

## **THE LECTURERS' ENGLISH ABILITY THROUGH THE TOEFL TEST**

**Dian Susyla<sup>1</sup>**

Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu

**Ria Angraini<sup>2</sup>**

Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu

**Ririn Putri Ananda<sup>3</sup>**

Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu

[dsusyla@umb.ac.id<sup>1</sup>](mailto:dsusyla@umb.ac.id)

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to determine and describe lecturers' English language skills, which can be seen through the TOEFL test. This research method is descriptive qualitative. The researcher gave a TOEFL-like test to 109 lecturers as research subjects. TOEFL ability is mapped into the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR), measured at four different levels, namely A2, B1, B2, and C. The results show that no lecturer has C1 ability in the Listening section. Two lecturers are at level B2, 12 people are at level B1, and the remaining 95 people are at level A2. The average for Listening is in the A2-SD level category. For Structure and Written Expression, only four lecturers are at level B2; 25 at B1 level; and 80 at level A2. The average for SWE is 40 in the A2 elementary level category. As for the Reading section, only one lecturer is at level C1; 2 at level B2; 6 at level B1; 98 at level A2. The average score for Reading is in the A2-SD level category. In conclusion, most of the lecturers' English skills (Listening, Structure and Writing Expression, and Reading) are still very weak.

Keywords: Lecturers' English Ability, TOEFL

### **INTRODUCTION**

No one denies that language is very important in everyday life, but many are still not aware of the importance of the English language in today's life. Having English language skills, people can easily access the information that is so widely available from direct sources because the world is borderless. Rao (2019) said that English is not only the most widely spoken language in the world but also the most commonly studied foreign language in the world. It has crossed the national borders and it is now it is the language spoken not only by native

speakers but also by most non-native speakers. Furthermore he said that as English is widely spoken all over the world and so many resources are available only in English, it is an added advantage for those who want to refer to anything in order to get the right information about the subject or topic they are searching for. Since English is the only language that is spoken by many people of various regions all around the world, it has got the recognition of a global language.

One's ability to speak English, especially lecturers at universities, is very important nowadays in accordance with the increased development of science and technology. Lecturers need to realize that the English language does not only function for communication but also becomes a part of everyday life and supports the achievement of opportunities for further study. This globalization also requires lecturers to equip themselves with adequate knowledge of the English language. Putra (2020) explains that English has important role nowadays, it could not be underestimated because it doesn't only serve as a means of communication, but it can also make it easier to adapt to the environment and reach the present and future brighter. This language is also required to get scholarships for further studies, to be able to apply for lecturer certification also requires taking the English Language Proficiency Test with a predetermined score.

There are many opportunities today that require attaching proof of English language test results. If the results do not meet the specified standards, then the opportunity is lost. Yuyun et al., (2018) states that an expanding utilize of English as Universal Dialect (EIL) has been essentially demonstrated in numerous fields around the world. This can be demonstrated by the utilize of English standardized testing utilized in companies and institutions. They employ English Capability (TOEFL and IELTS) as one of the prerequisites within the recruitment process, such as scholarship programs. Particularly, in Indonesian educational institutions, a parcel of instructive institutions have been executing TOEFL (Test of English as Foreign Language) to degree the English-language capacity of individuals who do not speak English as their to begin with dialect and who plan to ponder at colleges and universities, either as undergrad or graduate understudies.

TOEFL is design to measure the English proficiency of people whose native language is not English (Pratiwi et al., 2021). It is a test proficiency in the field of English to determine a person's ability without being directly linked to the teaching and learning process (Netta & Trisnawati, 2019). Therefore, TOEFL is different from an achievement test, in which scope is limited to the material that the test-takers have studied in an English class.

In terms of continuing to a doctoral program, there are so many opportunities that a lecturer can take advantage of related to their English language skills. Usually, the intended university asks for a TOEFL or IELTS

certificate when registering. The standard entry requirements for universities abroad are a minimum score of 550 (paper-based) for the TOEFL or a minimum of 6.0 for the IELTS or even higher if you take certain majors. However, if the program is carried out domestically, the requirements are lower, namely 500 for the TOEFL.

