

ENHANCING FINAL-YEAR STUDENTS' ENGLISH PROFICIENCY THROUGH STRUCTURED TOEFL PREPARATION TRAINING: A STRATEGIC INTERVENTION FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract

The global demand for English proficiency has positioned standardized assessments like the TOEFL as critical benchmarks for academic and professional success. In alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), this study evaluates the effectiveness of a structured TOEFL Preparation training model for 88 final-year students at specialized college (STIE), Bandung. Using a pre-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test design, the program was implemented in three stages: a diagnostic pre-test, intensive strategic intervention focusing on Listening, Structure, and Reading, and a final post-test evaluation. Findings indicate a significant improvement in student performance, with 100% of participants exceeding the minimum score threshold of 450. Specifically, 60.2% reached the 460–500 range, while 39.7% achieved scores above 500. The study identifies Structure and Written Expression as the primary challenge for learners, which was successfully mitigated through targeted error-analysis strategies and multimedia-based simulations. These results provide empirical evidence that systematic test-taking strategy training significantly enhances graduates' strategic competence, thereby increasing their competitiveness in the global job market.



Keyword: TOEFL Preparation; Strategic Competence; Quality Education; Higher Education; English Proficiency

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INTRODUCTION

English proficiency has become an increasingly important component of students' academic and professional preparation in an internationally connected higher-education environment. For university students approaching graduation, English competency may be relevant to academic progression, access to professional opportunities, and participation in

workplaces where English is used for communication and information exchange. Standardized English assessments are consequently used by some higher-education institutions to identify students' language proficiency and readiness for further academic or professional demands. Among these assessments, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has been widely used to measure English-language proficiency. In particular, the TOEFL ITP assesses Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension through standardized multiple-choice tasks and reports scores on a scaled system (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2026).

The relevance of this issue is particularly evident in the Indonesian context, where English proficiency remains uneven. The EF English Proficiency Index 2025 places Indonesia at 80th globally, with a score of 471, below the global average of 488. The national profile also shows variation across skills, with listening (454) and speaking (447) scoring lower than reading (491) and writing (479). Although the EF EPI does not directly measure TOEFL performance and should not be treated as equivalent to a standardized TOEFL score, the profile provides a broader indication of the continuing challenge of developing English proficiency among Indonesian learners.

A related phenomenon can be observed among final-year students who are expected to demonstrate English competence but may have had limited experience with standardized English testing. At this private higher education, an initial institutional assessment involving final-year students identified a substantial gap between students' exposure to English and their experience with formal TOEFL preparation. Of the students involved in the present program, only 5.6% reported having taken a formal TOEFL test, while 91.7% reported having no previous experience in a TOEFL preparation program. This phenomenon is important because unfamiliarity with the format, task types, time constraints, and strategies required in a standardized test may create an additional challenge for students whose previous English learning has primarily taken place through regular classroom instruction. Thus, the issue addressed in this study is not simply whether students know English, but whether they have sufficient familiarity with the specific demands of a standardized English proficiency test.

This distinction is important because TOEFL performance involves both language knowledge and the ability to respond effectively to particular assessment tasks. ETS identifies three core sections in the TOEFL ITP Level 1—Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension—with a total testing time of approximately 115 minutes. The test uses scaled scores rather than simply converting the number of correct answers into a percentage. Consequently, students preparing for such an assessment need opportunity not only to review language forms but also to become familiar with question types, timing, response strategies, and the characteristics of the assessment itself. ETS's own preparation materials similarly provide practice activities organized around the three TOEFL ITP sections and explicitly include test-taking strategies.

The Structure and Written Expression section represents one particularly relevant area for preparation because it requires students to identify grammatical structures and errors within a highly constrained testing situation. Students may encounter difficulties when grammatical knowledge acquired during general English instruction has not been sufficiently connected to the rapid identification of sentence structures and

errors required by standardized test items. Such difficulties suggest the need for preparation that integrates language review with guided analysis of test items, identification of common grammatical patterns, and timed practice rather than relying exclusively on conventional grammar instruction.

Previous research and test-preparation literature have established the importance of familiarity with assessment formats and test-taking strategies. However, much of the existing discussion focuses either on general language proficiency or on individual strategies used by test takers. Less attention has been given to short, institution-based TOEFL preparation interventions that systematically combine diagnostic testing, strategy-oriented instruction, and immediate post-intervention assessment among final-year students with limited prior exposure to formal TOEFL preparation. This represents the specific gap addressed by the present study. Rather than examining TOEFL preparation as a general language-learning activity, the study investigates whether a structured three-stage intervention can produce measurable changes in students' performance on TOEFL-like tasks.

