

SOCIALIZATION OF STRATEGIES AND TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN TOEFL READING COMPREHENSION FOR 12TH GRADE STUDENTS AT SMK NEGERI 1 JORLANG HATARAN

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Abstract

This community service activity aimed to enhance the reading comprehension skills of 12th-grade students at SMK Negeri 1 Jorlang Hataran by introducing effective strategies and tips for success in the TOEFL Reading section. Recognizing that many students struggle with reading comprehension due to limited exposure to academic English and test-oriented strategies, this program provided targeted training focused on active reading techniques, vocabulary building, and identifying main ideas and supporting details. The activity was conducted through interactive workshops that included reading practice, discussions, and explanatory sessions. A qualitative approach was used to gather data, including observations, comprehension tests, and student questionnaires. Results indicate that students showed increased understanding of TOEFL question types, improved ability to identify key information in texts, and greater confidence in managing time during reading tasks. The feedback also reflected a positive change in student attitudes toward English reading, emphasizing the importance of early preparation and exposure to standardized testing formats. This initiative demonstrates that strategic socialization of reading techniques can significantly impact students' comprehension and test readiness. It also highlights the importance of equipping students with not only language proficiency but also the test-taking skills necessary for academic advancement. Future programs are encouraged to expand this approach to other sections of the TOEFL and provide continuous support for students' English development.

Keywords: TOEFL, Reading Comprehension, Tips and Strategies, Secondary School Students, Test Preparation, English Proficiency

INTRODUCTION

Reading in English is a basic competency needed for university or even professional use. Young learners in English schools usually practice reading in their daily life. Little by little, students expose themselves to different kinds of texts. The more students read, the better their

understanding of reading comprehension. Although reading is the basic English skill implemented from the beginning, most students, whether they are in high school or undergraduate, still have difficulty comprehending the reading (Nainggolan et al., 2023; Vaughn, Boardman, & Klingner, 2024). Therefore, it is not surprising that reading is one of the biggest issues for the students. They find that a higher level of students, especially university students in non-English education majors, still face some problems with reading English texts. The lack of reading knowledge might lead to failure in these students' reading comprehension skills. This failure might come from various factors and be involved in the way teachers teach reading in the classroom or the reading habits of the students themselves (Duke, Ward, & Pearson, 2021; Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

TOEFL is the acronym for Test of English as a Foreign Language. It is the most competent and widespread type of English examination for ESL or ESOL that is linked with proficiency aspects in various sectors around the world (Sinambela et al., 2023). These include universities, governments, private companies, licensing bodies, various professional associations, and private individuals. The scores of a TOEFL test are often used to evaluate English proficiency so that examinees are able to pursue academic, business, government, or employment opportunities in about 130 countries where TOEFL test centers exist (Baghaei, Bagheri, & Yamini, 2020; Tamba et al., 2023). This situation can be a demonstration of not only the necessary preparation but also of self-awareness, pride, and development. Examinees might experience certain emotional changes before, during, and after taking this test because of the importance placed on TOEFL scores (Ivanova & Ivanov, 2021).

The ability to take a test is essential for TOEFL candidates since it can also influence the reliability of TOEFL scores. Baghaei et al. (2020) defined that reliable scores can help organizations assess examinees' levels of English proficiency so that they can take appropriate action, either acceptance into a study program or the implementation of a plan. To assist examinees in comprehending various aspects of TOEFL, mainly the Reading Comprehension skill, tips and tricks can be shared in several ways. Candidates must be aware of the type of TOEFL test in which Reading Comprehension skills will be used. A positive environment might reduce the stress of the test and help examinees maintain their positive perspectives and attitudes (Herman et al., 2024). Overcoming the lack of vocabulary and understanding the types of questions within the predictable features can help in developing strategies for understanding the passage. These strategies include prioritizing, establishing stances, locating information, recognizing organizational patterns, and summarizing paragraphs. Examinees can prepare themselves for the task types by being aware of the time limits and understanding the answers for each item, which can only be determined after reading the entire passage thoroughly (Li, 2022; Rumahorbo et al., 2024).

