Raising TOEFL Awareness: An Introduction to Its Importance and Benefits for Senior High School Students at SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar

Nauli Hosianna Napitu [*], Monika Sinaga, Elina Sihotang, Santa Nananda Sebayang, Herman Herman
Department of English Education, Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar
Jl. Sangnawaluh No.4, Siopat Suhu, Kec. Siantar Tim., Kota Pematang Siantar, Sumatera Utara 21136, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

TOEFL introduction and awareness activity aimed to deepen students' understanding at SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar about the importance of English proficiency globally, especially through the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The activity addressed the low awareness among high school students regarding TOEFL certification as an academic and professional requirement both nationally and internationally. The method used a descriptive qualitative approach with interactive presentations, Q&A sessions, and a brief TOEFL simulation. Data was collected through direct observation of student engagement and feedback during discussions. Presentation media and simplified TOEFL practice questions were the primary instruments. Results showed high enthusiasm among students, many of whom had just realized TOEFL's significance for higher education and career prospects. Some students expressed interest in learning more about TOEFL sections such as Listening, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. The activity also proved that interactive methods effectively captured students' attention and increased their linguistic awareness. In conclusion, the TOEFL socialization successfully provided essential insight into TOEFL benefits and motivated students to prepare early for future academic and professional challenges. It is recommended that such activities continue regularly with expanded content, personalized mentoring, and more intensive test preparation support to help students meet global standards in English proficiency.

Corresponding Author:

Nauli Hosianna Napitu
Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar
Email: naulinapitu01@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary tool humans use to communicate ideas, feelings, and information. According to (Ummah, 2019) defines language as "a system of arbitrary sound symbols used by members of a community to communicate with each other." Similarly, (Kridalaksana, 2008) defines language as a social communication tool used as a means of interaction between individuals within a society (Rahmawati et al., 2025). These definitions highlight that language mastery involves not only the ability to speak or write but also understanding the social and cultural contexts in its use. In

the context of education, language especially English plays a vital role as an international language that provides broad access to knowledge and global opportunities (Juanda et al., 2025). (Arikunto, 2010) states that education is a systematic process aimed at developing individuals' potential so they can adapt and contribute to society, making well-designed language teaching essential to achieving this goal. (Harmer, 2007) emphasizes that English proficiency is a key competence needed by students to compete academically and professionally (Sinaga et al., 2025).

The use of information and communication technology (ICT)-based learning media is increasingly important in supporting language teaching. (Mayer, 2009)argues that interactive media can enhance students' absorption by providing more engaging and enjoyable learning experiences. (Prensky, 2001)adds that today's digital generation is more responsive to technology, making the integration of ICT media in language teaching highly effective in boosting motivation and student engagement. To improve students' English skills, introducing TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is crucial. TOEFL is a standardized test that measures an individual's English proficiency in an academic context (Service, 2020; Manurung et al., 2023; Tamba et al., 2023). However, a phenomenon observed is the low awareness among students of SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar regarding the importance of TOEFL as an academic and professional requirement. (Risnawati, 2018) reveals that many students do not fully understand the benefits of TOEFL certification and lack exposure to interactive and ICT-based learning methods for test preparation. As a solution, the TOEFL introduction socialization supported by ICT-based learning media and interactive methods becomes an important strategy to increase students' understanding and readiness (Herman et al., 2024). Through this socialization, students are not only introduced to the structure and types of TOEFL questions but also given direct experience through brief test simulations, making them better prepared to face the actual exam and motivated to start preparing early. Thus, integrating an understanding of language as a communication tool, the importance of English education, the use of ICT media, and TOEFL socialization is expected to enhance the English proficiency of students at SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar in facing future global challenges.

SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar is one of the educational institutions with great potential in shaping a generation of young people who are excellent and competitive. However, there remains a gap between students' potential and their readiness to face global challenges. Therefore, a strategic step is needed in the form of a socialization activity to introduce TOEFL to students in a systematic and comprehensive manner. This activity is not only intended to provide information about the structure and types of TOEFL questions, but also to raise students' awareness of the importance of English proficiency as a foundation for pursuing higher education and entering the global workforce. Through a communicative and participatory approach, this socialization activity is expected to build a better understanding among students of the long-term benefits of preparing for the TOEFL early on. In addition, it aims to motivate students to be more proactive in developing their English skills, not only for academic purposes but also as part of their personal development and future planning. Thus, this activity plays an important role in shaping a young generation that is adaptive, globally minded, and ready to face the challenges of the times.

METHOD

The approach used by our group in this study is descriptive qualitative research, which is one of the methods aimed at describing a phenomenon in a detailed and systematic manner based on factual data in the field, without manipulating existing variables. According to (Moleong, 2017)states that qualitative research is holistic in nature, with the goal of understanding the meaning and social reality experienced by the subjects in depth. This method is highly suitable for the activity "TOEFL Socialization: Introduction and Its Benefits for Students of SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar", as it aims to thoroughly describe the implementation process, student responses, and the impact on their awareness and motivation in preparing for global challenges through TOEFL. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, researchers or activity organizers can record student engagement, the dynamics of interactions during the event, and summarize key findings from their feedback. The use of this method enables a comprehensive report based on empirical facts and provides a clear picture of the effectiveness of the TOEFL socialization activity within the school environment.

The TOEFL introduction and awareness activity for the students of SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar was held on May 3, 2025. The activity took place in person and was attended by 41 students, consisting of 18 female students and 23 male students. The socialization was carried out in several stages:
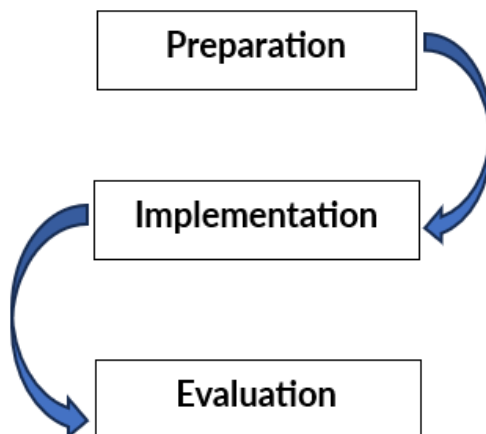

Figure 1 Stages of Method Implementation
(Nainggolan et al., 2023)

Stage 1: Preparation

The first stage began with preparation, where the socialization team assessed whether the students were already familiar with TOEFL whether they had heard of it or even tried taking a TOEFL test through social media or other platforms. The team then introduced TOEFL, which stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language, a widely recognized English proficiency test required for studying or working abroad. During this stage, the team also provided a brief explanation of TOEFL, the types of TOEFL (such as TOEFL ITP, IBT, and PBT), and the common sections in the test, including Listening, Structure, and Reading. These initial observations were used as a reference to design a more tailored and in-depth TOEFL introduction session.

Stage 2: Implementation

In this stage, the team delivered the planned materials to the students. The presentation covered the definition of TOEFL, its function (e.g., as a requirement for university admission or job applications abroad), its importance for students, the different TOEFL types, test format, and time allocation for each section. The material was delivered in simple language to ensure that the students could easily understand it and feel better prepared to face the TOEFL in the future.

Stage 3: Evaluation

The final stage was the evaluation. At this point, the team distributed sample TOEFL questions to the students of class XI MIA 2 to assess their understanding after the session. In addition to answering the questions, students participated in a group discussion with the team to reflect on the material. At the end of the session, the socialization team concluded that the activity successfully helped students understand the importance of TOEFL, both for their future careers and further academic pursuits.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The socialization activity conducted in Grade XI of SMA Teladan aimed to introduce what TOEFL is and how important its function is for the students' future. Through this activity, students were encouraged to understand that TOEFL can serve as a valuable asset—not only for pursuing higher education but also for entering the workforce later on.