The study therefore implements a three-stage TOEFL Preparation model consisting of a pre-test, strategic instructional intervention, and post-test. The intervention focuses on Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension, reflecting the core sections of the TOEFL ITP Level 1. The participants comprise 88 final-year students from Management, Accounting, and Human Resources programs at specialized college (STIE). The pre-test establishes participants' initial performance, the instructional stage provides targeted preparation and test-taking strategies, and the post-test is used to examine changes in performance following the intervention.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: To what extent does a structured three-stage TOEFL preparation program improve the TOEFL-like test performance of final-year students at specialized college (STIE)? By comparing students' performance before and after the intervention and applying an appropriate statistical analysis, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of a focused, institution-based TOEFL preparation program. The findings may contribute to the development of practical English assessment-preparation programs for higher-education institutions whose graduating students have limited previous exposure to standardized English testing.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Language Assessment and Standardized English Testing

Language assessment is a systematic process of collecting and interpreting evidence about language ability for a particular purpose. Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) emphasize that language assessment should be understood in relation to the construct being measured, the tasks used to elicit evidence, and the interpretation made from assessment results. Similarly, Fulcher and Harding (2022) position language assessment as a complex process involving test design, administration, scoring, interpretation, and the consequences of test use. Therefore, test scores should not be interpreted independently of the purpose, format, and context of the assessment. This perspective is particularly relevant to standardized English proficiency tests such as the TOEFL. Standardized tests are designed to provide comparable information about test takers' language performance through systematically developed tasks and scoring procedures. In the TOEFL ITP framework, English proficiency is assessed through Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and

Reading Comprehension. The test therefore provides evidence of performance in selected language domains rather than representing every dimension of communicative competence.

The distinction between language proficiency and performance on a particular assessment is important in the present study. The intervention was evaluated using a TOEFL-like test based on these three domains. Consequently, an increase in post-test scores is interpreted primarily as evidence of improved performance on the assessed TOEFL-like tasks, rather than as conclusive evidence of improvement in students' overall English proficiency. Assessment interpretation also requires attention to scoring. A standardized test score is meaningful only when the relationship between the test task, scoring procedure, and intended interpretation is clearly established. For this reason, the present study specifies the structure of the TOEFL-like instrument and its scoring procedure rather than treating the reported score as a simple percentage of correct responses.

2.2 TOEFL as an English Proficiency Assessment

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is an internationally recognized assessment system designed to provide information about English-language proficiency. For the TOEFL ITP Level 1, the assessment consists of three sections: Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. The official scoring system uses scaled scores rather than simply reporting the percentage of correct answers (Educational Testing Service [ETS], 2026). The three sections require different forms of linguistic processing. Listening Comprehension requires the interpretation of spoken English, including information presented in conversations and academic contexts. Structure and Written Expression assesses knowledge of English grammatical structures and the ability to identify grammatical errors. Reading Comprehension requires students to process written passages and identify information, main ideas, relationships, and implied meaning. These distinctions have direct pedagogical implications. Preparation for a standardized assessment should not be reduced to general language instruction because each test section presents specific task demands. Fulcher and Harding (2022) argue that language assessment needs to consider the relationship between test constructs, tasks, and interpretations. Thus, preparation activities should familiarize learners with both the linguistic knowledge required and the characteristics of the assessment tasks. In the present study, this principle is reflected in the organization of the intervention into Listening, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading. The training was therefore designed to correspond directly to the assessment domains represented in the TOEFL-like test.

2.3 Test Preparation in Second Language Assessment

Test preparation occupies an important position within language assessment because test performance can influence academic and professional opportunities. However, test preparation has generated debate concerning what exactly is being improved through preparation. He et al. (2025), in a scoping review of 66 studies on second-language test preparation, found that research has examined preparation in relation to impacts, practices, and perceptions. They also identified a methodological gap: relatively few studies have employed experimental designs and sophisticated statistical analyses to investigate the effects of preparation. An important distinction in this literature concerns preparation that develops

relevant language abilities and preparation that merely teaches students how to exploit particular test formats. He et al. (2025) note that excessive emphasis on test preparation may encourage construct-irrelevant test-taking strategies at the expense of broader language proficiency. Consequently, effective preparation should establish an appropriate relationship between language learning and familiarity with assessment demands.

