

IMPROVING THE ENGLISH COMPETENCY OF FINAL YEAR STUDENTS THROUGH TOEFL PREPARATION TRAINING AT STIE GEMA WIDYA BANGSA

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Abstract

The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4), Quality Education, serves as the primary foundation for this community service program (PKM). This PKM aims to enhance the English proficiency of final-year students at STIE Gema Widya Bangsa, Bandung, through TOEFL Preparation training and testing. The program was attended by 88 students from the Management, Human Resources, Marketing Management, and accounting departments. The implementation method was divided into three stages: 1) The initial stage, consisting of a pre-test to gauge fundamental abilities; 2) The core stage, involving interactive material delivery and simulations for the three TOEFL sections (Listening, Structure, and Reading); and 3) The final stage, which included a post-test and evaluation. The results showed a significant improvement in the participants' TOEFL scores. The majority of participants achieved scores in the 501-550 range, surpassing the common minimum standard. Thus, this PKM is considered effective in equipping students with relevant English language skills and enhancing their competitiveness in the job market.

Keywords: TOEFL, Community Service, Students, English Language

INTRODUCTION

Community Service (*Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat / PKM*) is one of the three main pillars of the *Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi*, alongside education and research. PKM represents not only the social responsibility of academics but also a strategic medium for transferring knowledge, technology, and expertise to the wider community.

Community service programs that focus on improving English language proficiency, particularly through TOEFL preparation training, play an increasingly important role in the era of globalization. English proficiency has become an essential competence for university students to compete in the global job market, pursue higher education, and access academic information from international sources.

Therefore, programs that improve English language competence directly contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly **SDG 4: Quality**

Education, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In Indonesia, the importance of English proficiency continues to increase as global economic and educational systems become more integrated. According to the **Education First (EF) English Proficiency Index (2023)**, Indonesia is still categorized in the lower-middle proficiency level. This indicates a considerable gap between the demands of the job market—which increasingly requires English proficiency—and the level of competence possessed by many university graduates.

Consequently, systematic efforts are required to improve English language skills, particularly among final-year students who will soon enter the workforce. One effective approach is the implementation of TOEFL preparation training programs. These programs not only assess English proficiency in listening, grammar structure, and reading comprehension, but also equip students with effective strategies and techniques for achieving higher TOEFL scores.

The Indonesian government has also emphasized the importance of improving the quality of competitive human resources. This commitment is reflected in various national programs, including **Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)**, which encourages students to gain learning experiences outside the classroom and develop competencies relevant to industry needs.

TOEFL preparation training is aligned with the spirit of the MBKM policy by providing practical learning experiences that directly contribute to improving students' competencies. Furthermore, national development policies outlined in the **National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN)** prioritize the development of high-quality human resources as one of the country's main development goals (Bappenas, 2020).

In this context, universities play a strategic role as agents of change. Through PKM activities, higher education institutions can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge taught in classrooms and the practical skills required in real-world situations.

The collaboration between Universitas Widyatama and STIE Gema Widya Bangsa demonstrates a shared commitment to improving the quality of higher education through collaborative initiatives. The TOEFL preparation training implemented in this program was designed in a structured manner, beginning with a pre-test, followed by instructional sessions covering Listening, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading, and ending with a post-test evaluation.

This structured approach is expected to provide participants with a comprehensive learning experience and measurable improvements in their TOEFL performance. Previous research by **Jones and Smith (2022)** indicates that structured training programs focusing on test-taking strategies have a strong positive correlation with improvements in TOEFL scores.

The main objective of this PKM program is to improve the English language proficiency of final-year students from various study programs at STIE Gema Widya Bangsa, particularly in preparation for the TOEFL test. Through this training, students are expected not only to understand the test materials but also to master effective strategies for answering TOEFL questions.

Additionally, the program aims to develop relevant soft skills, such as time management and analytical thinking, which are essential in both academic and professional contexts.

Ultimately, the program is expected to enhance graduates' competitiveness and support the institution's vision of producing high-quality and globally competitive human resources.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

The Community Service Program entitled “**Improving the English Competence of Final-Year Students through TOEFL Preparation Training at STIE Gema Widya Bangsa**” was conducted in two batches.

The first batch, consisting of 45 students, was held on **September 15–26, 2025**, while the second batch, attended by 43 students, was conducted on **November 10–21, 2025**. In total, **88 students** from the Management, Human Resources, Marketing Management, and Accounting study programs participated in the program. The implementation consisted of three main stages designed to provide a comprehensive and measurable learning experience.

1. Initial Stage

This stage focused on identifying participants' initial abilities and introducing the training program.

a. Observation and Needs Analysis

The implementation team conducted observations and discussions with STIE Gema Widya Bangsa to identify the specific needs of final-year students regarding TOEFL preparation. This analysis included students' academic backgrounds and their level of English proficiency. The purpose of this stage was to ensure that the training materials were relevant to the participants' needs.

b. Program Introduction and Pre-Test

The program began with an introductory session explaining the objectives, benefits, and structure of the training. Afterward, all participants took a **pre-test** designed to measure their initial proficiency in the three TOEFL components:

- Listening
- Structure and Written Expression
- Reading

The results of the pre-test served as a baseline for measuring participants' improvement at the end of the program.

2. Core Stage

At this stage, the training materials were delivered systematically through several sessions.

a. Tiered Material Delivery

Training materials are delivered in several sessions according to a predetermined schedule.

