Zasrianita (2021) claim, based on their research, that the challenges faced by students in participating in a listening test include their lack of understanding of the content being played, their lack of focus while listening to the audio, and their inability to comprehend the topic of short conversations in the audio. Diora & Rosa (2020) mention several challenges in listening comprehension, including difficulty of complex grammatical structures, challenge of understanding every word heard, challenge of digesting the meaning of lengthy spoken texts, and challenge of comprehending what the speaker is saying when the topic is unfamiliar to them. Amir et al. (2019) inform that students often complain about the recordings being too fast and not being able to replay the audio. They feel overwhelmed by unfamiliar words, which hampers their understanding of the speaker's intention or message. Another challenge is the level of concentration, where students feel nervous and under pressure, which affects their listening ability.

Challenges in Reading

Several studies highlight the important role of reading in the EFL classroom as a crucial academic skill that enables students to acquire new knowledge in various

subjects and develop diverse perspectives through interpretation (Novitasari et al., 2021). Additionally, Sari et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of reading for students in terms of developing their English language skills. Engaging in reading activities allows students to enhance their understanding of content and grasp the main ideas presented in texts. However, despite the significance of reading, English educators nationwide face challenges with students lacking the essential skills needed to comprehend English texts (Novitasari et al., 2021). Dari & Zasrianita (2021) further argue that students encounter difficulties not only in listening but also in reading. Specifically, students struggle with understanding the material being tested, including unfamiliar vocabulary and comprehension of reading test questions, leading them to rely more on guessing rather than analyzing the questions and answers. Furthermore, among the three types of reading test questions, they find error recognition questions particularly challenging because answering those questions requires a thorough understanding of the question's meaning and grammar. Bhakti et al. (2022) add that students face obstacles in comprehending reading texts due to a lack of interest in reading, unawareness of reading strategies, limited vocabulary knowledge, and lengthy texts that make students bored.

Nurmalasari & Haryudin (2021) claim in their research that almost all students do not understand the discussed texts, and some of them struggle to comprehend the intended questions. Nurmalasari & Haryudin (2021) also add that students lack grammar proficiency, so when they attempt to translate each sentence, they find it difficult to organize the meaning of each word and extract information from a sentence. This is why students require multiple attempts to interpret just one paragraph of text. Abeeleh et al. (2021) also points out that environmental conditions influence learners' attempts to comprehend a reading text.

METHOD

The primary objective of this study was to delve into the viewpoints of second-grade students from Muhammadiyah Vocational High School in Banda Aceh regarding the TOEIC test, specifically focusing on their perceptions and the hurdles they confront during the test. We selected 30 students through purposive sampling, a decision swayed by their imminent long vacation in May 2023, which made them more accessible for the study. Recognizing that many had not previously engaged with the TOEIC test, it was administered before handing out the questionnaires to gauge their experience and feedback. The key tool for gathering data was a structured questionnaire, bifurcated into two sections: the first ten questions gauged their viewpoints about the TOEIC, while questions 11-20 aimed to understand the obstacles they faced. To ensure clarity and comprehension, the questionnaire was rendered in Indonesian. Once the data was collated, a descriptive narrative approach was employed to sift through and understand the nuances of the students' feedback and challenges related to the TOEIC test. The 20 questions were distilled into 9 distinct categories for a more streamlined interpretation. The outcomes from this exploration are poised to offer critical insights for educational institutions and educators. These insights will be instrumental in enhancing

preparatory approaches for the TOEIC and in crafting pedagogical tools to navigate through the identified challenges.

Table 1. The classification of the questionnaire

No	Indicators	Statements	Item No.
1	Awareness and familiarity	Had ever heard the TOEIC test before	1a
		Had taken the TOEIC test before	2a
2	Preparation and practice	The frequency of practice English before taking the test	3a
		Kind of resources before taking the test	8a
		How prepared before taking the test	9a
3	Confidence and perception	The confident of English ability before taking the test	4a
		The accuracy of TOEIC test as a measurement for someone's English proficiency	5a
4	Impact and Recommendation	Opinion on TOEIC test helps improve the English skills	6a
		Recommendation of TOEIC test for friends and family to measure their English proficiency	7a
		The important of TOEIC test for future career prospect	10a
5	Comprehension of instructions and accent	Facing difficulties in understanding the test instruction	1b
		Facing difficulties in understanding English accents used in the test	4b
6	Time management and test duration	Time given in the test is sufficient enough	2b
7	Difficulty in answering questions	Difficulty in answering TOEIC test questions	3b
		Difficulty to understand the difficult words in the test	5b
		Difficulty to understand the context or situation in the test	6b
		Difficulty to understand the texts or reading materials in the test	7b
8	Lack of confidence and unfamiliarity	Lack of confidence when taking the test	8b
		Unfamiliar with the types of questions given in test	9b
9	Other factors	Other factors that make difficult when taking the test	10b
		Kinds of factors that make difficult	11b

