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INTERNATIONAL ONLINE CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH AND EDUCATION

Theme: Revitalizing English and Education on New Normal Era

Sub-theme: TEFL and Teaching Methods, Assessment and evaluation, Material developments, Linguistics and Literature, and Technology for teaching.

**AN ANALYSIS ON ENGLISH STUDENTS'  
DIFFICULTIES IN TOEFL TEST OF STRUCTURE AND  
WRITTEN EXPRESSION SECTION AT IAIN  
PADANGSIDIMPUAN**

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**ABSTRACT**

The problem of this research came from students' difficulties on aspects of structure and written expression in TOEFL test. The difficulties found in students' answer sheets could be analyzed. The objectives of this research are to identify the difficulties on aspects of structure and to identify the difficulties on aspects of written expression in TOEFL test 1. This is a qualitative research which used document analysis method. The participants of this research are 35 students of English department. The data was collected from students' documents of question sheets and answer sheets in TOEFL test 1. Analysis of the data consisted of 5 steps; they are data managing, reading/memoing, description, classifying, and interpreting. This research used triangulate technique to check data trustworthiness. Based on the result of the research, the researcher found the difficulties on aspects of structure from the students were consisted of WIAS, word choice, word order, verb form and parallelism. From these five grammatical aspects, WIAS was the highest percentage (72.85%) that students could not answer the questions correctly, so that aspect was the hardest one for the students. It also showed that verb form, which 25.71% of participants could not answer correctly, was the least difficult one for the students. From the difficulties on aspects of written expression, the researcher encountered from the students was consisted of part of speech, plural, verb form, pronoun errors, prepositional errors, article, parallelism and conjunction. From these aspects, pronoun error was the highest percentage (82.86%) that students could not answer the questions correctly, so that aspect was the most difficult one for the students. It also showed that plural, which 28.57% of participants could not answer correctly, was the least difficult one for the students.

Key Words : *Difficulties, Aspects of Structure, Aspects of Written Expression, TOEFL Test*



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Test of English as a Foreign Language abbreviated TOEFL is aimed at measuring English ability of speakers who do not speak English as a first or a second language. TOEFL is an internationally accepted standard of English that measures the academic English proficiency of a non-native speaker of English. It is obviously important to meet students' ability in English standard test. It is one of the important admission requirements for students who are planning to study abroad. It also becomes quite necessary for some the businesses, government, and scholarship program. In addition, it is particularly used by some institutions in Indonesia recently as the one of requirements to get a job as well. Therefore, it will be beneficial for job seeker when they have the TOEFL certificate first.

TOEFL test is a test to measure the level of English proficiency of non-native speakers of English. It is probably the most often used examination in the admissions process of foreign students to colleges and universities. Therefore, the purposes of why students take the TOEFL because of ordering to ensure their ability in English as a second or foreign language, passing the graduation requirements in the university, or applying for particular things, like applying particular jobs abroad and inside the country.

The owner and organizer of the official TOEFL test is an international agency called ETS (Educational Testing Service). TOEFL certificates that are officially recognized always have the ETS logo. The ETS representative in Indonesia is The Indonesian International Education Foundation (IIEF). In conducting the tests, IIEF cooperates with various educational institutions throughout Indonesia, such as universities, academics, LPK, and others that meet the requirements. For example in Jakarta, IIEF collaborated with the University of Indonesia, IES Foundation, and LBPP LIA Scouts.

In TOEFL class at State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) Padangsidimpuan, students will be presented with some sections of TOEFL



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in general, such as listening comprehension section, structure and written expression section, and reading comprehension section. They will also learn many topics and sub-topics related to those sections. So, it is the best place for those who want to pass the TOEFL test. Students who want to join the class are tested first. There are only students who get standard score that have been decided can join the class. The class is divided becomes two classes. First class is at 8 to 9.30 am, and second class is at 3 to 4.30 pm.

Previously, the first research in TOEFL class was carried out by Feri Sandi Nasution. He had also researched on structure and written expression section. The difference is he analyzed errors, whereas researcher is now analyzing difficulties. The research subjects of Feri's were students of TOEFL class batch 3, while the researcher takes English students in TOEFL class batch 5.