There are still many lecturers at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu (UMB) who have not studied at a Doctoral program. Most of them are still having problems with their mastery of the English language which is categorized as poor. This can be seen from the results of the TOEFL Prediction test held by the Language Centre of UMB. The predictive TOEFL test is not equivalent to the actual TOEFL test, in terms of the updating of the test material, implementation, and relatively more friendly processing time (not as strict as the TOEFL test). If the results of the predictive TOEFL test are still in the poor category, we can foresee that the results of the actual TOEFL test will not be very different.

Based on an understanding of the importance of mastering English language for lecturers, both to gain knowledge, the opportunity to participate in certification, international-scale seminars and for further studies, this research aims to answer questions about the English language skills of UMB lecturers (especially young lecturers who have not studied further). The expectation is that the results of this research will become a resourceful information for policymakers and can serve as an illustration for lecturers who will continue their studies on their English language skills/mastery.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **TOEFL**

TOEFL is a test to measure the English language proficiency and capability of someone whose mother tongue is not English. This test is usually one of the requirements to apply to national and foreign universities (postgraduate programs), some foreign companies, and some State-Owned Enterprises. TOEFL is the most famous test, so it is used in many countries from all parts of the world (Lubis & Irmayana, 2019).

TOEFL was established in 1947 and is based in New Jersey, USA as one of the registered test services from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) institution. TOEFL is generally used both for work and academic purposes as well as other general matters (related to education, e.g. to qualify for scholarships, administration to universities, or general purposes such as applying for jobs). To date, there are three types of TOEFL tests issued by ETS (English Testing Service), namely PBT (Paper-Based Test), CBT (Computer-Based Test), and iBT (Internet-Based Test). However, in general Indonesia uses PBT in the TOEFL

test. PBT has 3 skills to the TOEFL Test, there are Listening skill, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension (Suryani, 2021).

Many definitions are given by experts related to the TOEFL test, a standardized international test that stands for the Test of English as a Foreign Language. TOEFL was developed by the English Testing Service (ETS). TOEFL is used by most universities as a tool to measure students' English proficiency level and also as one of the graduation requirements (Alek et al., 2019). The language used in the TOEFL is the language commonly used in lectures and seminars. The TOEFL test was commissioned under the auspices of the Testing of English as a Foreign Language, a temporary working group formed through the cooperative effort of more than thirty public and private institutions concerned with the English proficiency of second language speakers, especially those applying to English-medium academic institutions (Fajri et al., 2021).

### **Types of TOEFL**

TOEFL was first held by ETS or Educational Testing Service in 1963. There are 3 types of TOEFL tests: paper version (PBT - Paper-based Test); computer-based (CBT - Computer-based Test) and online version (iBT - Internet-based Test) (Alek et al., 2019)

PBT (Paper-based TOEFL Test); as the name implies, uses a 2B pencil and paper. There are three test sessions, namely Listening, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading, all of which are in the form of multiple-choice questions. The Listening session tests the understanding of English through audio in the form of dialogue or narration. In the Structure session, understanding of grammar is tested. In this session, test-takers will encounter questions about finding errors or pointing out the wrong part of the given sentence structure. Reading session, measuring a person's understanding in reading a text. The test lasts for 2 to 2.5 hours. TOEFL ITP scores are processed by calculating the number of correct answers, then converted to a score scale from 31 to 68 in each session. The total score of the three skills ranges on a scale of 310 to 677. TOEFL ITP scores can be used as a requirement to continue to a higher education in Indonesia.

There are three types of skills tested in the TOEFL test. They are (a) Listening Comprehension. This section contains recorded material covering vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical constructions typical of spoken English in the form of short and long conversation comprehensions; (b) Structure and Written Expressions that test knowledge of the structural and grammatical elements of standard written English; (c) Reading Comprehension which contains discourses and questions about them. Questions include main ideas and important details, draw conclusions based on the information provided,

identify a textual organization, identify foreign vocabulary based on context, and recognize referential relationships of abstract pronouns and nouns.

The score obtained by a person includes three skill scores and a total score. Additional information on the score report provides details on English language skills. To interpret the score, a reference to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), an internationally recognized description of language proficiency, is needed. TOEFL test scores are reported concerning the four CEFR levels: (a) A2-basic; (b) B1- medium; (c) B2-upper middle; and (d) C1-advanced.