FINDINGS

The present study aimed to investigate students' preparation and experience with the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) test at SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh. The TOEIC test is widely recognized as a measure of English language proficiency and is often utilized for academic and professional purposes. Through a descriptive narrative analysis, this research sought to gain insights into students' perceptions, level of preparation, and the challenges they faced during the TOEIC test. The findings contribute to a better understanding of students' perspectives and provide valuable implications for enhancing test preparation strategies and addressing the difficulties encountered in taking the TOEIC test.

Students' perception of the TOEIC Test

Here are some viewpoints and perspectives of TOEIC test takers from vocational high school students.

Table 2. Awareness and familiarity

No	Statements	Responses	
		Yes	No
1a	Have you heard of the TOEIC test before?	17%	83%
2a	Have you taken the TOEIC test before?		100%

The data reveals that 17% of the respondents claim to have heard about the TOEIC test before, while the majority, accounting for 83% of the respondents, have never heard of it. This finding suggests that a small portion of the participants had some prior knowledge or exposure to the TOEIC test, while the majority were unfamiliar with it. The data provided indicates that 17% of the respondents claim to have prior knowledge of the TOEIC test, while the majority, comprising 83% of the respondents, have never heard of it before. This finding suggests that a small portion of the participants had some familiarity with the TOEIC test, while the majority were completely unaware of its existence. However, it is important to note that the questionnaire results show that all respondents (100%) stated that they have taken the TOEIC test. This result can be attributed to the methodology employed in the study, where the researcher administered the TOEIC test to the participants before administering the questionnaire. By doing so, the researcher ensured that all participants had the opportunity to experience the TOEIC test firsthand, allowing them to have a better understanding of what the TOEIC test entails. This approach not only familiarized the students with the test but also provided them with the necessary context to provide informed responses to the questionnaire. Therefore, the finding that all respondents claim to have taken the TOEIC test can be attributed to the preparatory measure taken by the researcher, which enabled the students to become acquainted with the nature of the TOEIC test.

Table 3. Preparation and practice

No	Statements	Responses			
3a	How often did you practice English before taking the TOEIC test?	less than 1 hour per week	between 1-3 hours per week	between 4-6 hours per week	more than 6 hours per week
		47%	50%	0%	3.3%
8a	What resources do you use to prepare before taking the TOEIC Test?	English books	Online materials	English App	Not using any resources
		53%	3.3%	13%	30%
9a	What is your level of preparation for the TOEIC Test?	Highly prepared	Quite ready	not very prepared	Not prepared at all
		20%	33%	40%	6.7%

The data presents important insights regarding the English language training and preparation of the respondents for the TOEIC test. The majority of respondents practiced English for 1-3 hours per week, with a small percentage dedicating more extensive time to language practice. English books were the most commonly used

resource, but a significant portion of respondents did not utilize any resources, and only a few relied on online materials.

In terms of readiness, a considerable proportion of respondents expressed feelings of unpreparedness or uncertainty. This highlights the need for more structured and consistent language training to improve readiness levels. Additionally, the variation in readiness levels emphasizes the importance of addressing individual needs and providing adequate support to enhance confidence and preparedness.

The findings underscore the importance of increasing the intensity and variety of English language training among the respondents. It is essential to introduce diverse learning materials and strategies to complement the use of English books. By addressing the concerns and improving readiness levels, a more confident and well-prepared test-taking experience can be achieved.

Table 4. Confidence and perception

No	Statements	Responses	
4a	What is your confidence level in your English skills when taking the TOEIC test?	Confident 70%	Not so confident 30%
5a	Do you think the TOIEC test is an accurate measurement of a person's English skills?	Yes 77%	No 23%

The data obtained from the questionnaire provides valuable insights into the confidence levels and perceptions of the respondents regarding the TOEIC test. The majority of participants, accounting for 70%, expressed confidence in their English language skills during the TOEIC test, while 30% reported feeling less confident. This indicates that while a significant portion of the respondents felt assured in their language abilities, there is still a notable percentage who experienced doubts or lacked confidence.