Based on researcher's experience, as the first and second generation from TOEFL class, the researcher really appreciates for this TOEFL class program. According to researcher, this program is one great way to help students who need TOEFL score for some particular things in the next study. On the other hand, the program also can improve students' English skills. The students are surely taught English skill ability well and are given the strategies to answer each section in the test.

Here, the researcher has interviewed several students from TOEFL class. The first was Hotni, she said that the difficulties from the structure and written expression section part was in analyzing errors in written expression. He was not able to see and analyze properly the errors that exist in each sentence in the test. The second was Melissa, she added that she also did not understand well how to analyze the errors and to find the answer to fulfill what it was being asked on each sentence.

In addition, the researcher also interviewed the TOEFL's lecturer. The same respond was told out by Mrs. Liah. She said that the students were still weak in structure and written expression. They needed to study more and they



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had to know the strategies to answer the sentence, so that they could get high score on this second section.

Based on interviews conducted by researcher with several classmates of TOEFL and also Mrs. Liah as a lecturer in TOEFL class about students' difficulties with the structure and written expression section, it can be concluded that students get many difficulties from the structure and written expression section because of their poorness on mastering structure and on analyzing written expression sentences in the test.

Consequently, the researcher is interested in analyzing the students' difficulties on structure and written expression section, because the students are still weak on that section proved by interviews that the researcher has done with them. To sum up, the students need to study more about how to answer the questions in structure and written expression section with some strategies that must be mastered by the fifth batch TOEFL class students as the subject of this research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEWS**

### **Students' Difficulties in TOEFL Test**

Difficulties are something that makes hard to do. A.S Hornby stated that difficulty is the state or condition of being difficult. Difficulty is the fact or actuality of not being easy to do or understand. It means difficulties are conditions that need an effort to do or to understand. According to Merriam Webster online dictionary, difficulty is the quality of something that makes it hard to do or the difficult nature of something.

If we want to relate it with the English proficiency test, it is a quality of something that cause the test takers are hard to gain the score they want. There many obstacles that prevent them from getting qualified results in the test. According to Kempa, difficulty is the situation where the students fail to comprehend and understand a concept or idea. It means that students have no idea when they encounter something that need to be solved.



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From the definitions that some experts mentioned above, the researcher draws conclusion that the difficulties is the state, the fact, or the quality of something that makes it hard to do or something that needs an effort to comprehend and to understand a concept or idea.

### **Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL)**

Test of English As a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a test conducted by institutions Educational Testing Service (ETS) in the United States. The TOEFL test is a test to measure the level of English proficiency of nonnative speakers of English.

There are four types of TOEFL, namely Paper-Based Test (PBT), Computer-Based Test (CBT), Internet-Based Test (iBT), and Institutional Testing Program (ITP). TOEFL PBT and ITP consist of three sections, namely listening, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. In addition to three sections tested in PBT TOEFL, there is another section called Test of Written English (TWE) which could be taken separately in the test. The TOEFL test referred to this study follows the format of TOEFL ITP. Following TOEFL ITP, the questions in TOEFL test are designed in a multiple-choice format consisting of 50 items in the listening section, 40 items in the structure and written expression section, and 50 items in the reading section. The test is administered for about 115 minutes and is scored between 310 and 677.

### **Structure and Written Expression Section**

Structure and written expression is the second section in TOEFL test that focuses on written English. This segment consists of two parts: (A): Structure and (B): Written expression in which the test-takers are given 25 minutes time to answer the total 40 questions. Part A has fifteen multiple



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choice questions marked with A, B, C and D probable answers as part of sentence completion, whereas the second part has twenty five questions. In the second part, the test-takers will encounter error analysis type of questions in each sentence. Moreover, structure and written expression is not only existed in ITP TOEFL but also in PBT TOEFL. The difference between two is that PBT TOEFL has one section namely Test of Written English or known as TWE.