This distinction provides an important theoretical basis for the present study. The intervention did not consist exclusively of strategies for guessing answers or eliminating distractors. It combined language-focused instruction—particularly grammar and comprehension—with explicit practice in responding to TOEFL-like tasks. The training consequently represents a strategy-oriented preparation model integrated with language instruction. Recent empirical research supports the value of targeted preparation while also demonstrating the importance of rigorous evaluation. Silfani et al. (2025), for example, investigated a short, targeted TOEFL listening intervention using a one-group pretest–post-test design. Their study reported a statistically significant increase in listening scores following three online instructional meetings. The researchers concluded that even a relatively short intervention can produce measurable gains when instruction is closely aligned with identified learner needs. Similarly, Amalia et al. (2024) examined students' motivation, challenges, and score development in an online TOEFL preparation course using questionnaires, interviews, and pretest/post-test data. Their study demonstrates the value of examining both performance outcomes and learner experiences when evaluating TOEFL preparation. The present study extends this line of research by examining a structured preparation program involving final-year students from several non-English academic programs in an Indonesian higher-education institution. In contrast to studies focusing on one particular skill, the present intervention addresses the three principal TOEFL ITP domains represented in the study's TOEFL-like assessment.

2.4 Test-Taking Strategies and Strategic Competence

Language test performance is influenced not only by linguistic knowledge but also by the strategies learners use when responding to assessment tasks. Bachman and Palmer's (2010) framework of language assessment emphasizes the interaction between language ability, task characteristics, and strategic competence. Strategic competence involves the processes through which test takers plan, execute, and evaluate their responses in relation to the demands of a particular task. Recent empirical research supports the importance of test-taking strategies. Han (2023), examining 138 young Chinese EFL learners undertaking an authentic international standardized English test, found that learners used metacognitive strategies more frequently than cognitive strategies. Higher-performing learners also demonstrated broader and more sophisticated use of test-taking strategies than lower-performing learners. The study suggests that developing learners' repertoire of strategies and modeling effective strategy use may support more effective test-taking. Test-taking strategies can broadly involve cognitive and metacognitive processes. Cognitive strategies include identifying relevant information, analyzing alternatives, inferring meaning, and applying linguistic knowledge. Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring comprehension, managing time, and evaluating the effectiveness of a response strategy.

These concepts are directly reflected in the present intervention. In Listening Comprehension, students were trained to identify key information,

main ideas, and details. In Structure and Written Expression, students practiced identifying sentence components, grammatical relationships, and errors. In Reading Comprehension, students practiced skimming, scanning, identifying main ideas, locating details, and answering inference questions. Therefore, the present study conceptualizes TOEFL preparation as involving two interconnected dimensions:

Linguistic knowledge + strategic competence → performance on TOEFL-like tasks

This framework helps explain why preparation may produce score changes even when the intervention period is relatively short. Students may become more efficient at applying existing linguistic knowledge to the specific demands of the test while simultaneously developing relevant language knowledge.

2.5 Assessment Literacy and Familiarity with Test Demands

Assessment literacy refers broadly to the knowledge and skills needed to understand, develop, interpret, and use language assessment appropriately. Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) emphasize the importance of understanding assessment purposes, task characteristics, scoring, and interpretation. Fulcher and Harding (2022) similarly position assessment literacy as an important dimension of responsible assessment practice. Assessment literacy is relevant not only to teachers but also to learners. Students who have little experience with standardized testing may be unfamiliar with the structure of an assessment, the types of questions used, time constraints, scoring procedures, and appropriate response strategies. Consequently, poor performance may partly reflect unfamiliarity with assessment demands rather than insufficient language knowledge alone.

This issue is particularly relevant to the present study because the initial questionnaire indicated that only 5.6% of participants had previously taken a formal TOEFL test and 91.7% had never participated in a structured TOEFL preparation course. The participants therefore represented a group with limited prior exposure to standardized English assessment. The concept of assessment familiarity helps explain the rationale for the first stage of the intervention. The pretest was not used solely to obtain a numerical baseline. It also introduced participants to the format and demands of the TOEFL-like assessment. Subsequent instructional sessions then provided repeated opportunities to practice these demands. Thus, the study treats familiarity with assessment as an important contextual factor in test performance rather than assuming that test scores represent linguistic knowledge alone.