- **Listening**

Two sessions were devoted to listening comprehension training. The materials included strategies for identifying main ideas, capturing details, and understanding the meaning and implications of dialogues and monologues.

- **Structure and Written Expression**

Four sessions focused on grammar and written expression skills. Students were trained to identify grammatical errors and to recognize correct sentence structures according to Standard English grammar rules.

- **Reading**

Two sessions were dedicated to reading comprehension strategies, including **skimming and scanning techniques**, identifying main ideas, and drawing conclusions from reading passages.

Table 1. EPT Preparation Curriculum

Session	Main Material	Sub Material / Activity	Learning Objectives
1	Pre-Test	Full English Proficiency Test Simulation	Assessing students' prior competence in three test components (Listening, Structure, Reading)
2	Listening Part A	Short Conversations (identifying gist, context, expression)	Being able to comprehend short conversations and choose the best answer
3	Listening Part B & C	Longer Conversations (topic, purpose, details) Short Talks and Lectures	Being able to get main ideas and important information in the long conversations Improving the listening skills to academic long talks
4	Listening: Integrated Practice	Gabungan Part A–C (mini test + pembahasan)	Practicing the strategies of doing listening test in a limited time
5	Structure: Sentence Completion	Grammar patterns (tenses, agreement, modifiers)	Being able to complete the missing sentences grammatically
6	Structure: Error Analysis	Identifying incorrect grammar usage	Improving the skills of grammatical errors identification
7	Structure: Error Analysis	Identifying incorrect grammar usage	Improving the skills of grammatical errors identification
8	Reading Comprehension: Factual Ideas Reading Comprehension: Inference & Tone	Identifying main ideas, details, references Making inferences, identifying tone, vocabulary in context	Being able to find explicit information in a text Being able to comprehend implicit information and tone of text
9	Reading Comprehension: Structure & Strategy	Text organization, transitions, test-taking strategies	Analyzing the structure of texts and strategies in answering the reading comprehension questions
10	Post-Test	Full English Proficiency Test Simulation	Assessing the students' learning progress and readiness in doing the formal test

b. Interactive Learning Approach

During the training sessions, instructors applied interactive teaching methods, including lectures, discussions, and question-and-answer sessions to encourage active participation. Multimedia materials such as videos, audio recordings, and visual examples were also used to make learning more engaging and easier to understand.

Students were also given opportunities to practice TOEFL questions directly after each explanation.

3. Final Stage

The final stage aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program.

a. Post-Test

At the last meeting, participants took a **post-test** with the same format and level of difficulty as the pre-test. The post-test results were used to measure improvements in participants' English proficiency.

b. Evaluation

The implementation team conducted a comparative analysis between the pre-test and post-test results to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program.

c. Certificate Distribution

Participants received certificates that included their TOEFL scores and evaluation results. These certificates may be used to support job applications or further academic studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Needs Analysis and Initial Understanding

Before the training began, participants completed a questionnaire to measure their initial understanding of TOEFL.

The results indicated that:

- Only **5.6%** of participants had previously taken a TOEFL test.
- **61.1%** of participants were familiar with TOEFL but had never participated in a preparation program.
- Only **8.3%** had attended a TOEFL preparation course.

Most participants identified **Structure and Written Expression** as the most difficult section of the test, followed by Listening, while Reading was considered the easiest section. This may be due to students' greater exposure to reading exercises during their previous education.

Approximately **75%** of participants had studied English before, mostly at elementary or intermediate levels. Many also reported learning English through digital media such as movies, YouTube, and online games. These findings indicate that most participants lacked sufficient preparation and strategies for answering TOEFL questions.

Participant Score Achievements

The main indicator of the program's success was the improvement in TOEFL scores. From the **88 participants**, the post-test results showed:

- **60.2%** scored between **460–500**
- **29.5%** scored between **501–550**
- **9.1%** scored between **551–580**
- **1.1%** achieved a score of **620**

Overall, **100% of participants achieved scores above 450**, which is generally considered the minimum TOEFL requirement in many institutions.

These results demonstrate that structured TOEFL preparation training can significantly improve students' performance in a relatively short period.

Training Effectiveness and Participant Enthusiasm

The training sessions were conducted interactively and focused on three TOEFL sections:

- Listening
- Structure and Written Expression
- Reading

Participants showed high enthusiasm during the sessions, as demonstrated by their active participation in discussions and question-and-answer sessions. Simulation exercises were also conducted to allow participants to practice answering TOEFL questions directly. This approach helped participants better understand the material and apply the strategies taught by the instructors. The improvement in participants' scores indicates that interactive and simulation-based learning methods can effectively enhance English proficiency within a short period of time.

CONCLUSION

The Community Service Program (PKM) successfully improved the English proficiency of final-year students at STIE Gema Widya Bangsa through structured TOEFL preparation training. The program involved **88 students** and was implemented through three main stages: initial assessment, structured training sessions, and final evaluation.

The post-test results showed that most participants achieved TOEFL scores above the required minimum standard, demonstrating the effectiveness of the training program. However, the **Structure and Written Expression** section remains a challenging area for many students. Therefore, continuous practice and further training programs are recommended to maintain and improve students' English proficiency.

It is also recommended that STIE Gema Widya Bangsa develop more intensive and sustainable English training programs to enhance graduates' competitiveness at both national and global levels.

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