

## Introduction to TOEFL in Improving Kampus Nommensen High School Students' Listening Skills as an Effort to Face Academic and Global Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

This community service aims to improve the listening skills of students at SMA Kampus Nommensen Pematangsiantar through the introduction of the TOEFL test. The program responds to the increasing need for English proficiency in academic and global contexts. The activity involved 20 students from Grade XI and was conducted in three phases: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. During the implementation, a lecture and discussion format was used to deliver material covering the definition, types, benefits, and strategies related to TOEFL. Students were also introduced to practice resources and test venues. The results show that students gained new insights into TOEFL, actively participated in the sessions, and became more aware of the importance of English proficiency for their future. Several challenges were encountered, including limited initial knowledge about TOEFL and lack of motivation. These were addressed through interactive discussions and collaborative support from teachers. This initiative proves to be a valuable step in preparing students to face academic requirements and international opportunities.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization and increasingly intense academic competition, English proficiency has become an essential skill, especially for high school students who aspire to pursue higher education or compete for scholarships at national and international levels.

According to (Zareian et al., 2015) One of the most widely recognized international standardized tests to assess English proficiency is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which serves as a critical benchmark for university admission, scholarship eligibility, and even employment in the global workforce. English is not only a subject taught in schools but also a gateway to academic literature, scientific communication, and global collaboration. According to Manurung et al. (2023), the introduction of TOEFL to high school students helps them understand its function as a preparation tool for further studies and to face global challenges (Sinaga et al., 2023). As Harmer (2007) asserts, English has become the “lingua franca” of international communication,

making it a key instrument for educational and professional mobility (Tamba et al., 2023). One of the most widely recognized international standardized tests to assess English proficiency is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), TOEFL is one method of measuring English competence and serving as a standard for anyone studying or speaking English as a foreign language (Aprilliandari & Sugiharto, 2023), which serves as a critical benchmark for university admission, scholarship eligibility, and even employment in the global workforce (Phillips, 2001; Nainggolan et al., 2023)

However, despite the growing importance of English proficiency, many students in Indonesia—particularly those at Kampus Nommensen High School— still face significant challenges due to limited exposure to authentic TOEFL materials and effective test-taking strategies. These obstacles stem from various factors, including limited access to authentic materials, insufficient exposure to real test environments, and a lack of training in test-taking strategies. (P Nation & Newton, 2009) emphasize that effective language instruction should involve meaningful exposure to the target language and systematic comprehension strategies. Without these, students tend to face the TOEFL with low confidence and inadequate readiness.

Among the four components of the TOEFL—listening, reading, speaking, and writing—the listening section is often considered the most challenging. This difficulty arises from the complexity of audio materials, which feature native speakers' pace and accents, while most students are not accustomed to active listening in English. (Rost Michael, 2011) notes that listening is not merely about “hearing” but involves an active cognitive process of understanding context and meaning. However, due to a lack of structured practice, minimal interaction with native speakers, and the absence of engaging learning media, students tend to feel overwhelmed when tackling TOEFL listening tasks.

To address these challenges, innovative programs such as English Camps have been implemented to enhance students' motivation and confidence in using English. Siradjuddin (2025) highlights that "the results of the implementation of the English Camp activities show a positive impact, including high motivation in using English, increased self-confidence, perseverance, and hard work throughout the implementation of the English Camp" (p. 7). This initiative is based on communicative learning principles, where interaction and active participation play crucial roles in the learning process (Brown, 2001). The program combines informative lectures and interactive discussions to create an active and collaborative learning environment. This approach aims not only to deliver information but also to build students' motivation and confidence in facing the TOEFL progressively.

The learning media used in this program include PowerPoint presentations, authentic TOEFL listening samples, and visual strategies for answering questions. The use of authentic learning sources aligns with the real-life context approach advocated by (J. C. Richards & Schmidt, 2010), who argue that language understanding improves when students can relate learning to real experiences. Close collaboration with English teachers and school leadership ensures that the applied approach is tailored to the students' background and needs.

Overall, this program represents a strategic first step in preparing students to face the TOEFL with better skills and strategies. In addition to improving listening proficiency, it also fosters a greater enthusiasm for learning, broadens students' awareness of global academic opportunities, and enhances their readiness for the future. As (Brown, 2001) states, successful language learning encompasses not only mastery of structure but also the development of confidence and motivation to use the language in real-life contexts.