2.6 Washback and TOEFL Preparation

Washback refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning. Tests can influence what teachers teach, what students learn, and how instructional time is allocated. The effect of testing is not necessarily positive or negative; it depends on the interaction between the assessment, teachers, learners, instructional practices, and institutional context. Recent research emphasizes this complexity. Seraj (2023) argues that washback is mediated by multiple stakeholders and contextual factors, meaning that the presence of a test does not automatically produce a particular learning outcome. Similarly, He et al. (2025) identify washback as an important dimension within research on second-language test preparation and highlight the tension between preparation that supports relevant learning and preparation

that promotes test-specific strategies without broader language development. The present study adopts a cautious understanding of washback. The TOEFL-like assessment provided a framework around which instructional activities were organized. The test influenced the selection of content, including listening strategies, grammatical analysis, reading strategies, and timed practice. In this sense, the assessment generated a form of instructional alignment between assessment demands and classroom activities. However, the study does not assume that this alignment necessarily represents positive washback in a broad sense. Because the study did not measure long-term changes in students' general English learning behavior, motivation, or language proficiency outside the assessed domains, claims concerning broader washback effects must remain limited.

2.7 Structure and Written Expression as a Target of TOEFL Preparation

Structure and Written Expression represents a particularly distinctive component of TOEFL ITP-oriented preparation because it requires students to recognize grammatical relationships and identify errors within multiple-choice items. Unlike communicative grammar instruction, this section requires learners to make rapid judgments about grammatical form and sentence structure. Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) emphasize that assessment tasks should be interpreted according to their intended construct and response demands. Accordingly, preparation for Structure and Written Expression should not be reduced to memorization of isolated grammatical rules. Learners need opportunities to apply grammatical knowledge to assessment tasks and recognize how grammatical forms operate within sentences. The present study responds to this requirement by focusing on sentence structure, verb forms and tenses, clauses, modifiers, error identification, and timed practice. The intervention also introduced strategies for identifying distractors and eliminating grammatically inappropriate alternatives.

The initial questionnaire provided an empirical rationale for this emphasis: 78% of participants identified Structure and Written Expression as the most difficult section, compared with 15% for Listening and 7% for Reading. Thus, the relatively intensive treatment of grammar and sentence structure was based on the participants' reported needs rather than being determined solely by the researchers.

2.8 Technology and Multimedia-Supported Test Preparation

Technology-mediated instruction has increasingly become part of language assessment preparation. Multimedia resources can provide learners with repeated exposure to spoken and written input, interactive exercises, immediate feedback, and simulated testing environments. Such resources are particularly relevant to Listening Comprehension, where repeated exposure to authentic or test-like audio materials can provide opportunities for learners to practice comprehension under controlled conditions. Amalia et al. (2024) demonstrate the relevance of online TOEFL preparation in providing flexible access to preparation activities while also identifying challenges associated with online learning. In addition, research on computer-assisted language testing has increasingly examined how digital technologies influence the design and delivery of language assessment (Fulcher & Harding, 2022). In the present study, multimedia resources were used as instructional support rather than as the independent variable. The central intervention remained the structured TOEFL preparation program.

Multimedia tools facilitated listening practice, presentation of test items, interactive exercises, and simulation activities. Therefore, any improvement observed in the study should not be attributed to multimedia technology alone. The intervention comprised the combined effects of structured instruction, repeated practice, assessment familiarity, and strategy development.

2.9 Theoretical Framework of the Present Study

The theoretical perspectives discussed above can be integrated into a framework explaining the relationship between assessment familiarity, language knowledge, strategic competence, instructional intervention, and TOEFL-like performance.

The framework assumes that students' performance on standardized English assessment is influenced by at least three interconnected dimensions:

1. Linguistic knowledge, including vocabulary, grammar, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension;
2. Strategic competence, including planning, monitoring, identifying relevant information, eliminating inappropriate alternatives, and managing time; and
3. Assessment familiarity, including knowledge of test format, item types, scoring expectations, and response procedures.

A structured TOEFL preparation program can address these dimensions through diagnostic assessment, explicit strategy instruction, language-focused activities, guided practice, and simulated testing.