Additionally, when asked about their perception of the TOEIC test as an accurate measure of English language proficiency, the majority of respondents (77%) agreed that the test effectively evaluates one's language abilities. This suggests a widespread belief in the validity and reliability of the TOEIC test for assessing English language skills. However, it is important to note that 23% of the respondents disagreed with this view, indicating varying perspectives and levels of skepticism regarding the test's accuracy.

These findings highlight the diverse range of perspectives among the respondents concerning their confidence levels and perceptions of the TOEIC test. While a significant proportion expressed confidence in their language abilities and considered the test to be an accurate measure, there were still participants who felt less confident or held reservations about its effectiveness. These results emphasize the importance of addressing individual differences in confidence and perceptions when designing and administering language proficiency tests like the TOEIC, as it greatly influences the test-takers' experience and overall evaluation.

Table 5. Impact and recommendation

No	Statements	Responses	
6a		Yes	No

	Do you feel the TOEIC Test helps improve your English skills?	70%	30%
7a	Would you recommend the TOEIC Test to friends or family who want to measure their English skills?	Yes	No
		60%	40%
10a	How important do you think the TOEIC Test is for your future career prospects?	Significant	Insignificant
		93%	3%

The information offered sheds light on the respondents' perceptions of the TOEIC test, its effects on their language abilities, and their hopes for the future. The TOEIC test is perceived as being successful by a large majority of responders (70%) who feel that it helps them enhance their English language skills. However, 30% of respondents do not hold the same attitude, indicating that individuals may have different experiences or viewpoints.

Additionally, more than half of the respondents (60%) said they would be happy to advise people to take the TOEIC test if they wanted to gauge their English language skills, which is a strong indication of the test's reliability and value. Furthermore, a sizable majority (97%) believes that the TOEIC test will be crucial for their future professional activities since they understand how vital it is for establishing language competency and expanding employment options. However, a tiny percentage (3%), demonstrating varied opinions on the test's significance to their professional objectives, believes it to be less significant.

As a whole, the data shows that respondents have a largely favorable opinion of the TOEIC test, with the majority of them agreeing that it has the ability to increase language proficiency, endorsing it to others, and considering it essential for future employment possibilities. These results highlight the importance of the TOEIC test for professional success and language acquisition.

Difficulties encountered by students while undertaking the TOEIC test

The following are some variables that can make it challenging for students in vocational high schools to take the TOEIC test.

Table 6. Comprehension of instruction and accent

No	Statements	Responses	
		Yes	No
1b	Are you facing difficulties in understanding the TOEIC Test instructions?	70%	30%
4b	Do you find it difficult to understand the English accent used in the TOEIC Test?	50%	50%

The information provided emphasizes the challenges respondents encountered when taking the TOEIC test, particularly while trying to understand instructions and English dialects. The majority of respondents (70%) reported difficulty understanding the test instructions, suggesting that the instructions' complexity or clarity may have an impact on their performance. Additionally, while

the other half did not notice any faults, 50% of the respondents said it was difficult to comprehend the English accents utilized in the test.

To maintain fairness and accuracy in determining language competency, these findings highlight the significance of giving clear and understandable instructions in the TOEIC test. Additionally, given the wide variety of accents utilized, it can be advantageous to expose test-takers to several accents during preparation to enhance their listening and understanding abilities.

The data reveals that a significant portion of the respondents faced challenges with instructions and English accents in the TOEIC test. These insights highlight the need for test developers to prioritize clear instructions and consider the diversity of accents to create a more inclusive and effective testing experience for all participants.

Table 7. Time management and test duration

No	Statement	Responses	
		Yes	No
2b	Do you feel that the time allotted for the TOEIC Test is sufficient?	63%	37%

The study's data makes it possible to understand how respondents felt about the time allotted for the TOEIC test. While 37% of participants thought the provided time was insufficient, the majority of participants (63%) thought it was acceptable. This result implies that most test-takers were able to comfortably complete the test within the allotted time, demonstrating a good fit between the test's time limit and the target population's skills.