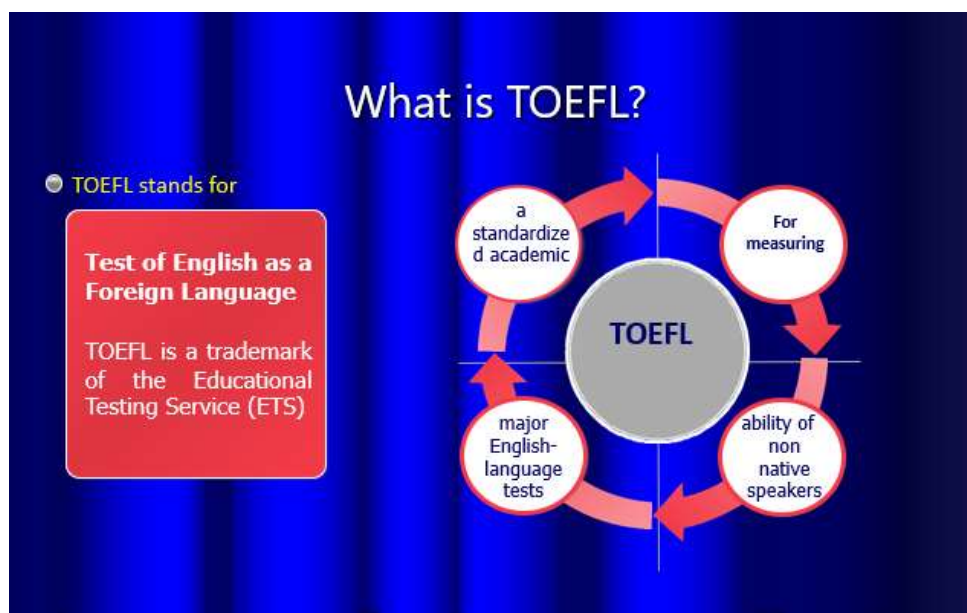


Figure 1. Explanation about TOEFL taken from PowerPoint

Most of us perform tasks more effectively when we know what to expect ahead of time. This is also true with the reading comprehension task on the test. By understanding what is involved in this task, the steps you go through, and the factors that affect your responses, you can feel more secure and be more successful. You will recognize areas of concern and thus be better able to remediate them. Then you can concentrate on reading to understand, as you usually do, rather than worrying and changing your reading style on test day. In brief, the reading section always provides four passages of increasing complexity. The subjects vary. They are often from college textbooks, with assignments attached, such as writing summaries or analyzing data. The questions that follow are designed to assess your ability to do several things: infer the meaning of vocabulary in context, understand stated information, understand implied information, and combine information to draw a conclusion. Other related tasks assess your ability to use information from the reading task to write and to structure your responses to a specified purpose (Matthews, McLinden, & Greenway, 2021; Sidabalok et al., 2023).

Madyarov, Movsisyan, Madoyan, Galikyan, and Gasparyan (2021) stated that the TOEFL test could be described as “a multiple-choice test of language proficiency in a standardized context.” All the test materials are framed around topics that would be of interest to university candidates, i.e., university students or similar mature learners. There are three primary types of selection tasks, from which correct use of reading strategies can reap great benefits, they are (Lertcharoenwanich, 2022):

(1) Short passage (with or without a lecturer's organizational pattern stated in the question). This type of reading selection takes about three minutes, including the time to read the question and choose an answer. The average number of questions for this type of passage in the paper-based test is three. Each question is worth one point.

(2) Short passage in one of the common usage areas (i.e., each passage includes an assigned purpose like a trip report or a letter of request).

(3) Pre-reading questions. Three to five pre-reading questions are asked of the examinee for each passage in these two categories. Each pre-reading question is worth one point. Examinees should answer only the pre-reading questions, then proceed with the test.

Serious attention should be given not just to the individual questions and their probable answers but also to the way that the test is organized as a whole. If free items are presented in a single selection area, they are to be identified and answered in sequence. However, if two passages and the questions based on them are compacted into a single reading area, then the free items that correspond to one passage should be found and answered in numerical order. Free items and the assigned discussion item should be answered last, since their answers can be best determined after careful scrutiny of both passages.