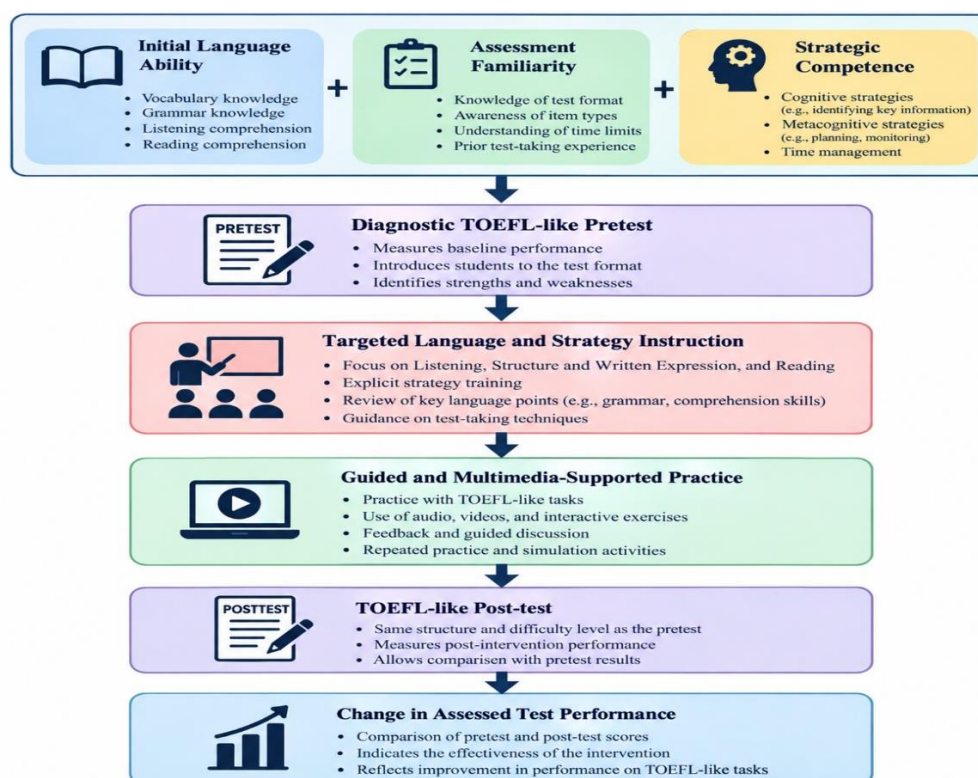


Fig 1. Theoretical Framework

This framework is consistent with the recent literature on second-language test preparation, which emphasizes the need to examine both the practices used in preparation and their measurable consequences (He et al., 2025). It also responds to the methodological gap identified in the literature

by evaluating a structured intervention through pretest–post-test comparison and, where assumptions are satisfied, inferential statistical analysis.

The framework consequently positions the present study not as an investigation of TOEFL preparation in general, but as an empirical evaluation of whether a short, structured, strategy-oriented TOEFL preparation intervention is associated with measurable changes in the TOEFL-like performance of final-year students with limited prior TOEFL preparation experience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental One-Group Pretest–Post-test Design to examine changes in students' performance following a structured TOEFL preparation program. The design involved administering a pretest before the intervention and a post-test after the intervention to the same group of participants. The difference between the two measurements was used to determine whether students demonstrated measurable improvement in their TOEFL-like test performance following the training. The design was selected because the program was implemented as an institutional training activity involving the available cohort of final-year students, without a separate control group. Accordingly, the findings are interpreted as evidence of pre–post changes associated with the intervention, rather than as definitive evidence that the training alone caused the observed changes. The research procedure consisted of three principal stages: (1) initial assessment through a pretest, (2) structured TOEFL preparation training, and (3) final evaluation through a post-test.

2. Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at specialized college (STIE), Bandung, Indonesia, and involved 88 final-year students enrolled in four academic programs: Management, Human Resources Management (SDM), Marketing Management, and Accounting.

The participants were organized into two training batches to facilitate the implementation of the program and maintain an appropriate learning environment:

- Batch 1: 45 students, participating from September 15 to 26, 2025.
- Batch 2: 43 students, participating from November 10 to 21, 2025.

All participants completed the pretest before the training and the post-test after completing the intervention. The use of the same participants at both measurement points enabled individual pre–post-performance comparisons.