## METHOD

This research employs a model and method for conducting research, namely the community service model, which is used solely for conducting research on target audiences in the form of two sessions: lecture and discussion. The lecture session is a session where researchers provide material on TOEFL, namely the definition of TOEFL, types of TOEFL, benefits and uses of TOEFL, how to access free TOEFL practice, costs and places for TOEFL tests, and tips and tricks for working on TOEFL questions quickly and easily via powerpoint. Furthermore, the discussion is a question and answer session between students and researchers on the material that was presented during the socialization activity. Data from this study were collected in a systematic manner by researchers through fieldwork and observation during the extension process.

The goal of this socialization is to emphasize the importance of TOEFL to students at the school. This social activity will be carried out on May 6, 2025, at Kampus Nommensen High School Pematangsiantar by several students, including Naomi Simanjuntak, Tiondina Samosir, Tiodor Sihotang, and Nova Evelin Saragih. The participants in this socialization activity were 20 students from Kampus Nommensen High School Pematangsiantar in Grade XI.



**Figure 1. Stages of Method Implementation**

### Phase 1. Preparation

The first stage or phase of this research consists of several procedures that must be completed before the implementation of the socialization, namely:

1. Coordinating with the lecturer in charge of the course regarding the preparations needed before carrying out the socialization activity.
2. Meeting with the principal of Kampus Nommensen High School Pematangsiantar to discuss the TOEFL socialization activity.
3. Collaborating with the English teacher of Kampus Nommensen High School Pematangsiantar to identify students who can participate in the TOEFL socialization activity.
4. Providing the tools and materials needed for the TOEFL socialization to ensure the success of the activity.

### Phase 2. Implementation

The second stage of this research is the distribution of materials to 20 students of Kampus Nommensen High School Pematangsiantar who participated in the socialization activity. This activity focused on socialization and discussion about the importance of TOEFL, especially listening skill for senior high school students as an effort to face academic and global challenges.

### Phase 3. Evaluation

The third stage or phase in this study is to provide an opportunity for students who attend the socialization to conduct a question and answer session and discussion related to obstacles, things that are not yet understood about the material in the socialization, and share tips and tricks in TOEFL. Researchers discuss together to provide solutions to the obstacles faced by participants and questions raised by students in the question and answer session.

## RESULTS

Socialization activities regarding the introduction of TOEFL and its functions to students of grade XI Kampus Nommensen High School Pematangsiantar is one form of activity that aims to make students understand the importance of TOEFL as one of the preparations for continuing their studies and facing the world of work in the future.

This activity began with introductions from each member of the socialization team, then continued with the delivery of the objectives of the implementation of this activity. After that, the

team explained that the socialization material would be delivered in several sessions. Each session was presented by a different team member according to the division of tasks.

In this activity, the main focus of the material was directed at listening skill, which is one of the important parts of the TOEFL test. In this session, students were introduced to the types of TOEFL listening questions and strategies to answer them effectively.

As a form of direct practice, this activity is also equipped with a simulation session to answer TOEFL listening questions, where students are given the opportunity to listen to audio snippets and try to answer questions according to the TOEFL exam format. This session aims to provide a real picture of the exam atmosphere. Activity sessions are presented in the table 1

**Table 1. List of the activities**

NO	TIME	MATERIAL
1	08.00-08.05	Introduction by the socialization team
2	08.05-08.12	Explanation of the meaning and benefits of TOEFL
3	08.12-08.15	Explanation of TOEFL types
4	08.15-08.30	Explaining strategies in listening skills
5	08.30-09.12	Simulation of listening questions
6	09.12-09.27	Open discussion and question & answer

#### Phase 1. Preparation

Before the socialization activity was carried out, coordination was carried out to determine the class that would be the place of implementation. This activity was attended by 20 students who were present at the time of implementation. The material to be delivered was prepared in the form of a powerpoint presentation to facilitate the delivery of information visually.

As a support activity, the team also prepared student worksheets that were used during the socialization process so that participants could more actively understand the material provided.



**Figure 2. The preparation stage determines the target audience, licensing, and preparation of socialization materials**

#### Phase 2. Implementation

In the implementation stage, the socialization team divided this activity into six main sessions that were arranged systematically so that the material could be well received by students of grade XI of Kampus Nommensen High School.