The activity began with an introduction session from the socialization team, during which the main goals of the program were explained. The team also informed the students that the socialization would be divided into several sessions, each led by different team members according to the specific material to be delivered. The details of the session schedule are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Session Schedule of the TOEFL Introduction and Awareness Program for Students :
(Placeholder1)

No	Time	Material Description
1	9:30–9:40	Introduction by the socialization team
2	9:40–9:50	Introduction to TOEFL: Definition, purpose, and types
3	9:50–10:15	Sample questions and tips for answering them
4	10:15–10:35	Evaluation
5	10:35–10:45	Conclusion and closing remarks

Phase 1: Preparation

Before conducting the TOEFL awareness activity, the team visited SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar to coordinate with the school representatives. The photo above captures the moment when the team posed together with a teacher of the school, symbolizing the collaboration between the university team and the high school. This initial meeting served as an important step to ensure that the socialization activity could be well-received and run smoothly by all parties involved.

a. The team held a discussion to determine which class would be selected for the socialization activity. After consideration, the activity was conducted in Grade XI, with a total of 41 students in attendance.

b. The team began preparing the materials to be delivered to the students. These materials were packaged in the form of a PowerPoint presentation to make them easier to understand.

c. In addition, other supporting equipment and logistics were also prepared to ensure that the classroom socialization activity could run smoothly.

Figure 2 Documentation of the TOEFL Socialization Team's Visit to SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar

Phase 2: Implementation

During the implementation stage, the socialization team divided the activity into two sessions:

1. The first session involved the team members explaining what TOEFL is and the functions of TOEFL to the Grade XI students of SMA Swasta Teladan.
2. The second session focused on discussing sample TOEFL questions, along with tips and strategies for answering them. In this session, students were also encouraged to collaborate and try answering the sample questions provided by the team.

Figure 3 The presenter opens the event by introducing the members of the socialization team and explaining the objectives of the socialization

The first session : Introduction to TOEFL, Definition, Purpose, and Types

a. Definition of TOEFL

TOEFL, which stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language, is a standardized test specifically designed to evaluate the English proficiency of individuals who are non-native speakers. The test focuses on assessing four core language skills used in academic environments: Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing.

According to (Phillips, 2008)TOEFL plays a crucial role in determining a student's readiness to participate in English-speaking academic settings. It is widely recognized and used by universities around the world as a prerequisite for international admissions, scholarships, and even employment. A strong TOEFL score indicates a student's ability to understand coursework, engage in discussions, and communicate effectively in English. As stated by ETS (2020) in The Official Guide to the TOEFL iBT Test, the TOEFL iBT provides a comprehensive measure of academic English skills required in university settings. The statement from ETS (2020) highlights the TOEFL iBT as a comprehensive assessment tool designed to evaluate the four key English language skills reading, listening, speaking, and writing that are essential for success in academic environments.

Figure 1 shows the opening of the activity with an introduction of the socialization team and an explanation of the event's objectives.

First introduced in 1964, TOEFL was developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS), a non-profit organization based in the United States that also created other global standardized exams such as the GRE and SAT. ETS aims to improve educational assessment and support academic success globally.

Over time, TOEFL has evolved through several formats from the Paper-Based Test (PBT) to the more advanced Internet-Based Test (iBT), which is now more accessible and efficient in evaluating English language skills.

Students of SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar were introduced to the components and purpose of TOEFL in a comprehensive and engaging way. The goal was to provide them with a clear understanding of what the TOEFL measures and how it can benefit their academic and professional

future. Essentially, TOEFL is designed to assess an individual's ability to study and work in an English-speaking environment.

b. Components of the TOEFL PBT

1) Listening Comprehension

This is the first section of both the PBT and iBT formats. It consists of several short conversations, longer dialogues, and academic talks.