However, it's possible that the 37% of respondents who felt that the allotted time wasn't enough had trouble finishing the test in the allotted time. As showed in Zahruni et al. (2020)'s research that one difficulty encountered by students during the TOEIC test is accurately managing their allotted time. The difficulty of the test questions, the requisite reading or listening comprehension speed, or certain test-taking techniques may all have an impact on how this impression is formed. In order to effectively create and administer the TOEIC test, it is crucial for test creators and administrators to take these findings into account. For a fair and accurate evaluation of test participants' language proficiency, it is essential to make sure that most of them believe they have enough time to complete the task at hand. Furthermore, it could be advantageous to pinpoint the precise locations where test-takers encountered time-related difficulties and, if necessary, modify the test's format or question types to ease any time restrictions.

The data indicates that the majority of respondents thought the time allotted for the TOEIC test was adequate, while a minority thought it was insufficient. These observations highlight how crucial it is to carefully analyze the test's time component and make necessary adjustments to make sure that test-takers have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their language proficiency within the allotted time.

Table 8. Difficulty in answering questions

No	Statement	Responses	
		Yes	No
3b	Do you find it difficult to answer the TOEIC Test questions?	77%	23%

5b	Do you find it difficult to understand difficult words used in the TOEIC Test?	70%	30%
6b	Do you find it difficult to understand the context or situation used in the TOEIC Test?	60%	40%
7b	Do you find it difficult to understand texts or reading materials in the TOEIC Test?	47%	53%

The information illustrates the difficulties that test takers encountered during the TOEIC. 77% of test takers reported having trouble responding to the questions, and 70% had trouble understanding the difficult vocabulary. Additionally, 53% of the participants had trouble understanding the reading materials, and 60% had trouble understanding the context or situation that was presented during the test. These findings draw attention to frequent areas of difficulties, such as reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and context understanding.

These revelations highlight the necessity for test designers and administrators to take these difficulties into account when creating and evaluating the test. It is imperative to address language complexity, offer suitable help and resources, and guarantee a fair and accurate evaluation of English competence. Test takers can improve their chances of showcasing their language abilities on the TOEIC test by recognizing and overcoming these challenges.

In result, the data shows that a sizeable percentage of respondents encountered difficulties with a variety of TOEIC test components. This underlines how crucial it is to offer resources and support in order to deal with these issues and guarantee a fair testing experience.

Table 9. Lack of confidence and unfamiliarity

No	Statement	Responses	
		Yes	No
8b	Do you feel less confident when taking the TOEIC Test?	47%	53%
9b	Do you feel unfamiliar with the types of questions given in the TOEIC Test?	63%	37%

The information offers perceptions into respondents' degrees of confidence and comfort with different question categories during the TOEIC test. It shows that while 53% of respondents said they felt sufficiently confident, 47% of respondents reported feeling less confidence during the test. This shows a sizable percentage of test takers had low confidence in their proficiency in the English language, which may have affected their results.

In addition, 37% of respondents said they were familiar with the question formats used in the TOEIC test, while 63% said they were less familiar. This suggests that a large percentage of test-takers were unfamiliar with the exact question formats and structures utilized on the exam, which may have made it more challenging for them to comprehend and react correctly.

These results underline how crucial it is to boost test-takers' self-assurance and familiarize them with the TOEIC test's question kinds. Effective preparation, tools that help individuals become comfortable with question styles, advice, and practice opportunities that are tailored to the specific question kinds are essential.

By doing this, test takers can increase their level of comfort, confidence, and readiness for questions of a similar nature on the actual exam.

The research emphasizes the necessity to boost test-takers' confidence levels and acquaint them with the TOEIC test's question patterns, as a conclusion. By giving them the right materials and support, you may improve their performance and get more precise English language proficiency measurements.

Table 10. Other factors

No	Statements	Responses			
10b	Are there any other factors that make you feel difficult when taking the TOEIC Test? If so, what factors caused the difficulty?	Lack of preparation	Lack of understanding of the English language	Lack of time provided to prepare	Cannot understand TOEIC Test instructions well
		37%	57%	3%	3%

The data offers understanding into the elements causing the challenges faced by test takers during the TOEIC exam. The necessity of thoroughly preparing for the test is demonstrated by the fact that a sizable majority of respondents blamed their difficulties on a lack of preparation. The majority of test-takers also had trouble understanding English, notably in the areas of vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. Time restraints and difficulties comprehending the test instructions were also noted as contributing concerns.

