TEST WISENESS EXPLOITS BY TOEFL TEST-TAKERS: WISELY OR NAIVELY?

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Abstract
Test-taking strategies in TOEFL are seen as test significance since the test-takers mostly make a guess when they are faced with the absence of decision in identifying the correct option. Guessing with strategy is helpful and can manifest in score achievement. This study aimed at finding the test-taking strategies utilized by TOEFL testees. There were 23 non-English department students involved as the respondents in this study. They were asked to answer three sets of questions within different times—each set consisting of 7 questions representing each test-wise strategy. The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics to see the score variance. The result displays that only 4 out of 23 students who can employ their test strategies—are known to be test wise; meanwhile the rest cannot—known to be test naïve.

Keywords: Test-taking strategies, test wise, test naïve, standardized test, and language test cognition.

INTRODUCTION
Language learning has become a global language phenomenon most individuals experience as there is a wide variety of languages worldwide; whether this experience is an enjoyable practice or raises out of necessity, directly depends on our objectives and future goals. Among such languages is English whose mastery is a requisite for higher education and at times better working conditions, which demands a great deal of perseverance, time, and costs on the part of language learner and yet is worthwhile and an asset enabling them to step into the brave new world and reach a level of occupational or academic comprehension. This has led many ongoing types of research exploring the nature of these strategies and how they relate to several factors involved in the processes of language test-taking. According to Cohen (2012), the main goal of test-taking strategy research is to arrive at a succession of confirmed recommendations for what respondents need to do in order to enhance their performance on the tests. As learners want to acknowledge this foreign language, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) brings tremendous influence to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners which is highly important for the student to pass this test with the best score that they can achieve. The test is very important for EFL students and the time limit challenges them most in every section of the tests. As a large-scale of the proficiency test, TOEFL is designed to measure language abilities. It is slightly different from tests in the classroom. The test taker only has the experience from the TOEFL preparation class which has no fixed idea of the range and general contents of the TOEFL test. Good language learners need to have a proper strategy and employ the right strategies. The strategies may be different from topics. According to McDonough (2006), it is better to talk about learner strategies than learning strategies as they are uniquely used by individuals and are worth paying attention to. This issue is magnified when language tests are at stake and test-taking strategies along with test-wiseness pave pay to a prolific outcome for each individual. Among such tests, the TOEFL is a standard yardstick for measuring such level of proficiency globally. Therefore, there are copious TOEFL preparation courses and English instructors that approach the tasks differently. This emphasizes on various skills and language points even though the help of related material such as textbooks take into account all the necessary criteria for the wanted result. Among such diversity of topics, learning strategies and test-taking strategy and the right level of proficiency motivated the
present paper considering the whole test. Despite such diversity of topic, learner strategies employed during the preparation course with an added of self-awareness of test type and with regard to the proficiency level of the skills seems to be a promising domain that could aid many hapless TOEFL takers and the needed of basic knowledge to better handle the tasks.

There are skills in TOEFL such as listening, structure and reading comprehension section. Reading test requires a lot of time to finish, fifty questions which most of the students find it hard to finish all the reading passages on time. The students need to have a plan or strategies to read fast and understand the text. Many of the reading processes are automatic which means that the reading normally starts from the skill that the students gain before since they were young, this is called reading skill (Williams and Moran, 1989). However, this skill does not help much in the TOEFL test when time duration for the students to read is limited. Therefore, the student needs to come out with some strategies such as to read fast, yet it is still not an effective way since they are not able to understand the passage well. Therefore, in order to read and understand the passage fast, the students have to make use of strategies, which are defined as conscious procedures that are thoughtful and determined (Williams and Moran, 1989). So, reading in the TOEFL test needs both automatic and conscious procedures mentioned above.

Besides, the different students used their understandable strategies. There are two strategies call test-wise strategy and test-naive strategy. Cohen (1998) distinguishes between test-wiseness strategies and test-taking strategies. The difference could be seen in the approach between the test-wise and test-naive. Test-wise students go through the metacognitive process while test-naive students go through cognitive failure. Test-wiseness strategies are not necessarily determined by proficiency in the language being assessed, but rather may be dependent on the respondent’s knowledge of how to take tests (Wenden, 1991). In other word, they are strategies which are applied to language tests since students do not manifest their actual or real language ability, competence or knowledge of the construct being assessed. Therefore, they are seen as a real hinder to language test validity. Test-taking strategies are classified into three types; Time-using strategies, Error-avoidance strategies, and Guessing strategies (Nitko and Brookhart 2007). A highly successful test-taker is more likely to use metacognitive strategies than moderately successful ones, who in turn use these strategies more than unsuccessful test-takers (Phakiti, 2003).