3. Research Instruments

Three instruments were employed to collect the research data: a questionnaire, a TOEFL-like test, and an observation instrument.

3.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered at the initial stage to obtain information about participants' English-learning backgrounds and previous experience with TOEFL testing and preparation. The questionnaire also addressed students' perceived difficulties in English and their familiarity with standardized English-language testing.

The questionnaire data were used primarily to describe the participants' initial learning and testing backgrounds and to provide contextual information for interpreting the quantitative test results.

3.2 TOEFL-Like Test

The principal quantitative instrument was a TOEFL-like English proficiency test covering three sections corresponding to the core components addressed in the training program:

1. Listening Comprehension
2. Structure and Written Expression
3. Reading Comprehension

The test was used in both the pretest and post-test stages. The test items were designed/adapted to reflect the format and skill areas of the TOEFL ITP rather than representing an official ETS TOEFL ITP examination. The pretest and post-test were administered at comparable levels of difficulty so that changes in students' performance could be examined across the two measurement points. The test was adapted from ETS TOEFL ITP materials. The scoring procedure should likewise be reported transparently. The number of correct responses for each section was recorded and converted into the study's reported TOEFL-like score using a TOEFL ITP-equivalent scale.

3.3 Observation

Observation was conducted throughout the training sessions to document students' participation and responses during the instructional activities. The observation focused on classroom engagement, participation in interactive activities, responsiveness to multimedia-based instruction, and students' engagement with TOEFL-oriented tasks.

Observation data were used as supporting contextual information rather than as a direct measure of improvement in English proficiency.

4. Training Procedure

The intervention was implemented through a structured TOEFL preparation program consisting of 10 intensive instructional sessions. The training employed interactive and multimedia-supported activities designed to familiarize students with the three test sections and provide opportunities to practice relevant strategies.

The intervention was organized around the following areas:

Stage 1: Initial Assessment — Pretest

Before receiving the TOEFL preparation intervention, all participants completed a TOEFL-like English proficiency test. The pretest established the participants' baseline performance in Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension.

The pretest also served as a diagnostic basis for identifying areas that required greater attention during the training.

Stage 2: Core Intervention — Structured TOEFL Preparation

The core intervention consisted of 10 sessions focusing on the three TOEFL-like test sections.

- a. Listening Comprehension (Sessions 2–4)

Instruction focused on strategies for understanding short conversations, longer conversations, and academic talks. Activities included listening

practice, identification of key information, recognition of distractors, and timed question practice.

- b. Structure and Written Expression (Sessions 5–7)
Instruction focused on sentence completion, grammatical structures, identification of grammatical errors, and recognition of recurring grammar patterns in TOEFL-like questions. Particular attention was given to identifying sentence components and analyzing grammatical relationships within a limited response time.
- c. Reading Comprehension (Sessions 8–9)
Instruction focused on strategies including skimming, scanning, identifying main and factual ideas, locating supporting information, and responding to inference questions. Students practiced applying these strategies to timed reading passages.
- d. Integrated Review and Practice (Session 10)
The final instructional session consolidated the strategies introduced in the three sections and provided students with additional TOEFL-like practice before the post-test.

Stage 3: Final Evaluation — Post-test

Following completion of the training program, participants completed a post-test covering the same three skill areas: Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension.

The post-test was designed to be comparable in format and difficulty to the pretest. Its purpose was to determine whether participants' test performance changed following the intervention. Pretest and post-test scores were subsequently compared at both the overall-test level and, where appropriate, by individual test section.

4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for the pretest and post-test results. These included the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores, frequency distributions, and percentages. The results were reported for the overall TOEFL-like test and, where relevant, for Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension separately. Second, an inferential statistical test was conducted to determine whether the difference between pretest and post-test scores was statistically significant. Because the same participants completed both measurements, a paired-samples statistical procedure was appropriate. A paired-samples *t*-test was used if the difference scores met the assumptions of parametric analysis. If the normality assumption was not satisfied, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used as the non-parametric alternative. The statistical analysis was conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = .05$. In addition to statistical significance, the magnitude of the pre-post change should be reported through an appropriate effect-size measure, enabling the practical magnitude of the observed change to be interpreted rather than relying solely on the *p*-value. The analysis can therefore be expressed as:

Pretest → Intervention → Post-test → Mean Difference → Inferential Test → Effect Size

Finally, questionnaire and observation data were analyzed descriptively to provide contextual information concerning participants' prior TOEFL experience, perceived difficulties, and engagement during the training. These data were used to complement the quantitative findings rather than to establish causal claims about proficiency improvement.