On this section, the knowledge of English grammar is being tested. Structure and grammar are two things different but they are similar and related each other. King and Stanley in their book state that an individual who studies English sentence structure and become skilful in speaking and listening but never become a competent writer is unlikely to make a good score on the structure and written expression of TOEFL. Structure and written expression (SWE) section contains sentences that test examinees' knowledge of important structural and grammatical elements of standard written English. There are forty questions on the grammar section. 1-15 questions are on structure's part (sentence completion), and 16-40 questions are on written expression's part (error analysis). Sentence completion is about how the test-takers find the best answer to fill in the blank sentence to make it correct. Meanwhile, in error identification, the test-takers are asked to look for the error, and the part of the sentences that is wrong.

### **RELATED FINDINGS**

On this part, the researcher shows some researchs that have been done by several researchers, which they are related to this research, as follows:

The first, the research was done by Titin Hajri, Jufriзал, and Delvi Wahyuni. The result of the research showed that there were 3 the most difficulties items in structure and written expression; negation, reduced form, and parallel structure items. The reasons behind the students' mistakes were



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ignorance, careless, dubious, oblivious and miscast. The first two reasons were the biggest causes of students' mistakes.

The second, the research was found from Feri Sandi Nasution. The result of the research showed that there were 22 errors found in test 3 and 26 errors found in test 4. In the test 3, all 22 errors were classified into error of addition with the detail as follows; 8 errors in inverted subject-verb, 2 errors in adjective clause, and 12 errors in noun clause. In the test 4, 26 errors were classified into different kinds of error. 7 errors found in inverted subject-verb; 1 error of addition and 6 errors of misordering. 6 errors found in adjective clause; 5 errors of omission and 1 error of misformation. 5 errors found in noun clause number 9; 3 errors of addition and 2 errors of misformation. 8 errors found in noun clause number 11; 7 errors of omission and 1 error of misordering.

The third, the research was from Nurfitriyah Halim and Sri Yulianti Ardiningtyas about Difficulties Faced by the Students in Answering TOEFL Test Questions. It just showed the findings of the research were the difficulties faced by the students in answering the TOEFL test questions, they were fewer basic skills, less practice, less motivation, and students' individual differences.

The fourth, the research was from Muhajir and Sofyan A. Gani. The result revealed that the students faced a serious problems with redundancy (48%), followed by verb form (53%), pronoun error (55%), plural (55%), WIAS (57%), parallelism (59%), article (60%), word order (61%), conjunction (62%), deleted word (71%), prepositional phrase (71%), word choice (73%), and part of speech (74%). It was concluded that redundancy was the most difficult aspect for the students.

The fifth research was done by Faishol Hadi. The study found the most students' errors were from five items of TOEFL test, they were invert subject and verb, multi clauses, reduced clause, form of the verb, and adjective and



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verb. This research also showed that the main factor causing students' difficulty in TOEFL was lack of grammar.

The next research was from Risa Asrida and Fitrawati. This research aimed to find out the students' difficult skills in answering reading section of TOEFL. The participants of this study were 26 students at English department in 2016 academic years. This study used proportional stratified sampling to choose the sample. The instrument used in this research was reading TOEFL test. The test consisted 50 questions multiple choice with 55 minutes. The study found that the last year English students of Universitas Negeri Padang had problems in 13 skills among 5 topics assessed. There were five most difficult items; main idea questions, stated detail questions, transition questions, context to determine meaning of simple words, and determine the tone of the passage.

The researcher presented the result of this research in chapter IV of this thesis. There, the researcher needed to make discussion with the related findings above. It was provided in part discussion where the result of this research was compared with the related findings to get wider view related to the topic of the researcher.

## **METHOD**

In order to achieve the purpose of this research, a document research was applied. It aimed to investigate and identify English students' difficulties on aspects of structure and written expression in ITP TOEFL test. Using qualitative way, the documents can be understood and interpreted so that the results presented through words. This research was not going to generalize the result because different phenomenon meant different experience of each participant or informant which affected interpretation and results of the collected data.