### **Factors Affecting Language Acquisition**

Motivation is one of the most important factors in acquiring a second language. Motivation is a major factor in the prosperous study of language acquisition (Adwani & Shrivastava, 2017). It is clear that learners who want to learn tend to achieve more than those who do not. Motivation is an issue worthy of investigation because it seems implicated in how prosperous language learners are. Motivation can also be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is when someone wants to do an activity for its own sake divorced from any specific outcome level. The enjoyment is in the doing; the doing can range from passive to active (Locke & Schattke, 2019). Extrinsically motivated behavior expects a reward, such as money, praise, or positive feedback.

Language attitudes are the attitudes that speaker of different languages have toward other languages or their own. Attitude includes positive one and negative one. With positive attitude, a learner will be active in communicating with the people speaking target language, which will promote the SLA. Lukman (2019) explains that the language attitude toward learning a second language is a critical aspect in its success, its attitudes are typically consists of two positive and negative poles. One of the language attitudes can be attached to student. Holding a negative attitude, a learner tends to refuse or be afraid to contact the people speaking target language, which will definitely hinder the development of SLA and the improvement of the communicative ability.

Age is one of the factors that influence second language learning. It is generally believed that children are better at mastering language than adults. However, only studies conducted in naturalistic learning settings provide evidence to support this assumption. Age factor is an important physiological factor in both first language learning and second language learning, which has attracted much attention of psychologists, linguists, and educators. Different people hold different opinions, but the importance of age factor in SLA cannot be ignored (Sun, 2019).

However, research conducted in formal learning environments gives the opposite result. In terms of classroom learning, adults appear to be better in syntax and morphology, while adolescents are the best and they also develop faster. The

study on the age factor is summarized by which states that the SLA pathway is not influenced by initial age, but that there is a relationship between learning speed and the age of students. Teenagers learn faster than adults and children as far as grammar and vocabulary are concerned. Although young learners don't learn as fast as older ones, they are quick to gain higher overall success due to longer exposure to the language. The research also gave several results' explanations of the research. Studies do not support the critical period hypothesis, which states that children can acquire language naturally and effortlessly for some ages.

Rahman et al., (2017) explained that the age-SLA relationship must be clarified, and the findings will undoubtedly have far-reaching ramifications in second or foreign language teaching/learning, language policy, and planning. The misconception may still be seen in CPH, which claims that getting a head start on language learning is beneficial. On the basis of empirical studies, the notion is seriously questioned. In a hypothetical situation, however, it could be claimed that in terms of acquiring native-like pronunciation, an early start may provide some benefits. There was no indication of a positive relationship between age and other acquisition variables. Hegemony will be established if the belief is correct. Early analysis of English language policy in the context of a second or foreign language reveals the importance of introducing access to a second language. Early age is merely essential in terms of pronunciation, which corresponds to the argument that there may be multiple key stages.

Intelligence is a general ability to master academic skills. Intelligence is defined and measured in terms of linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities. Success in learning should be correlated with IQ (Intelligence Quotient) test scores. Intelligence is considered to have little relationship with learners' performance as a second language learner. It is proven that without high IQ level students achieved success in second language learning (Kakhramonov, 2020).

According to Halim & Hardiningtyas (2018) the main problem in answering the English proficiency test is that the test takers do not have basic skills in English. Respondents showed low ability in understanding English grammar. Indeed, the material must start from the most basic level such as subject pronouns, object pronouns, verb forms, etc. Therefore, teachers sometimes spend a lot of time explaining very basic grammar and do not have more time to practice for other parts of the TOEFL test. The problem is, in the TOEFL material, the participants are expected to know about more complex issues such as subject and verb agreement, parallel structures, etc. Furthermore he stated that although participants were given material related to the TOEFL as preparation before taking the exam, many of them did not take the time to practice. Even though they had taken the course, participants still showed little effort in exercise. Even though there can be many good reasons for students to take a TOEFL test, for