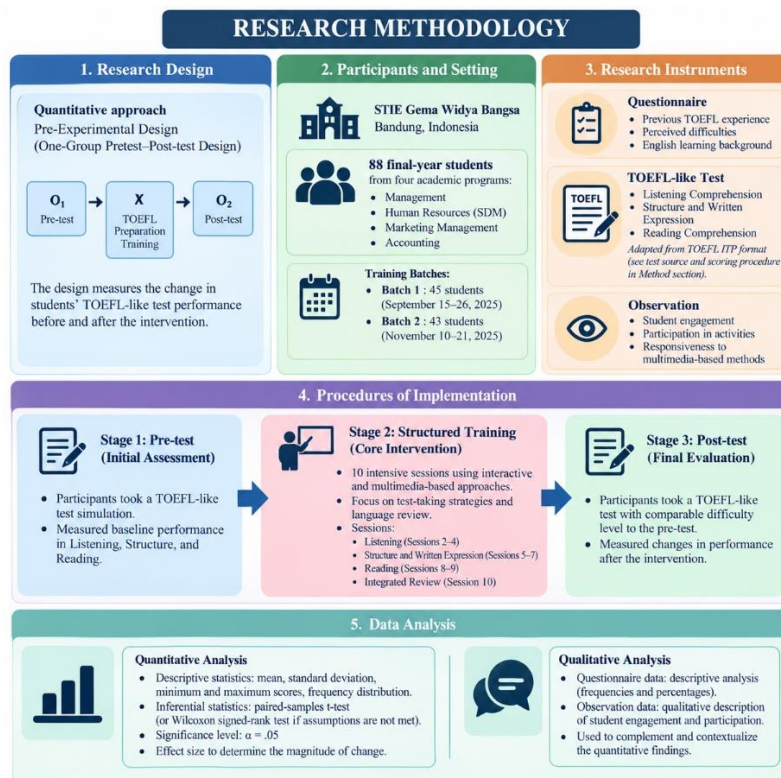


Fig 2. Research Methodology

5. Ethical Considerations

Participation in the training and data collection was conducted in accordance with the institutional requirements applicable to the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the assessment and training activities, and the results were used for research and program-evaluation purposes. Individual participants were not identified in the reporting of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Participants' Prior Experience and Initial Assessment

Before the TOEFL preparation intervention, the participants completed a questionnaire designed to identify their previous experience with standardized English testing and TOEFL preparation. The findings indicate that most participants had limited exposure to formal TOEFL assessment and preparation. Only 5.6% of the 88 participants reported that they had previously taken a formal TOEFL test, whereas 91.7% reported that they had never participated in a structured TOEFL preparation program. These findings are important for interpreting the subsequent test-performance results. The participants were not necessarily unfamiliar with English, but most had limited experience with the format, task demands, timing, and strategies associated with TOEFL-type assessment. Thus, the intervention addressed not only language-related difficulties but also a substantial gap in assessment familiarity and test-taking experience.

The questionnaire also identified substantial variation in students' perceptions of the difficulty of the three test sections. Structure and Written Expression was identified as the most difficult section by 78% of participants, followed by Listening Comprehension (15%) and Reading Comprehension (7%). The concentration of perceived difficulty in Structure and Written Expression provided a clear rationale for allocating substantial instructional time to sentence structure, verb forms, clauses, modifiers, and error identification during the intervention. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that TOEFL preparation may require explicit attention to the characteristics of individual test sections rather than treating test preparation as a general English-learning activity. Recent Indonesian research, for example, has reported measurable gains following targeted TOEFL preparation interventions, including interventions specifically directed at listening performance. Silfani et al. (2025) found a statistically significant increase in TOEFL listening scores following a short, targeted intervention, demonstrating the potential value of focused strategy instruction in a pre-experimental setting.

4.2 Pre-test and Post-test Performance

The pre-test and post-test were administered to the same 88 participants before and after the TOEFL preparation program. The pre-test established participants' baseline TOEFL-like performance, while the post-test measured performance following completion of the intervention.