Based on the explanation above, the researchers have identified several issues to address in this community service project. The first issue is that secondary school students often struggle with reading comprehension in TOEFL exams, possibly due to a lack of familiarity with effective learning strategies for this section. This comprehension difficulty can result in lower scores and diminished confidence in English language skills. To tackle this problem, it is essential to offer specialized training and resources that concentrate on TOEFL reading comprehension techniques. Implementing a systematic approach to teaching these strategies could substantially enhance students' performance and overall success in the TOEFL exam. To address these challenges, the project aims to develop a comprehensive training program that incorporates interactive workshops, practice sessions, and personalized feedback to help students improve their reading comprehension skills. Additionally, the researchers plan to create a set of tailored study materials and online resources that students can access outside of formal training sessions, allowing for continuous practice and reinforcement of learned strategies. By providing students with these targeted interventions and support systems, the project seeks to not only boost TOEFL scores but also foster greater confidence and proficiency in English language skills among secondary school students. The second issue is that previous studies have predominantly focused on the challenges and difficulties in TOEFL, particularly in reading comprehension skills. Tackling these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates targeted instruction, practice sessions, and continuous support. Educational institutions and language programs could design specialized courses or workshops dedicated to TOEFL reading comprehension methods.

Moreover, integrating adaptive learning technologies and personalized feedback systems could assist students in identifying their specific weaknesses and monitoring their progress over time. These targeted interventions could be supplemented with regular mock TOEFL exams to simulate test conditions and familiarize students with the exam format. Additionally, incorporating peer-to-peer learning activities and discussion groups can provide students with opportunities to practice their English skills in a supportive environment. To further enhance the effectiveness of these interventions, educators could collaborate with TOEFL experts to develop tailored curriculum materials and teaching strategies aligned with the exam's requirements. The aim of this

service is to provide socialization of strategies and tips for success in understanding TOEFL listening comprehension for secondary school students and to implement these strategies in the school setting. Additionally, this activity will help students identify the factors that make reading comprehension in the TOEFL exam challenging for them. The researchers anticipate that this service will contribute to the literature on TOEFL socialization in educational environments, particularly in secondary schools, through the dissemination of these success strategies and tips.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The key strategy expected to increase students' comprehension of reading skills is presented in this section. The strategy discusses some tricks and methods that can be useful for mentors to enhance their teaching in improving students' comprehension of reading. Prevailing formulas that can be applied for reading comprehension evaluation are also provided in this part. The following content is the presented slide about the tricks and tips for mentors to apply some methods and strategies that can improve teaching to increase students' comprehension of reading skills. Applying the given strategies can allegedly enhance students' chances of successfully passing the test. There is no shortcut that can ensure students improve their English proficiency. Students should invest time and effort to improve their English proficiency, which is required to pass the test. However, some simple tricks can be used to enhance students' comprehension of reading skills, which is one of the basic skills for passing the test successfully. Some strategies can be utilized to assist both mentors and students in enhancing their training and learning processes to increase students' comprehension of reading skills, which can then substantiate their opportunities for successfully passing the test (Lertcharoenwanich, 2022; Madyarov et al., 2021).

1. Active Reading Techniques

One popular active reading technique you can use when reading a passage is asking yourself questions. Try to predict what a paragraph will be about, even before you read it. Come up with some good questions as you're reading along. This will increase your engagement and help you understand the passage. Each consecutive paragraph should answer the last questions as well as create a few new ones. Also, use outlines or mapping to physically illustrate the flow of many readings. Some other popular active reading techniques include connecting the text to your personal knowledge, predicting outcomes, imagining being the characters, solving the story's problem, and summarizing the story's main ideas throughout your reading. All these techniques will ensure that the content of the passage gets absorbed in your brain (Gunning, 2013).

Another active reading technique you can use when practicing is to mark the key points in the passage. While doing test preparation, you should write down the main idea and the supporting evidence for the passages, and underline important details that you come across. This shows that you understood what you were reading. Such evidence will also be helpful when you consider your choice of answers. You will also be able to create a personal guide to refer back to quickly when you are answering questions and refreshing your memory about key details and concepts. It's a

drawback that you can't make notes on the actual reading test you'll encounter. You cannot write anywhere in the reading section of the paper. Since you'll be answering questions on separate sheets of paper or electronically, this won't be a serious problem for you (Snow, 2010).