## **RESULT OF THE RESEARCH**





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The researcher analyzed English students' difficulties on aspects of structure and on aspects of written expression. The researcher prepared the data or documents needed to be analyzed and managed them. The prepared data or documents were students' question sheets and answer sheets in TOEFL test 1. What the researcher did next was reading the data and taking notes for some important points. This helped the researcher to analyze and describe the findings. The description of the findings was started from here.

Here the researcher analyzed documents to encounter the difficulties on aspects of structure and written expression from TOEFL test 1. Documents were analyzed in detail. The findings from the analysis were described from students' answer sheets as follows.

### **1. Difficulties on Aspects of Structure Faced by English Students in TOEFL Test at IAIN Padangsidimpuan**

#### **WIAS (What is a sentence)**

WIAS appeared 6 times of 15 items in part A (structure). It was in item number 1,8,11,13,14 and 15. In item number 1, there were 23 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item was incomplete. It was missing a subject. The subject that was needed to complete the sentence was on C "The epidermis". In item no 8, there were 26 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item was still incomplete. It needed a verb and compliment to make the sentence correct. The answer from this question was A "identify a limited number". In item number 11, there were 30 students getting incorret. The sentence needed right phrase to complete the oppositive. Oppositive in this sentence was, *opposing presidents of the Union and the Confederacy during the Civil War.*. It aimed to give more information about the subject *Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis*. So, the answer was C "opposing presidents".

In item number 13, there were 28 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed preposition and relative clause to complete. D is the answer for this item "from whose cocoons". In item



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number 14, there were 28 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed an inverted subject. The subject should come after the verb. Here the answer was C “does a nuclear breeder”. In item number 15, there were 18 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed an adjective clause. The subject in this sentence was *D.W. Griffith* and the verb was *pioneered*. Adjective clause here was needed to explain *many of the stylish features and film making techniques*. The answer was B “that became established”.

#### **Word Choice**

Word choice appeared 5 times. It was in item number 2,3,5,7 and 12. In item number 2, there were 14 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed a verb and match word choice to complete the sentence. The answer was “are two”. In item number 3, there were 20 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed a conjunction to connect the sentences. The answer was B “but”. In item number 5, there were 13 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed a prepositional phrase. The answer was B “between the mouth”. In item number 7, there were 25 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed right phrase to be connected with the preposition *of*. The answer was A “otitis media may develop”. In item number 12, there were 17 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed past participle. The sentence used passive form. So, the verb from this sentence was *is called*. *Issued* was not a verb, but it was past participle. The answer was A “issued”.

#### **Parallelism**

Parallelism appeared twice. It was in item number 4 and 6. In item number 4, there were 24 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed parallelism. A sentence must be parallel to another sentence. The suitable answer was A “first appeared”. In item number 6,



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there were 15 students getting incorrect. The sentence needed parallelism. The sentences must be parallel one each other. The suitable answer was C “appropriate temperatures”.

### **Word Order**

Word order appeared once. It was in item number 9. In this item, there were 13 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item needed a good word ordering. In this sentence, the subject must come first before the verb. The right answer was D “the statue should be”.

### **Verb Form**

Verb form appeared once. It was in item number 10. In this item, there were 9 students getting incorrect. In this sentence, the prepositional must be followed by noun. On this case, it chose gerund to make parallel with the next phrase that is connected by conjunction *and*. The suitable answer was B “damming water basins”.

## **2. Difficulties on Aspects of Written Expression Faced by English Students in TOEFL Test at IAIN Padangsidimpuan**

### **Part of Speech**

Part of speech appeared 13 times of 25 items in part B (written expression). It was in item number 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 28, 30, 31, 36, 37, 39 and 40. In item number 18, there were 20 students getting incorrect. The sentence from this item had two verbs in a procession. The second verb *occur* should be changed to be noun *occurrence*. The answer was A. In item number 19, there were 22 students getting incorrect. The article *the* should be followed by noun. It should be not *the operate*, but it should be *the operation*. The answer was C. In item number 20, there were 27 students getting incorrect. The sentence in this item was superlative sentence. *Most* becomes *the most*. The answer was C.