The first session began with an introduction from the socialization team to all participants as an opening activity. The second session contained an explanation of the meaning of TOEFL and its benefits, both in the context of continuing education to a higher level and for the purposes of the world of work. The third session discussed the types of TOEFL that are commonly used, namely TOEFL iBT (Internet-Based Test), TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program), and TOEFL Prediction, complete with their respective characteristics and designations. The fourth session focused on delivering strategies for answering TOEFL questions, especially the listening section, which is one of the important skills in the TOEFL exam. The fifth session was a simulation of

answering listening questions, where students were given examples of TOEFL listening questions and asked to answer based on the audio played. Finally, the sixth session was closed with an open discussion and question and answer session, where students were given the opportunity to ask questions or things that were still not understood from the material that had been presented.

#### A. Explanation of the meaning of TOEFL and its benefits

TOEFL, or Test of English as a Foreign Language, is an English language proficiency test designed to measure the extent to which a person is able to understand and use English in an academic context. This test is commonly used as a requirement for admission to universities in English-speaking countries as well as one of the supporting documents for scholarships, employment, or international student exchange programs.

According to (Sutanti & Salma, 2022) the benefits of taking and having a good TOEFL score include:

1. Academic requirements: Many universities abroad, and even some within the country, require a certain TOEFL score as a condition of entry.
2. Scholarship opportunities: TOEFL is often the main requirement for getting scholarships from government and private institutions.
3. World of work: Multinational companies or agencies engaged in the international field make TOEFL as proof of communication skills in English.
4. Self-improvement: Preparing for TOEFL also indirectly improves skills in four aspects of language: listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

By understanding the functions and benefits of TOEFL, students are expected to be more motivated to start preparing themselves early, in order to be able to compete at the national and international levels.



**Figure 3. Explaining of the meaning and benefits of TOEFL**

#### B. Explanation of TOEFL Types and Score

According to (Purnaning Estiwi Retno et al., 2014) TOEFL consists of several test types adjusted to the purpose and implementation. And according to (Jenny Airin & Tim English Power, 2018), each type of TOEFL has a different vulnerable score. In this socialization activity, the three TOEFL types explained to the students are as follows:

##### 1. TOEFL iBT (Internet-Based Test)

TOEFL iBT is the most widely used type of TOEFL internationally. This test is conducted online and assesses four English skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

Score range: 0–120

Validity period: 2 years

TOEFL iBT is generally used for applying to universities abroad, international scholarship applications, or professional needs in English-speaking countries.



## 2. TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program)

TOEFL ITP is a paper-based test used locally by educational institutions, such as universities or schools, as a requirement for graduation, class placement, or other internal administrative purposes. This test assesses three skills: listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension.

Score range: 310–677

Validity period: 2 years

Since it is institutional, TOEFL ITP scores cannot be used for applying to universities abroad, but it is recognized by many domestic campuses and institutions.

## 3. TOEFL Prediction Test

TOEFL Prediction is a form of TOEFL ITP simulation test often used by educational institutions as a preliminary administrative requirement, such as for internal scholarship selection or initial English proficiency assessment.

Score range: follows TOEFL ITP format (310–677)

Validity period: unofficial (depends on the organizing institution's policy)

Because it is not official, this test is only used for internal purposes or practice, not as proof of English proficiency for foreign institutions.



**Figure 4. Explanation of TOEFL types**

### C. Explaining Strategies in Listening Skills

The listening section of the TOEFL test is designed to assess how well test-takers can understand spoken English in academic and everyday contexts. It includes short conversations, long conversations, and academic lectures. "Several studies show that listening remains one of the most challenging skills for learners due to speed, unfamiliar accents, and background noise (A. P. , Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). " To succeed in this section, students need more than just good vocabulary they must also develop effective strategies to recognize meaning, inference, and speaker's intent.

During the socialization session at Kampus Nommensen High School, the students were introduced to three essential listening strategies (Samulang et al., 2022) that are commonly used to answer TOEFL questions accurately:

### 1. Focus on the Second Line

In short conversations, TOEFL often presents a two-line dialogue between two speakers. A very effective technique is to concentrate on the second speaker's response, because this is usually where the clue to the correct answer is found. The first line often presents a situation or problem, while the second line provides a reaction, solution, or opinion.

Example:

- Speaker A: "I can't believe I lost my notes for the test tomorrow."
- Speaker B: "Why don't you ask Maria? She always takes detailed notes."