2. Vocabulary Building Strategies

By reading the TOEFL test, we may not understand immediately all the new words and their meanings. Some words have something familiar in our current life, such as television and transportation. Other words may be related to the countries we have visited. For example, sushi and kimono are Japanese words. Therefore, it is not necessary for us to memorize all new words in a dictionary. However, we can prepare for the readings by working on our general language skills. Improving vocabulary by reading as much as possible may help. A vocabulary notebook is the best way to keep lists of words one does not know and their meanings in order to find them quickly later. Developing vocabulary generally revolves around one critical goal: students need to remember both the meanings and spellings of as many words as possible. There are, however, several tips, suggestions, and applications that can prove extremely useful on the way to this goal. The prime objective of all instructional approaches is in the phrase "vocabulary building." By systematically planting the seeds for such growth, students will continually enhance their vocabulary base (Graves, 2016; Nation, 2013).

3. Identifying Main Ideas and Supporting Details

One of the most important skills you need to develop for answering the questions in a reading comprehension set is to be able to tell the difference between important information and less important information. This is what identifying the main idea and supporting details is all about; finding the main idea or principle emphasis is central to students. To understand and learn from a text, the goal of reading a scientific article is to comprehend and evaluate the arguments and the research presented in that article. In science and engineering, it's not unusual for you to encounter complex sentence structures, paragraphs that go on for a quarter of a page, and any data or tables that may provide additional information to the passages. When you read a test article, you should start by trying to understand the passage at a basic level. As you read, you need to identify the important information and evidence and begin to make connections between the various elements in the passage (Afflerbach, 2016; McNamara & Magliano, 2009).

Based on advice, academicians and students, especially test takers, really need more practice to achieve a high score in their reading comprehension skills. Great readers should also have a strategy to improve students' comprehension of reading comprehension. There are four steps to identify a main idea in a reading comprehension quiz. The steps are to divide passages into segments, read each segment, identify a main idea for the segment, not pick an answer without evidence, and eliminate poor choices quickly. The four steps can be used in any quiz contained in the test. To execute the steps, students must pay attention to the reading passage (Roe, Smith, & Burns, 2018).

METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the research questions, the procedures mentioned are to be carried out in the research design. The procedures describe what is going to be found, how the researcher is going to find it, and how to analyze the data. The research was qualitative in nature; the data source used in this community service will be the twelfth-grade students of SMK Negeri 1 Jorlang Hataran. They are chosen because they will graduate from school and head to university which means TOEFL is very important for them in equipping their knowledge.. The implementation of the teaching and learning process to improve the students' comprehension was arranged. During this period, the researcher would like to investigate what tricks and tips are beneficial for students learning in the area of reading comprehension in the TOEFL Test. This community service was conducted on Friday, 29 November 2024 located in a room at SMK Negeri 1 Jorlang Hataran.



Figure 2. Team of community service from Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar with Principal and teacher from SMK Negeri 1 Jorlang Hataran

The instrument used in this study was a reading comprehension test. The reading comprehension test consisted of eight reading passages, the subject matter of which was mostly full-length articles, journal articles, and adapted short stories from children's books. Each passage was followed by a set of questions. The questions were designed to test either skimming, scanning, or comprehensive reading skills in terms of finding the main idea, understanding specific factual information, and recognizing the writer's attitude. Setting a time limit in each reading paper was meant to ensure the reading speed of the respondents in viewing the comprehension skill. The reading comprehension test was intended to measure respondents' comprehension skills focused on contextual and non-contextual vocabulary in relation to the participants' ability to answer the

questions that were packed with the reading papers, which were almost the same in terms of intention, though different in terms of word formality and difficulty.

The data in this study were primarily collected through an implementation of the socialization. Additionally, to validate the observation, the researchers also awarded two types of questionnaires: the questionnaire of tricks and tips in answering Reading Comprehension skills and the questionnaire of the importance of learners' background knowledge in answering Reading Comprehension skills. Although data gained from questionnaires are just added data to validate the observation of the effects of the tricks and tips and the effects of learners' background knowledge, there are some varieties in collecting the data so that it is possible for the researchers to find out, as far as they are aware, some other potential ways to improve students' comprehension.

A qualitative methodology will be employed to examine the gathered information. The examination process will involve coding, theme identification, and narrative construction to offer a comprehensive understanding of the socialization implementation. Information collected through interviews, observations, and document review will be consolidated to provide a holistic perspective and enable in-depth interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Increased Awareness and Engagement During the Socialization Session

Based on direct observation during the activity on 29 November 2024, students showed a high level of interest and engagement throughout the session. The use of interactive strategies such as group discussions, question-answer segments, and practice exercises with real TOEFL-style questions helped foster an encouraging learning atmosphere. Many students, who initially appeared hesitant, became more confident in expressing their thoughts and attempting to answer reading comprehension questions as the session progressed. Students responded positively to the introduction of active reading strategies, such as predicting paragraph content, underlining key points, and summarizing main ideas. Several students reported that they had never practiced these techniques before and found them useful in understanding longer, complex texts.