example to continue their study abroad, many of them only take the test for the sake of having a certificate. This is proving that a lack of motivation is one of the obstacles that prevent students from getting a good score in the TOEFL test.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The method used is the descriptive qualitative method. This method is used to describe the English skills of UMB's lecturers who are tested through the TOEFL-like test. This research was conducted at Language Centre of UMB. The subjects in this research were 109 lecturers at UMB which consisted of Civil servants lecturers (PNSD), Muhammadiyah Foundation lecturers, and Foundation lecturers (DPK). They are young lecturers who have not yet continued their doctoral study and are also followed by lecturers who want to take the TOEFL test even though they are not going to/are in further study. The instruments in this research were the researchers themselves who were assisted by other tools used in data collection such as the TOEFL-like test, questionnaires, and questions guide for interviews.

**Table 1.** CEFR Level

ITP TOEFL Scores	CEFR Level
627-677	C1: Effective Operational Proficiency/Advanced (Proficient User)
543-626	B2: Vantage/Upper Intermediate (Independent User)
460-542	B1: Threshold/Intermediate (Independent User)
310-459	A2: Way stage/Elementary (Basic User)

The TOEFL test was held on Thursday, February 25, 2021, at the Language Centre of UMB which was attended by 109 lecturers. At first, the initial research subjects were young lecturers who had not received doctoral degrees. However, the university wanted more lecturers to be involved. There is also a high enthusiasm from other lecturers to take the test. The test was divided into two sessions; morning session from 9 - 11 a.m. and afternoon session from 2 - 4 p.m. In terms of implementation, the researchers were not directly involved in the supervision and preparation of the test. The researchers delegated it to the staff of the Language Center which has been mandated by the Vice-Chancellor 1 to collect data on the English language skills of the lecturers.

As a result, 109 lecturers took the TOEFL test. After the researchers calculated the correct answer for each skill, the researchers then converted the score according to the CEFR. After the implementation of the sample test, a questionnaire related to the test was given and interviews were also conducted with several people who were considered representative. Data in the form of

TOEFL test scores are recapitulated and analyzed by referring to the criteria based on the score calculation rules that have been set by ETS. Overall, the average English proficiency of the lecturers was obtained. The researchers concluded that the majority of lecturers' English skills were very weak.

## FINDING

This section answers the research question "what is the English proficiency of lecturers at UMB through the TOEFL test". The data for this research were taken from the results of the TOEFL-like test conducted by the Language Centre of UMB. TOEFL ability will also be mapped into the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) which is measured at four different levels, namely A2, B1, B2, and C1. Overall, the average TOEFL score of the lecturers was 378 with a standard deviation of 44. This situation is of course very concerning, considering the TOEFL requirements from Dikti/LPDP are far from being obtained, with the minimum score of 530 for the TOEFL ITP when applying to a national university in Indonesia. Fortunately, many Postgraduate Programs in the country do not impose strict TOEFL score requirements for new student admissions. Experience shows that if the TOEFL score requirements are strictly enforced, the number of new students that can be accepted does not meet the predetermined allocation.

**Table 2.** Results of Listening Section

No	Level	Frequency	Percentage
1	C1-advanced	-	-
2	B2-upper intermediate	2	1.83%
3	B1-intermediate	12	11 %
4	A2-elementary	95	87.16 %
5	0 (no level)	0	0 %

For the Listening section, there were no lecturers who have C1 ability according to CEFR standards. Two lecturers were at level B2, 12 were at level B1, and the remaining 95 were at level A2. The highest score for listening was 62 and the lowest score was 32. The average score for Listening was 42 (in the A2-elementary level category).

**Table 3.** Results of SWE Section

No	Level	Frequency	Percentage
1	C1-advanced	-	-
2	B2-upper intermediate	<b>4</b>	<b>3.67%</b>
3	B1-intermediate	25	22.94 %
4	A2-elementary	80	73.39 %
5	0 (no level)	0	0 %
Total		109	100%



The results of Structure and Written Expression (SWE) are slightly better than Listening skill, although for SWE there were also no lecturers at the C1 level. Only 4 lecturers were at level B2; 25 at level B1; and 80 at level A2. The highest score for SWE was 61 and the lowest score was 31. The average score for SWE was 40 (in the A2-elementary level category).