- In short conversations, two speakers interact briefly, followed by a multiple-choice question.
- In longer conversations, typically involving two or three speakers, a series of questions follow.
- For talks, a single speaker discusses a general topic, followed by 5–7 multiple-choice questions.

The total time allotted for the listening section is around 30–35 minutes (Phillips, 2008). This section assesses the students' ability to comprehend spoken English in various contexts.

2) Structure and Written Expression

This is the second section, composed of 40 multiple-choice questions to be completed within 25 minutes.

- The Structure portion (questions 1–15) asks students to complete sentences using the grammatically correct options.
- The Written Expression portion (questions 16–40) presents sentences broken into four parts (A, B, C, D), where one part contains an error. Students must identify the incorrect segment.

This section evaluates the test taker's understanding of English grammar and sentence structure, progressing from easier to more challenging questions.

3) Reading Comprehension

This is the final section of the TOEFL PBT, consisting of 50 questions with a time limit of 55 minutes. Students read several passages and answer questions that test their comprehension skills. The questions cover:

- Main ideas
- Specific details
- Vocabulary in context
- Inference
- Author's intent and tone

The passages progress from the shortest and easiest to the longest and most complex. This section tests the students' ability to extract and interpret meaning from academic texts, a critical skill in university-level study.

Figure 4 Explanation of the Definition, Importance, and Types of TOEFL

Through this structured socialization activity, students were not only introduced to TOEFL in theory, but also gained early exposure to the real format and strategies needed to perform well on the test. The focus on the TOEFL PBT format was selected to match the current needs and infrastructure of the institution while laying the foundation for future TOEFL preparation.

Sample Questions and Strategies for Answering Them :
In this session, the Socialization Team has prepared several sample questions along with easy strategies to tackle each question in the three components previously explained by the presenter. We will begin by working on the questions in order.

Figure 5 Students actively answering questions during the TOEFL socialization session

i. Listening Comprehension
Listening is the first section in the TOEFL test, particularly in TOEFL PBT and IBT. This section assesses the participant's ability to understand spoken English in conversations or academic monologues. The types of questions include:
• Short Conversations: Brief exchanges between two people.
• Long Conversations / Lectures: Extended dialogues or academic lectures.

Purpose: To evaluate active listening skills, the ability to understand main ideas, catch important details, and recognize the speaker's tone or attitude.

Key Points:
- Listen actively, not passively.
- Focus on keywords, tone of voice, and transition signals.
- Use the elimination strategy when choosing the correct answer.

Short Conversation Example – Listening Comprehension
Conversation:
- Man: Did you hear that Professor Adams cancelled the class for tomorrow?
- Woman: Really? I was counting on getting my paper back.
- Question: What does the woman mean?

Answer: A. She was hoping to get her paper back tomorrow.

Explanation:
- The phrase "I was counting on getting my paper back" means she was expecting or relying on receiving her paper.
- "Counting on" implies hope or reliance.
- She sounds disappointed because the class cancellation means she won't receive her paper as expected.
- Other options are incorrect:

      B: She doesn't sound happy about the cancellation.

      C: She hasn't received her paper yet.

      D: While she just found out about the cancellation, that's not the focus of the question—the question is about what she meant.

Long Conversation Example – Listening Comprehension
Scenario:
- The student is looking for information on renewable energy for a science project.
- The librarian guides them to the books and also suggests using the online database for recent articles.

      Question: What does the librarian suggest the student do?

      Answer: B. Use the online database for recent articles.

      Explanation:
- The student specifically asks for recent articles, and the librarian clearly says to use the online database.
- Key terms like "recent articles" and "online database" match directly with option B.
- Other options are incorrect:

      A: The science section is for books, not articles.

      C and D: Not mentioned in the conversation.

ii. Structure and Written Expression – Explanation

This section tests grammar understanding and the ability to identify grammatically correct sentence structures. It consists of two parts:
- Structure: Completing incomplete sentences.
- Written Expression: Identifying errors in complete sentences.