Theoretically, this study is expected to fill the gap in the discipline of language testing behavior, especially in high-stake testing as TOEFL. Practically, it is considered significant for the TOEFL test takers who always obtain low score after sitting the test. One of the cognitive issues that needs to be reexamined is the test-takers’ ability in employing their test-wise strategy. In brief, this study sought to outline the students who are good at managing the test-wise strategy and those who are lack of managing their strategic ability in guessing the TOEFL question items. Those who are good are considered as test wise students and those who are not are considered as test naive students. In addition, this study also tried to figure out the strategy(s) that are mostly used by the students.

METHODS

The method used in this study was qualitative research design employing a case study model. In qualitative research, researcher becomes a key instrument by collecting data through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants (Creswell, 2011). The case-study model permits the holistic investigation: inside and out and multi-faceted without any stimulating intervention toward the object/settings of the study. This model can encourage data triangulation for data validation (Crowe, et.al, 2011). There were 23 non-English department students involved as the respondents in this study. The data were collected by administering a test which consists of 7 questions representing test wise strategies: stem option, grammatical cues, item giveaway, longer option, option inclusion, similar option, and specific determiner. The question items from all sets were adopted from Hayati and Ghojogh (2008). The test was then repeated three times on every other day. It was administered on 12th, 15th, and 17th of July 2019. The repetition is made to reassure the students’ wisdom/naiveness regarding the validity and reliability issue. The content validity index obtained was 0.91 which shows that the items are almost perfectly valid. In accordance with the reliability, the successive process or repetition is one of the ways to achieve the inter-rater reliability of the results. This is also called test-retest reliability and the authors later justified the concordance with Kappa values (0.17 for slight agreement and 1 for perfect agreement). Then, the Kappa value in average for all items is 0.97 which shows that there is the near perfect agreement regarding the reliability. Later on, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to see the score variation among those three tests for each student.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following figure provides information about the strategy(s) that is mostly employed by the students in deciding the correct answer.

![Figure 1. Test wiseness exploits.](image)

In 1860, Paul Tradson, a Danish surgeon, reported that damage to specific part of spinal cord was resulted to extreme difficulty in body’s movement. This disorder is known as...

- a) Phineas disability
- b) Tradson’s disorder*
- c) Mark’s disease
- d) Morgan’s aphasia

In the question above, the skill that the question tries to fetch is the recognizing the correct answer by identifying the ‘stem option’ of the question item. It is learned in the question stem that Paul Tradson discovered a damage in spinal cord, later in the options, his name was one of the disease name. The previous pie chart has shown that the students’ skill in employing the ‘stem option’ is rather low in average. There is 29% (7 respondents) of the respondents who managed to choose the answer B. Basically, this kind of strategy is dominantly used by low-proficient test takers since it is only using the test takers’ wisdom to decide the answer (Jamil, Aziz & Razak, 2010).

Then, the second most used strategy is option inclusion item which was employed by 11 students. The example showing option inclusion is as follows.

Gold, silver, copper, and platinum are found in...

- a) Mines
- b) Rocks
- c) Nature*
- d) Mountains

We learn from the stem that the mentioned variables such as gold, silver, and copper can be found in mines, rocks, nature, and mountains. However, a closer look and investigation that mines, rocks, and mountains are also the attributes that are included into ‘nature’. So, students need to analyze it more closely to figure it out. However, the data show that there is 17% (5 respondents) of the respondents who could manage this strategy.

Next, item giveaway and longer option strategy are used equally by the students as 10 students used both of these strategies. The example of item giveaway and longer option are as below, respectively.

Paul Tradson was a...

- a) Painter
- b) Musician
- c) Novelist
- d) Surgeon*
In the ‘item giveaway’, the answer of this question is clearly stated somewhere in other questions. If the students are critical enough to recall the information from the previous stems, they can easily answer this question. This is also the reason why it is named item giveaway. This question asks ‘who is Paul Tradson’ which can precisely be found in the earliest question that he is a surgeon. And the item giveaway was answered correctly by 16% (4 respondents) students. It shows that not even a half of them could employ this strategy, this leads to the fact that the test naiveness level is still serious. For test wise students, this strategy may offer an unfair situation since their readiness and knowledge to accomplish the test. On the other hand, for tests naïve students, this strategy should work well if they had been successful in using it during prior tests (Hayati and Ghojogh, 2008).