**Table 4.** Results of Reading Section

No	Level	Frequency	Percentage
1	C1-advanced	1	0.92
2	B2-upper intermediate	2	1.83 %
3	B1-intermediate	6	5.50 %
4	A2-elementary	98	89.91 %
5	0 (no level)	2	1.83 %
	Total	109	100%

The results which are somewhat encouraging but also concerning at the same time occurred in the results of the Reading skill test. There was only 1 lecturer who was at level C1; 2 at level B2; 6 at level B1; 98 at level A2, but there were 2 lecturers whose scores were less than 31. The highest score for Reading was 65 and the lowest score was 30. The average score for Reading was 40 (in the A2-elementary level category). Overall, it can be concluded that the ability of the UMB lecturers is still at the elementary (basic) level.

**Table 5.** Lecturer's English Ability by Field of Study

Field Study	N	Mean	SD
Exact	62	377	46
Social	47	379	42

After examining the TOEFL scores of the lecturers in the field of the study group, it appears that there is no significant difference between the English language skills of the Exact Science Lecturer and the Social Lecturer.

**Table 6.** Relationship between Lecturer's English Ability and Age

Age	N	Mean	SD
< 30 years old	13	390	62
30 - 39 years old	73	380	41
40 - 49 years old	19	366	48
>50 years old	4	366	12

In terms of age, the lecturers were quite heterogeneous with an age range of 28 years; the youngest age is 25 years old and the oldest is 57 years old. The wide range represents the existence of two generations. Young lecturers tend to have better English skills than the older ones. With this fact, the university should

put more focus on the older lecturers to improve their English skills. It can be useful when they want to take part in many activities in the future, especially international ones.

## **DISCUSSION**

In connection with the importance of English in the world of science and international communication, lecturers should be able to have good English skills. Not only good for self-improvement of the lecturers themselves, English skills are also favorable in the teaching and learning process. In teaching, lecturers are also expected to support students in mastering English by providing English-language reference books so that the students will also have English skills.

Looking at the condition of the lecturer's English proficiency as reflected in the test results above, it's very unfortunate that the results are still far from what is expected. From distributing the questionnaire, it was found that the majority of these lecturers do not have consistent habits when it comes to learning English. Most of them will try to study when they are about to take a test. Other than that, they would not try to practice.

Mastering a foreign language is indeed not easy. There are many factors that influence a person's success in mastering a language such as motivation, language talent, and one's study habits as well as other external factors. Therefore, low results or success on the TOEFL test are also influenced by these study habits. English proficiency in taking the TOEFL is a significant factor, the lack of ability especially in English plays the most dominant role in failure to take the TOEFL test considering that the lecturers who take this test are not only English lecturers but also come from all majors so that their mastery of English are still low.

There are many factors that can cause this problem to occur. In terms of achieving a high score, the role of motivation is very important in building consistent study habits. Literally, motivation is an impulse that arises in a person consciously or unconsciously, to do an action with a specific purpose. This indicates that even though lecturers have spent a lot of time in training or in TOEFL courses, if they are not motivated to achieve high scores, then their efforts will be in vain.

Motivation consists of two types, namely intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is what drives someone to do something without reinforcement and reward from anyone. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is what motivates a person to do something based on a reward. If a person realizes that he has intrinsic motivation within him, the reward can harm his performance. Furthermore, extrinsic motivation is defined by doing something in order to get some future value as involving means-ends relationship (Locke & Schattke, 2019). It implies

that in the case of the TOEFL test if there is no personal encouragement from within oneself, even if the course is done many times it will not make a significant change, so Adwani & Shrivastava (2017) clarified that motivation really gives the significant impetus to start learning the L2 and later the main thrust to support the long and monotonous cognition measure; without a doubt, the wide range of various elements associated with L2 procurement assume inspiration somewhat.

Inspiration as one of the key elements which impact the rate and flourishing of second language learning have been broadly acknowledged by most educators and analysts. It obviously expresses that inspiration alludes to the blend of exertion, the craving to accomplish language learning objectives, and the normal mentality towards language learning. This infers that work itself doesn't show inspiration. Inspired individuals use their energy attempting to accomplish objectives, yet individuals who use the work are not really propelled.