In item number 22, there were 18 students getting incorrect. The form to infinitive *to+VI*. From *to resides* became *to reside*, without putting *s* at the end of the word. In item number 24, there were 27



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students getting incorrect. The adjective *shy* should not come after the preposition *of*. The preposition is always followed by noun. *Shy* should be changed to be *shyness*. In item number 25, there were 23 students getting incorrect. The adverb *weakly* should not come after the verb *becomes*. It should be put adjective. *weakly* becomes *weak*. The answer was D. In item number 28, there were 27 students getting incorrect. On the sentence of this item, the word *faster* should be changed to be *fasting*. The answer was C.

In item number 30, there were 22 students getting incorrect. On the sentence of this item, the word *other* should be changed to be *others*. The answer was D. In item number 31, there were 28 students getting incorrect. On the sentence of this item, the subject *The number* was a singular, not plural. To be *are* should be changed to be *is*. The answer was B. In item number 36, there were 19 students getting incorrect. There has been already subject and verb in the sentence of this item. The verb *consumes* after *that* should be present participle *consuming*. The answer was C. In item number 37, there were 16 students getting incorrect. The *observers* in the sentence of this item should use noun *observation*. The answer was A. In item number 39, there were 20 students getting incorrect. The verb *live* should be changed to be the verb *lived*. Because this sentence used passive form. The answer was C. In item number 40, there were 24 students getting incorrect. Noun *observing* on the sentence of this item should be changed to be adjective *observational*. The answer was C.

### **Plural**

Plural appeared once. It was in item number 17. In this item, there were 10 students getting incorrect. On this sentence, the word *electrons* should be changed to be *electron*, because there was article *a* which indicates a singular form. The answer was C.



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### **Parallelism**

Parallelism appeared once. It was in item number 21. In this item, there were 14 students getting incorrect. All words after the preposition *of* should be parallel. All of them should use adjective. The noun *anthropology* must be changed to be adjective *anthropological*. The answer was D.

### **Pronoun Errors**

Pronoun errors appeared once. It was in item number 23. In this item, there were 29 students getting incorrect. The subject in the sentence of this item was *rubberized asphalt*. So, the suitable pronoun to represent the subject was *its*, not *their*. The answer was A.

### **Prepositional Errors**

Prepositional errors appeared once. It was in item number 35. In this item, there were 17 students getting incorrect. The preposition in the sentence of this item was error. It is always *at least*, not *of least*. The answer was C.

### **Verb Form**

Verb form appeared 6 times. It was in item number 16, 26, 29, 33, 34 and 38. In item number 16, there were 4 students getting incorrect. The mistake was found on the verb *accepts*. Modal *will* is always followed by V-1. *Accepts* should be changed to be *accept*. The answer was A. In item number 26, there were 27 students getting incorrect. The sentence of this item used passive form. The word *reach* in the *can be reach only by boat or plane* should use V-3. *Reach* was changed to be *reached*. The answer was C. In item number 29, there were 17 students getting incorrect. On the sentence of this item used the subject plural *The Batataken House Ruins*. So, the verb must agree with the subject. To be *is* should be changed becomes to be *are*. The answer was A.



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In item number 33, there were 23 students getting incorrect. From the sentence of this item, the adverb *unlikely* in the beginning of the sentence should use adjective *unlike*. The answer was A. In item number 34, there were 21 students getting incorrect. The sentence of this item used simple past tense, not present perfect tense. It was proved by the year in 1852. So the verb *has begun* should be *began*. The answer was B. In item number 38, there were 25 students getting incorrect. The sentence of this item used simple past tense. The verb remembers should become remembered. The answer was A.

#### **Article**

Article appeared once. It was is in item number 32. In this item, there were 22 students getting incorrect. On the sentence of this item, the article *an* should be changed to be article *a*. The word *unique* is pronounced *ju'ni:k*. It became consonant *j* in the beginning of the word, not vowel *u*. The answer went to C.

#### **Conjunction**

Conjunction appeared once. It was in item number 27. In this item, there were 21 students getting incorrect. On the sentence of this item, the conjunction was error. It should not use conjunction *and*, because either is always followed by conjunction *or*. The sentence should be *either on the film in a camera or on the light-sensitive tube of a television camera*. The answer was D.