The idiom “to turn the table” means...
  a) To be happy  
  b) To be angry  
  c) To change a situation to your own advantages  
  d) To complain

The stem above tests the strategy to sort out the one with the longest option. It is not easy to answer an idiom question in TOEFL. Since the knowledge on the target culture is also taken into account when deciding the answer to such question. Thus, one of the strategy that can be employed in looking at the options and choose the one which is not similar to the others—in this case, the longest one. From the option A, B, C, or D, it can clearly be spotted that the longest one is option C. The students do not need to bear a special knowledge about the stem in deciding the answer. However, there are only 16% or 4 respondents who managed to answer this stem correctly. Nurhayati and Nehe (2016) further found that students have classified the idiom questions as the most difficult questions in standard English tests. Later, the strategy that are frequently used by the students are specific determiner which refers to the following item. There were 7 students employing this strategy.

* A person with mediocre ability or attainments is the one...
  a) Who is not very good or bad in his attainments*  
  b) Who is always successful in his works  
  c) Whose ability is amazing and fascinating  
  d) Who is never able to do work

The item above shows that students can make guessing based on the specific determiner given in the stem. There are four keywords from all options that can be gathered and sorted out; there are ‘not very good or bad’ in option A, ‘successful’ in option B, ‘amazing and fascinating’ in option C, and ‘never able’ in option D. The temporary conclusion that can be taken is that option B and C are similar, so they are opted out. Later, to decide between option A or D, we need to identify the keyword in the stem, which is ‘mediocre’, which means in the middle range, not too good nor too bad. So the answer should be option A. The respondents who can answer correctly is 10% (2 respondents) only. Most probably, the leading factor to not choosing option A is their absence on the literal meaning of the lexicon ‘mediocre’. Yousof, Pursiah, and Ahmadnejad (2015) found that those who tend to employ strategic performance during test are low-level students, meanwhile higher level students tend to focus on the holistic knowledge embraced in the test content. Regarding the condition of the current study, it is learned that the test takers are low-level students who did not utilize any strategies, either.

The next strategy is grammatical cue which is only utilized by 6 students. And the least used strategy is similar option strategy that was used by only 2 students. The example of grammatical cue and similar option are as below.

“Sleep learning” has become an...
  a) Fascinating  
  b) Devastating  
  c) Intriguing*  
  d) Pleasing

The item above shows the grammatical cues, which means that only those who have knowledge about grammar can manage this strategy. We can see that in the stem, it is clearly stated the article ‘an’ indicating
that the upcoming word must start in a vowel. From all options, the only one that starts with vowel is C.
intriguing. This explains the correct answers. However, only 9% of the respondents could investigate and apply this strategy. It implies that the respondents’ knowledge on the ‘articles’ is still very limited. For grammar cue strategy, it seems that the skill can only be grasped as the student gets exposed to the grammar content (Hayati and Ghojogh, 2008).

Next, it is the item of similar option strategy as shown below.

**Noxiom is considered to be a/an...**

a) Idea  
b) Theory  
c) Sign  
d) Concept

Lastly, the stem above shows the employment of sorting out the similar ideas out of the option bunch. The test takers need to look closely—without knowing the meaning of ‘noxiom’—that the ideas offered in the options are similar. In option A, ‘idea’ is similar with ‘theory’ in option B and also with ‘concept’ in option D. Since these three options are similar, there is no possibility for one of them to be the correct answer, so they all can be discarded and the one prevails as the correct answer is option C ‘sign’.

Unfortunately, only 1 respondent came to manage the correct answer in employing this strategy. This finding is supported by Cohen (2012) that experience and familiarity toward a certain and the test content pose a vital role in determining the strategies used by the test-takers.

Later, the results are as shown in the following charts.

**Table 1. Test Wiseness strategy by TOEFL test-takers.**

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<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stem option</td>
<td>Grammatical cue</td>
<td>Option inclusion</td>
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The table above shows that from 23 respondents, there are only 4 students who are considered to be test wise students. This decision was taken since these four students employed more than three (half) strategies in their decision-making when choosing correct answer(s). On the contrary, we can see that the rest can only employ three or fewer strategies in making guessing during the correct answer choosing phase. There is even one student (student 20) who did not employ any strategies at all when making decision.

**CONCLUSION**

In accordance with the research question, this study is aimed at finding the strategies of test-wiseness that are exploited by TOEFL test-takers. It was found that there are 82.6% or 19 respondents are considered
as test naïve who did not use enough strategies in deciding their answer. The implication of the result is that the TOEFL instructors need to outline these strategies and how they are used during the test to the students in TOEFL preparation classes. So that, more students can have bigger chance to answer correctly—even the questions they have no clues about.

REFERENCES