Figure 3. Socialization with strengthening and increasing students' awareness about the importance of TOEFL

2. Findings from the Reading Comprehension Test

The reading comprehension test, which was administered after the socialization session, consisted of eight passages with various question types assessing skimming, scanning, vocabulary understanding, and inference skills.

The key findings from the test results include:

- 1) Improved Strategy Application: A majority of students were able to apply skimming and scanning techniques effectively. This was evident in their ability to locate specific information within the passage faster and more accurately.
- 2) Vocabulary Challenges: Although some students demonstrated a growing familiarity with context clues and root word identification, vocabulary still remained a challenge for many, especially in more academic texts. This aligns with the literature suggesting that vocabulary building is a long-term process requiring consistent exposure and practice.
- 3) Main Idea and Detail Identification: Most students were able to correctly identify main ideas and differentiate them from supporting details, especially when they used the four-step technique introduced during the session (segmenting the text, reading in parts, identifying core points, and eliminating poor choices).

3. Questionnaire Results

Two sets of questionnaires were distributed to validate observational data: one on the effectiveness of the strategies introduced, and another on students' perceived role of prior knowledge in understanding reading texts.

a. Effectiveness of Tricks and Tips

- 1) 82% of students stated that the session helped them understand how to approach reading comprehension questions more systematically.
- 2) 76% agreed that the active reading techniques were applicable and easy to follow during practice.
- 3) 68% reported that they felt more confident attempting TOEFL-style reading questions after the session.

Students appreciated the clarity of the strategies and noted that breaking down passages into manageable parts made the reading process less overwhelming.

b. Role of Background Knowledge

- 1) 71% of students acknowledged that prior familiarity with a topic made reading easier.
- 2) Many participants agreed that having general world knowledge or subject-specific background helped them make better inferences and understand implied meanings.
- 3) A small portion (about **18%**) indicated that even when the topic was unfamiliar, using the strategies taught during the session helped compensate for the lack of background knowledge.

4. Student Feedback and Reflections

Through informal interviews and open-ended responses on the questionnaire, students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn TOEFL reading techniques in a structured yet practical manner. Some student remarks included:

- 1) *"Saya jadi tahu cara menemukan ide pokok dengan cepat."*
- 2) *"Strateginya membantu saya menjawab soal tanpa harus membaca semuanya dari awal."*
- 3) *"Sebelumnya saya tidak tahu skimming dan scanning itu apa. Sekarang saya mengerti."*

Several students requested follow-up sessions or additional materials for further self-practice, showing an increase in motivation to prepare for the TOEFL test.

5. Overall Interpretation

The qualitative analysis of data from observations, test results, and questionnaires shows that the socialization of TOEFL reading comprehension strategies was effective in:

- 1) Enhancing students' strategic reading abilities,
- 2) Increasing awareness of test-taking techniques,
- 3) Encouraging more positive attitudes toward English reading comprehension, and
- 4) Providing practical tools that students can continue to apply beyond the classroom setting.

While the intervention was short in duration, its immediate impact suggests that structured exposure to reading strategies, especially those tailored for standardized tests like TOEFL, can significantly benefit senior high school students preparing for further education.



Figure 4. Documentation after the socialization among team PkM, Principal, teachers and students from SMK Negeri 1 Jorlang Hataran

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the socialization of strategies and tips for success in TOEFL reading comprehension had a significant and positive impact on students of SMK Negeri 1 Jorlang Hataran. This discussion will interpret these results in light of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks presented earlier.

1. Effectiveness of Strategic Instruction in TOEFL Reading

The improved performance observed in students' reading comprehension skills, particularly in identifying main ideas and supporting details, supports the notion that explicit instruction in reading strategies is essential for enhancing reading outcomes (Anderson, 2003; Grabe & Stoller, 2011). The application of active reading techniques such as predicting, annotating key points, and summarizing helped students engage more deeply with the text, thus improving comprehension and retention.