Enhancing preparation efforts by offering direction, practice materials, and time management techniques is essential to overcoming these challenges. It is also crucial to increase English language proficiency through focused practice and instruction. Test takers can benefit from clear and concise instructions as well as test-taking techniques to better grasp the test requirements. Another crucial factor is allotting enough time for preparation.

The key to minimizing difficulty in the TOEIC test is addressing the factors of inadequate preparation and English language comprehension, as well as time restraints and difficulties interpreting instructions. Test takers' readiness and performance can be greatly enhanced by employing efficient study methods, language teaching, time management assistance, and clear instructions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the familiarity and test-taking experience of students at SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh regarding the TOEIC test. The data revealed that a small proportion of the respondents (17%) claimed to have heard about the TOEIC test before, indicating some prior exposure or knowledge. However, the majority of participants (83%) were completely unfamiliar with the TOEIC test, suggesting that it is relatively new to students at the school. This issue parallels the conclusions of (Purnama et al., 2019) which highlights a problem at SMK Negeri Dander, where an established culture of literacy, specifically English language literacy, is lacking. The introduction and habitual use of English and TOEIC can be advocated via the GLS (Literacy Movement School). The

objective of this initiative is to promote reading and writing habits among students. In this campaign, students are expected to familiarize themselves with TOEIC materials, understand them thoroughly, and practice with TOEIC questions. Another challenge for SMK Negeri Dander, situated in Dander District, Bojonegoro Regency, is the absence of prior training sessions focusing on TOEIC questions.

Interestingly, all respondents (100%) reported that they have taken the TOEIC test, which may seem contradictory to the earlier finding of their limited prior knowledge. This apparent inconsistency can be attributed to the study's methodology, where the TOEIC test was administered to all participants before the questionnaire. By doing so, the researcher ensured that all students had the opportunity to experience the TOEIC test firsthand, providing them with a better understanding of its content and structure. This approach aimed to familiarize the students with the test and enable them to provide informed responses to the questionnaire. Therefore, the finding that all respondents claimed to have taken the TOEIC test can be attributed to the preparatory measure taken by the researcher, which facilitated the students' acquaintance with the nature of the TOEIC test.

Moreover, the data indicated that most students (83%) had never heard of the TOEIC test before. This finding highlights the need for increased awareness and information dissemination regarding the TOEIC test among students at SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh. Educators and policymakers should consider implementing initiatives to introduce the TOEIC test to students, as it can provide valuable insights into their English language proficiency and enhance their future career prospects.

Additionally, it was revealed that students' preparation for the TOEIC test was relatively limited, with most students (83%) practicing English for only 1-3 hours per week. This finding suggests that students should allocate more time and effort to prepare for the TOEIC test, as a more rigorous and extensive preparation may contribute to better performance and outcomes. (Zakaria et al., 2017) in their research mentioned that the typical study duration for students at the State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya, barring those in the English department, is two hours per week. Nonetheless, dedicating just two hours per week to learning English might not be sufficient to yield satisfactory outcomes in terms of TOEIC scores. Implementing structured TOEIC test preparation programs, offering additional resources, and encouraging students to engage in regular English practice can be potential strategies to address this issue. Iswati (2019) suggested that students should enhance their skills through TOEIC training, which would equip them with strategies and tips for succeeding in the TOEIC test, improve their English communication skills in relation to professional environments, and also provide motivation for students to learn English. This would bolster their confidence in using English and in tackling TOEIC questions.

The study also explored students' perceptions of the TOEIC test as an assessment of English proficiency and its impact on their overall language ability. The majority of students (83%) believed that the TOEIC test accurately measures English proficiency, indicating their recognition of its validity as an assessment tool. Furthermore, most students (83%) acknowledged the value of the TOEIC test in enhancing their English language skills, affirming its positive influence on their language development. Dhewy & Handayani (2021) disclosed that the TOEIC test

can be employed as a tool to hone and refine the English language abilities of students. It is a kind of assessment designed to evaluate the English proficiency of individuals operating in a business context. Typically, TOEIC is a requirement for employees who frequently use English in their work, such as hotel and hospital staff, those involved in international meetings, or sports programs. Furthermore, most students (83%) acknowledged the value of the TOEIC test in enhancing their English language skills, affirming its positive influence on their language development.