Apart from that, there are also factors that influence failure in doing the TOEFL test; those are the factors of age, intelligence, and talent. In both first language learning and second language learning Age factor is an essential physiological factor which has retracted much attention of psychologists, linguists, and educators. Suryantari (2018) states that there are great differences between child and adult in terms of learning speed and achievement. Generally, children can do better in pronunciation and standard accent, and after a long period of learning they can be more likely to succeed in acquiring second language and communicating with it, while adults can do better on the initial stage for their better cognitive ability; the importance of age factor in SLA cannot be ignored even though different people hold different opinions. Another factor is Personality factors which consist of, anxiety, self-esteem, spirit of adventure, depression, extraversion and introversion, etc which will make much difference to learning efficiency and will have an effect on SLA.

When the test takers have met some of the criteria, then several other factors must be corrected when they want to take the TOEFL test, namely the lack of basic skills and lack of practice. This is in line with Fitria & Prastiwi (2020) who explained that there are several factors that made the TOEFL test difficult due to a person's lack of preparation, such as the lack of information related to studying the TOEFL itself. It is undeniable that in addition to consistent practice, TOEFL test participants must be at least equipped with basic skills in English, such as increasing vocabulary, learning the correct pronunciation, and so on. This is the basic necessary qualification so that the test takers can work on the TOEFL questions.

There are some problems faced by test participants related to basic skills in taking the TOEFL test because English has a different way of pronouncing a word compared to *Bahasa Indonesia*, so it will take extra effort to learn it. This will be

one of the obstacles, especially when facing a speaking session. The test-takers are required to be able to pronounce each word correctly. Furthermore, Pratiwi et al., (2021) explained that first problem TOEFL is Listen to Conversation. All conversations and monologues are carried out by native speakers so that intonation, pronunciation, and speaking speed will often make it difficult for test-takers, especially if the test takers are not used to listening to native speakers. All these conversations are pronounced in English. To response comprehension questions well, understanding the stress and tone, idioms, conversational phrases, find implied information, comparisons, and the understanding the meaning of the conversations are obligatory skills for the test takers to master. The sections in listening are divided into separately timed sessions. They are short conversations, long conversations, and talks/monologues. In each part, we will listen to the audio-only one time (Putlack et al., 2020).

The second one is Grammar Mastery. TOEFL test participants find it difficult to do the test; it can also be due to a lack of mastery of English grammar. Grammar becomes very important, both in terms of verbal and non-verbal tests because grammatical errors can change the meaning of a sentence, for example, the formation of active and passive. The test-takers will face some difficulties in the structure and written section if they use the wrong grammar. The last one is Lack of Vocabulary. It is natural for some test-takers to have difficulty in pronouncing and speaking English if they do not have sufficient vocabulary. In addition, there are some English idioms that are not very familiar for some test-takers if it is not supported by intense practice.

The result showed that the test takers still had difficulties when they were taking the test, such as in the structure section and structure and written section. It implies that the test takers have to learn more about complicated issues such as parallel structures, subject and verb agreements, etc. In reading section, many test takers are not familiar with the topic, difficult to identify difficult words, the main idea and the lack of idiom. Besides those problems, the test takers are lacking of practice and lacking strategies such as scanning and skimming which leads to particular issues in comprehending reading text.

The expectations of these lecturers are not excessive. If you look at the contents of the form for accreditation, there are preconditions for foreign cooperation, articles in international journals, etc. All of that is unavoidable if a university wants to get the title of "Excellent". So, the university should also facilitate lecturers with English skills. The results of the TOEFL test conducted some time ago can be useful for both sides the lecturers and the university. Lecturers will be able to know their English language skills and the university can also get data about the skills of their lecturers. It is hoped that this result will be beneficial for both sides.

## CONCLUSION

The average Listening, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading skills of 109 UMB lecturers are at the Elementary level, although some lecturers can be said to have qualified abilities. It implies that the lecturers have to dig deeper and improve their English skills. When associated with the demands in the Accreditation, where lecturers are expected to collaborate in terms of research and teaching with other universities both national or abroad, write in reputable international journals, become speakers at international seminars and so on, of course, the results of this research are expected to be followed up immediately by the policymakers at UMB.

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