Purpose: To measure the participant's mastery of English sentence structure, including tenses, subject-verb agreement, conjunction use, and word forms.

Key Points:
- Learn common sentence patterns.
- Pay attention to subject-verb agreement.
- Train yourself to spot grammatical errors.

- Be familiar with passive sentence construction and the use of modal verbs.

Question 1:
Sentence: The Eiffel Tower ___ in 1889.
Answer: B. was built
Explanation:
- "In 1889" indicates a past event → use past tense.
- The Eiffel Tower didn't build itself → use passive voice.
- "Was built" is the correct form of passive past tense.

Question 2:
Sentence: Mr. Johnson has lived in this city ___ 2005.
Answer: B. since
Explanation:
- "Since" is used with a specific point in time (e.g., 2005).
- "For" is used for a duration (e.g., for 10 years).
- The verb "has lived" is in present perfect tense, which works with "since."

Question 3:
Sentence: She is one of the students who ___ passed the exam.
Answer: B. have
Explanation:
- "Who" refers to "students," which is plural.
- Therefore, the verb after "who" must also be plural → "have passed."

iii. Reading Comprehension – Explanation
        This section assesses the participant's ability to understand academic reading passages in English. Types of questions include:
- Main Idea
- Specific Detail
- Vocabulary in Context
- Inference or Logical Conclusion

        Purpose: To train participants to understand long texts, extract important information, and interpret implied meanings within academic readings.
Key Points:
- Skim the text to understand the general content and paragraph structure.
- Scan to find important details and specific answers.
- Be cautious of distractor choices that sound correct but are not relevant.
- Manage time efficiently to avoid spending too long on a single question.

Question 1: What is the main idea of the passage?
Answer: C. The bald eagle was endangered but has recovered due to conservation.
Explanation:
- The first part of the passage states the bald eagle was close to extinction.
- The last sentence mentions "significant recovery" due to conservation efforts.
- The main idea focuses on the transition from endangered to recovery.

Question 2: What contributed to the bald eagle's near extinction?
Answer: C. Deforestation and DDT
Explanation:
- The passage clearly states: "hunting, habitat destruction, and the use of DDT."
- Option C includes deforestation (which relates to habitat destruction) and DDT (a pesticide).

Question 3: What does the word "abundant" most likely mean?
Answer: B. Plentiful
Explanation:
- "Abundant" means "plentiful" or "a lot of."
- In the phrase "abundant food supply", it refers to a large amount of food.
- "Plentiful" is the most accurate synonym in this context.

Phase 3. Evaluation

This community service activity successfully achieved its goal of increasing students' awareness and understanding of the TOEFL as an essential skill for global academic and career opportunities. The program contributed to bridging the knowledge gap by providing practical insights into TOEFL sections and requirements, which were previously unfamiliar to most students. This indicates a positive step in preparing students to meet international language standards. Future activities are recommended to include intensive training and personalized mentoring, ensuring sustained improvement in students' English proficiency and TOEFL readiness. The program also opens possibilities for similar initiatives in other schools to expand its impact.

Figure 6 Documentation with students after socialization

CONCLUSION

The TOEFL socialization program at SMA Swasta Teladan Pematangsiantar has effectively introduced students to the structure, benefits, and purpose of the TOEFL test, particularly its importance in improving English proficiency and supporting future academic and career goals. Through this session, students gained a clearer understanding of the test's three main sections Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension along with practical tips to approach each part strategically.

To build on this foundation, students are encouraged to practice regularly, especially with TOEFL-style materials, and schools are advised to integrate TOEFL content into English lessons, form study groups, and offer preparation programs. With continued support and clear academic goals, students will be better equipped and more confident in taking the TOEFL as a stepping stone toward higher education and international opportunities.

Thankyou Note

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