Correct answer: B suggests a solution → ask Maria.

Strategy: Focus on the second line where the response or solution is given.



**Figure 5. Explain about strategy 1 (focus on second line)**

### 2. Choose the Answer with Synonyms

TOEFL questions are designed to test understanding, not memorization. That means the correct answer usually does not repeat the same words used in the conversation. Instead, the correct choice often uses synonyms or paraphrased expressions.

Example:

- In the audio: "The lecture was postponed due to the storm."
- In the choices:
  - A. The lecture was canceled.
  - B. The lecture was delayed.
  - C. The professor changed the topic.
  - D. The students protested.

Correct answer: B ("delayed" is a synonym of "postponed")

Strategy: Train yourself to recognize the same meaning expressed in different words.



**Figure 6. Explain about strategy 2 (Choose Answers with Synonyms)**

### 3. Avoid Similar Sounds

This is one of the most common traps in the listening section. TOEFL often includes distractors choices that sound similar to words in the audio but have different meanings. Test-takers who rely only on what they think they heard may choose the wrong answer.

Example:

- In the audio: “He parked the car near the post office.”
- Distractor option: “He parked the car near the coast.”

The words “post” and “coast” sound similar, but the meaning is different.

Strategy: Do not just match sounds. Focus on understanding the context of the sentence. Always double-check if the answer makes logical sense with what was actually said.



**Figure 7. Explain about strategy 3 (Avoid Similar Sounds)**

### D. Simulation of Listening Questions

After explaining the strategies for answering TOEFL listening questions, the activity continued with a simulation session to give students the opportunity to practice applying the strategies they had just learned. (A. P. Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011) found that successful listening requires learners to combine bottom-up and top-down strategies and reduce anxiety during test conditions.”



In this session, students were given a set of sample listening questions, modeled after actual TOEFL listening section formats. The simulation was divided into several parts:

1. Listening Playback

Students listened to a series of short conversations and short talks using audio played through a speaker or laptop. Each recording was played only once, to simulate real TOEFL test conditions.

2. Answering Questions

After each audio, students answered multiple-choice questions related to:

- The main idea of the conversation
- Specific details
- Speaker's attitude or implied meaning
- Vocabulary in context

The questions were printed on a student worksheet that had been prepared earlier by the socialization team.

3. Strategy Reinforcement

During the simulation, the team encouraged students to:

- Focus on the second line of short dialogues
- Look for synonyms or paraphrased ideas in the answer options
- Be careful not to be misled by similar-sounding words

4. Discussion and Review

Once the simulation was completed, the team went over the questions with the students. Each item was discussed, with explanations provided for why an answer was correct and why other choices were not appropriate. This review helped reinforce the strategies and allowed students to ask questions if they were still confused.

This simulation gave students a realistic experience of how TOEFL listening works and allowed them to apply what they had just learned in a supportive environment. It also helped them become more familiar with the format, pacing, and question types commonly found in the TOEFL listening section.



**Figure 8. Simulation of listening questions**

### Phase 3. Evaluation

This final phase involved evaluating students' understanding and engagement through an open discussion and Q&A session. During this session, the students of Kampus Nommensen High School Pematangsiantar actively participated by asking relevant and insightful questions. Their questions reflected both curiosity and a growing awareness of the importance of TOEFL in academic and professional contexts.

Question 1: Who is eligible to take the TOEFL test?

Answer:

Anyone who wishes to assess their English proficiency can take the TOEFL test. It is most commonly taken by:

- High school students planning to continue their studies at a university where English is the medium of instruction.
- University students or graduates preparing for scholarships, student exchange programs, or postgraduate studies.
- Professionals applying for jobs that require proof of English language ability.

There is no specific age limit, but test-takers should have at least an intermediate level of English to comprehend the test content.

Question 2: Where and how can someone take the TOEFL test?

Answer:

TOEFL tests can be taken at official test centers or, in the case of TOEFL iBT, sometimes online from home (home edition), depending on availability in each country. Here's how to take the test:

1. Choose the TOEFL type you need (iBT, ITP, or Prediction).
2. Register online at the official ETS website (for TOEFL iBT).
3. Select a test center and date, and pay the registration fee.
4. For TOEFL ITP or Prediction, check with local universities or language centers that offer the test.