#### **Deleted Word**

#### **Word Order**

From 25 items in part B, there was no two aspects of written expression found, they were Deleted Word and Word Order.

### **DISCUSSION**

This research took 35 participants with their documents of question sheets and answer sheets in TOEFL test 1. The researcher analyzed students'



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difficulties on aspects of structure and written expression in TOEFL test. All analyzed items consisted of WIAS, word choice, word order, verb form, parallelism, part of speech, plural, pronoun errors, prepositional errors, deleted word, article, and conjunction.

Based on the research findings, the researcher found that in structure part, from five grammatical aspects, WIAS was the highest percentage (72.85%) that students could not answer the questions correctly, so that aspect was the hardest one for the students. It also showed that verb form, which 25.71% of participants could not answer correctly, was the least difficult one for the students. In written expression part, from ten aspects, pronoun error was the highest percentage (82.86%) that students could not answer the questions correctly, so that aspect was the most difficult one for the students. It also showed that plural, which 28.57% of participants could not answer correctly, was the least difficult one for the students.

Generally, the total of incorrect answers that students gained in doing TOEFL test of structure and written expression section that consisted of 40 items was 824. They were 302 (36.65%) in structure and 522 (63.35%) in written expression. So, the percentage of students' difficulties found more in part B (written expression) than in part A (structure).

Relating to the previous studies which relevant with this study, Muhajir and Sofyan in their research analyzed the similar difficulties on aspects of structure and written expression. They were WIAS, word choice, parallelism, word order, verb form, part of speech, plural, pronoun errors, prepositional errors, deleted word, article and conjunction. Whereas the result of the research was different.

In Muhajir's and Sofyan's study, the percentage was based on the students' correct answers. The result revealed that the students faced a serious problem with redundancy (48%), followed by verb form (53%), pronoun error (55%), plural (55%), WIAS (57%), parallelism (59%), article (60%),



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word order (61%), conjunction (62%), deleted word (71%), prepositional phrase (71%), word choice (73%), and part of speech (74%).

According to the researcher's finding, the percentage was based on students' incorrect answers. The result revealed that the students faced a serious problem with pronoun errors (82.86%), followed by WIAS (72.85%), part of speech (64.40%), article (62.86%), conjunction (60%), parallelism (55.71%), verb form (55.71%), word choice (50.85%), prepositional errors (48.57%), word order (37.14%), plural (28.57%), and verb form (25.71%).

In another research from Faishol Hadi, the study discussed about the students' errors from five items of TOEFL test, they were invert subject and verb, multi clauses, reduced clause, form of the verb, and adjective and verb. This research also showed that the main factor causing students' difficulty in TOEFL was lack of grammar. The items described in this study is more specific than this researcher's finding. Meanwhile, the items from Faishol's research was part of aspects from the focus of this research in general.

Invert subject and verb and multi clauses in Faishol's were included parts of aspect WIAS of structure part in researcher's, reduced clause was included a part of aspect word choice of structure, form of the verb is same as aspect verb form in structure and written expression, and adjective and verb were included parts of aspect part of speech in this study. In conclusion, the five items researched in Faishol's study were parts of aspects in structure and written expression from this research.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the result of the research, the conclusions of this research are the difficulties on aspects of structure that researcher found from the students was consisted of WIAS, word choice, word order, verb form and parallelism. From these five grammatical aspects, WIAS was the highest percentage (72.85%) that students could not answer the questions correctly, so that aspect was the hardest one for the students. It also showed that verb form, which





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25.71% of participants could not answer correctly, was the least difficult one for the students.

The difficulties on aspects of written expression that researcher encountered from the students was consisted of part of speech, plural, verb form, pronoun errors, prepositional errors, article, parallelism and conjunction. From these aspects, pronoun error was the highest percentage (82,86%) that students could not answer the questions correctly, so that aspect was the most difficult one for the studens. It also showed that plural, which 28.57% of participants could not answer correctly, was the least difficult one for the students.



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