These findings align with the literature review, which emphasized that effective TOEFL preparation is not merely about mastering vocabulary or grammar, but also about equipping learners with strategies that make the reading process more purposeful and efficient. The session's emphasis on strategic reading enabled students to approach complex texts with greater confidence and competence, validating the usefulness of methodical, skill-based teaching in test preparation contexts.

2. Addressing Vocabulary Gaps through Strategy Use

While vocabulary remained a challenge for many students, the findings suggest that contextual guessing and vocabulary notebook techniques helped mitigate this issue to some extent. As noted by Nation (2001), vocabulary development is a gradual process, and exposure through reading combined with strategic guessing is an effective way to grow lexical knowledge over time. The socialization session did not attempt to "solve" vocabulary issues in a short time but instead provided practical tools students could use independently—an important component in long-term learning.

Moreover, these findings reinforce the idea that reading comprehension and vocabulary development are interdependent. Students who learn to understand unfamiliar words in context tend to perform better on reading tasks, even when exact definitions are unknown. This demonstrates the value of teaching strategies that focus on meaning construction rather than isolated word memorization.

3. The Importance of Background Knowledge

The questionnaire responses also underscored the role of prior knowledge and topic familiarity in aiding comprehension. This supports schema theory (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983), which emphasizes that readers comprehend better when they can relate new information to existing knowledge structures. However, what's noteworthy is that students reported improved understanding even when faced with unfamiliar topics, as long as they applied the techniques shared during the session. This highlights that reading strategies can, to a certain extent, compensate for gaps in prior knowledge, especially when students are trained to navigate textual clues and question formats effectively.

4. Impact of Interactive and Practice-Based Learning

The community service project also demonstrated the value of interactive, practice-based learning. As shown in the results, students responded positively to activities that involved real-time application of strategies and engagement with sample TOEFL passages. These activities created a low-stress environment where students could apply new skills without the pressure of actual test conditions.

This aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which posits that learners are more receptive to language input when their anxiety is low and motivation is high. The relaxed, collaborative nature of the session likely contributed to a positive shift in student attitudes toward TOEFL reading tasks.

5. Short-Term Gains and Long-Term Implications

While the immediate improvements in student performance and confidence are promising, the short duration of the intervention limits the extent to which long-term impact can be measured. Nevertheless, the session succeeded in providing foundational tools and boosting student

awareness of what TOEFL reading comprehension entails. This implies that with regular follow-up sessions, structured practice, and continuous feedback, students could achieve even greater proficiency.

The results also point to a broader implication: secondary schools, particularly vocational institutions like SMK Negeri 1 Jorlang Hataran, would benefit from integrating TOEFL preparation into their curriculum, especially in the final year before graduation. Doing so would ensure that students not only meet university admission requirements but are also better equipped for academic and professional environments where English proficiency is essential.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of this community service activity focusing on the socialization of tips and strategies for improving TOEFL Reading Comprehension skills among 12th-grade students of SMK Negeri 1 Jorlang Hataran has shown promising outcomes. Through the interactive workshops and targeted reading exercises, students were able to gain better insight into common question types, effective reading strategies, and the importance of vocabulary in understanding texts. The activity also revealed that many students lacked prior exposure to TOEFL-style reading tasks, which highlights the relevance and necessity of early intervention and familiarization with academic English texts.

Findings from the implementation demonstrate that strategies such as active reading, identifying main ideas, and building vocabulary significantly support students in answering comprehension questions more confidently and accurately. Furthermore, the practical tips provided during the socialization session—like time management, scanning techniques, and annotating main ideas—helped students overcome common challenges, including reading anxiety and confusion about complex texts. The combination of explanation, practice, and discussion was key to raising both comprehension and motivation levels.

This initiative also identified a positive shift in the students' attitudes toward the TOEFL Reading section. Many participants expressed increased self-awareness of their reading strengths and weaknesses and felt more equipped to approach standardized English tests. The questionnaire results and observational data support the idea that strategic exposure to test-oriented techniques can reduce test-taking stress and improve performance, even within a limited time frame.

Overall, this program emphasizes the need for integrating TOEFL-style reading preparation into secondary education, particularly for students planning to continue their studies at the tertiary level. By equipping them with both the knowledge and strategies required to succeed in the Reading Comprehension section of the TOEFL, this activity not only contributes to immediate academic readiness but also strengthens students' long-term English proficiency. Future programs should consider expanding the content to include other TOEFL sections and implement regular follow-ups to maintain the learning momentum.

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