For high school students, it's advisable to consult a local education consultant, teacher, or institution for more guidance.

Question 3: Is TOEFL really important for job opportunities?

Answer:

Yes, in many cases, TOEFL can be an important asset in the job market. Especially for:

- Jobs in multinational companies, where English is used for communication.
- Positions that involve international collaboration or overseas training.
- Government or NGO positions that require proof of English proficiency.

Even if not mandatory, having a TOEFL certificate can strengthen a CV and show that the applicant is capable of working in an English-speaking environment. It demonstrates not just language skill but also initiative and readiness for global challenges.

This phase successfully captured the students' interest and encouraged them to think critically about the relevance of TOEFL in their future education and careers. The questions asked reflected a strong engagement with the topic and confirmed that the socialization activity had a meaningful impact on the participants.



Figure 9. Open Discussion and Q&A session.



**Figure 10. Documentation with students after socialization**

Researchers found several results obtained after carrying out socialization activities about the importance of TOEFL. This socialization activity was carried out on one day, namely on May 6, 2025 in one of the classrooms at Kampus Nommensen High School Pematangsiantar. The results obtained are:

1. Participants get new experience and understanding about the importance of TOEFL, including what TOEFL is, the many varieties of TOEFL, the advantages and uses of TOEFL, the fees and locations of TOEFL examinations, and tips and techniques for answering TOEFL questions quickly and properly.
2. Participants eagerly participated in the socializing activities, as seen by their enthusiasm throughout the presentation of TOEFL content, as well as questions and answers during socialization activities.
3. Challenges in Socializing the Introduction of TOEFL. In socializing the introduction of TOEFL, researchers have several challenges in implementing socialization and challenges faced by students in understanding and learning TOEFL. The first challenge for researchers is choosing a place for socialization. The second challenge faced by students in understanding and learning TOEFL is the lack of general understanding of TOEFL, what TOEFL is like and the benefits of TOEFL for students to get scholarships to continue their studies abroad. If the environment does not support and there is no interest or desire in the form of student motivation to improve their English skills, how will a student understand and learn TOEFL. Another challenge is that some students do not know that there are TOEFL courses in Pematangsiantar. This is a common occurrence, where when someone wants to learn they do not have access to information to improve their English skills in TOEFL.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **A. Challenges in Implementing the Program**

During the implementation of this activity, the socialization team encountered several challenges. Particularly related to the students' limited prior knowledge and low awareness of the significance of TOEFL. Many of them had never been introduced to the test format, its function for academic advancement, or its global recognition. This lack of baseline understanding made it necessary for the researchers to simplify explanations and provide clear, relatable examples.

Additionally, student motivation became a notable challenge. "Listening difficulties often stem from anxiety, lack of concentration, and poor listening habits (Hasan, 2000)" Some participants did not show interest in English learning due to a belief that it was not immediately relevant to their

current studies. Others were unaware of available resources such as TOEFL courses or online practice platforms in Pematangsiantar.

### B. Steps to Overcome the Challenges

To address these issues, the research team used several strategies. First, by working closely with the English teacher and the principal, they were able to select students with potential and interest in English, ensuring a more engaged audience. Second, the use of engaging media such as powerpoint slides, visual examples of TOEFL test formats, and an interactive discussion method helped students stay focused and curious throughout the session. This aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching which emphasize real-life communication and student engagement (J. C. ( Richards, 2006)

The team also emphasized the real-world benefits of mastering English and the TOEFL test, such as opportunities for scholarships and studying abroad, to increase the students' intrinsic motivation. By giving students access to free practice websites and discussing affordable test locations, the researchers empowered them with actionable steps they could take after the session.

Overall, this discussion highlights that while introducing a standardized test like TOEFL to high school students presents multiple challenges, these can be mitigated through collaboration, effective communication, and motivational support tailored to the students' context and needs.

## CONCLUSION

The socialization program on the introduction of TOEFL at Kampus Nommensen High School successfully raised students' awareness of the importance of English proficiency, especially in listening skills, in facing academic and global challenges. Through structured activities involving lectures and discussions, students were provided with essential knowledge about TOEFL, including its types, functions, benefits, and strategies for success. Despite the initial challenges, such as limited student knowledge and motivation, the program demonstrated that with proper guidance, engaging media, and collaborative support from teachers and school staff, students can develop a better understanding of TOEFL and its relevance to their academic future.

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