Regarding the sources utilized for TOEIC test preparation, students predominantly relied on English textbooks (67%), followed by online resources (50%) and language-learning apps (33%). However, it is noteworthy that a portion of students (17%) chose not to use any resources at all. This finding highlights the need for additional tools and materials to support students in their TOEIC test preparation. Educators and test administrators should consider diversifying the available resources and providing comprehensive guidance to ensure that students have access to a wide range of effective preparation materials. Efforts to discover more efficient methods and resources for teaching English as a foreign language have been made consistently, but the outcomes have not yet met expectations. This can be attributed to a variety of unpredictable factors that emerge during the teaching and learning process, even though they have been taken into account (Umar, 2017). One of the sources based on research conducted by Setyowati (2019) is through Android App. She showed students how to use different Android apps for TOEIC and IELTS preparation. Students will search for, download, and evaluate these apps based on their strengths, weaknesses, and attractiveness. This exercise will help them identify effective applications that can aid in improving their TOEIC and IELTS scores. Setiawan et al. (2023) also proposed to use App to increase the score. In his research, the students independently completed the exercises using the TOEIC application downloaded from the Play Store. This made the activity more hands-on, as the participants were able to work individually in class and receive instant feedback on their responses.

Most students feel adequately prepared and think highly of the TOEIC test for their future career possibilities when questioned about their amount of preparation and importance of the test for those chances. As Nguyen et al. (2020) affirmed that knowing English has turned into a vital qualification for job applicants, which is why numerous people learning English aspire to take globally recognized English examinations like IELTS, TOEFL, or TOEIC. Among these, the TOEIC has been gaining more acceptance in both professional settings and educational organizations. Numerous universities provide English courses tailored according to the TOEIC test scores of their students. Agoestyowati et al. (2022) also revealed that at present, the TOEIC test is extensively used by corporations during the preliminary selection of potential employees. The TOEIC scores serve as a benchmark to gauge an individual's English proficiency. It is a common requirement especially for employees who often interact with international colleagues or those employed in multinational companies. These results show that students are aware of how important English language skills are for overcoming obstacles in the workplace. Hence, job seekers are encouraged to build an appealing profile, demonstrating their readiness to engage on a global level. Possession of a TOEIC certification enhances

the likelihood of gaining employment in international corporations (Damayanti & Gafur, 2020).

Many students reported having trouble understanding the directions, the time allotted, the questions, English accents, difficult vocabulary, the context or situations, reading texts or materials, lacking confidence, and the kinds of questions offered during the TOEIC test. These issues were also linked to a lack of preparation, a weak command of the English language, and a lack of knowledge with the different sorts of questions.This aligns with the findings of Amir et al. (2019), who disclosed that students appear to have insufficient listening proficiency. Their comprehension of information from oral communication seems to be heavily reliant on who the speaker is. This scenario appears to originate from the students' unfamiliarity with phrases used by native speakers of English. Through interviews, Amir et al. (2019) gathered students' feedback on the difficulties they encountered with listening during classroom sessions. These challenges encompass the rate of speech, restricted vocabulary, interpretation issues, entrenched language habits, and dialects.

The findings of this study offer a thorough picture of how students at SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh perceived, prepared for, and experienced taking the TOEIC test. These results can act as a solid foundation for the creation of test preparation courses that are more productive and help students overcome TOEIC test-related difficulties. The creation of more focused solutions to address the issues students faced during the TOEIC test as well as a deeper investigation of the variables affecting students' views and preparedness are suggested as areas for future research.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The findings are based on self-reported data from a specific sample of students at SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh, which may not be fully representative of all students or educational contexts. Future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to obtain a broader perspective on students' familiarity, preparation, and perceptions of the TOEIC test. Additionally, further investigations can delve into the factors influencing students' test.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the majority of students at SMK Muhammadiyah Banda Aceh were unfamiliar with the TOEIC test. However, through the implementation of the test as a preparatory measure, all students had the opportunity to experience it firsthand, enhancing their understanding. It is recommended to increase awareness of the TOEIC test among students through targeted initiatives. The findings highlighted the need for improved preparation efforts, including structured TOEIC test preparation programs and additional resources. Students recognized the test's accuracy in assessing English proficiency and its value in enhancing overall language ability. Therefore, diversifying available resources and providing comprehensive guidance and support systems are recommended. The study's findings stress the significance of raising awareness, stepping up preparation efforts, and appreciating the TOEIC test's relevance in advancing students' English language ability and prospects for the future. Further

research with larger and diverse samples is warranted to deepen our understanding of students' experiences and explore additional influencing factors.

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