The original analysis reported that a large proportion of participants obtained scores below the 450 benchmarks in the pre-test. Following the intervention, however, **all 88 participants (100%) obtained post-test scores above 450**. The post-test distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Post-Test Scores (N=88)

Score Range	Frequency (Students)	Percentage (%)	Competency Level
460–500	53	60.2%	Intermediate
501–550	26	29.5%	High Intermediate
551–580	8	9.1%	Advanced
620	1	1.1%	Highest observed score
Total	88	100%	

The post-test distribution shows that 53 participants (60.2%) obtained scores between 460 and 500, while 26 participants (29.5%) obtained scores between 501 and 550. A further eight participants (9.1%) obtained scores between 551 and 580, and one participant obtained a score of 620. In total, 35 participants (39.7%) obtained scores above 500. The finding that all participants exceeded 450 in the post-test is noteworthy as a descriptive outcome of the training program. However, the result should not by itself be interpreted as evidence of statistically significant improvement. A direct evaluation of improvement requires comparison of the pre-test and post-test means and variability, followed by an appropriate inferential test.

This comparison is necessary because the percentage of students exceeding a benchmark does not show the magnitude or statistical significance of individual score changes. If the assumptions for a paired-samples *t*-test are satisfied, the analysis should report the paired *t*-test result. If the difference scores are not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon

signed-rank test should be reported instead. The effect size should also be reported to indicate the practical magnitude of the observed change.

4.3 Performance in Relation to the Training Focus

The distribution of post-test scores provides preliminary evidence that the intervention was associated with improved performance at the descriptive level. Nevertheless, the interpretation should remain closely tied to the specific instructional components of the program. The training allocated four sessions to Structure and Written Expression because this was the section most frequently identified by participants as difficult. Instruction included sentence structure, verb forms and tenses, clauses and modifiers, error identification, and timed grammar exercises. These activities were designed to familiarize students with recurring grammatical patterns and the rapid decision-making required by TOEFL-like questions. The emphasis on explicit strategy instruction is consistent with recent research on TOEFL preparation.

Farid et al. (2024), for example, compared communicative and test-focused approaches in TOEFL preparation classes and reported significant pre-test/post-test score increases in both instructional groups. Similarly, research on targeted TOEFL preparation in Indonesia has reported significant gains when instruction was closely aligned with specific test demands and skills. These studies provide a useful point of comparison for the present findings. However, the current study differs in its institutional context and participant profile. The participants were final-year students from Management, Human Resources Management, Marketing Management, and Accounting programs, most of whom had no previous experience with structured TOEFL preparation. The present intervention therefore addresses a practical institutional need among non-English-major students approaching graduation.

4.4 The Role of Strategy-Oriented Instruction

The training was not limited to grammar explanation. Students were introduced to strategies for approaching different types of TOEFL-like questions. In Listening Comprehension, the activities included identifying key information, recognizing implied meaning, distinguishing main ideas from details, and practicing note-taking. In Reading Comprehension, students practiced skimming, scanning, identifying main ideas, locating specific information, and responding to inference questions. The integration of language knowledge and test-taking strategies is important because performance on a standardized test reflects students' ability to respond to specific task demands under time constraints. Recent research on students' understanding of high-stakes test designs similarly suggests that students' perceptions and understanding of test demands can influence their learning practices.

However, the present study should not conclude that the intervention improved students' general English proficiency solely on the basis of TOEFL-like test scores. The instrument measured performance on three specific assessment domains. Therefore, the more defensible interpretation is that the intervention was associated with improved performance on the TOEFL-like assessment, rather than establishing a generalized increase in English proficiency across all communicative domains.

4.5 Student Engagement During the Intervention

Classroom observations indicated changes in students' participation during the training sessions. According to the observation records, students initially demonstrated hesitation during simulation activities. As the training progressed, particularly during activities involving error analysis and multimedia-supported practice, students became more actively involved in identifying and discussing answers. These observations provide useful contextual information for interpreting the quantitative findings. Nevertheless, they should be treated as descriptive observational evidence rather than evidence that the program reduced test anxiety. The present study did not employ a validated anxiety scale or a pre-test/post-test measure of test anxiety. Therefore, statements that the intervention "reduced anxiety" should be avoided.

A more appropriate interpretation is that repeated exposure to TOEFL-like tasks appeared to increase students' familiarity and participation during the training sessions. This interpretation is consistent with the broader literature on washback, which emphasizes that the effects of testing on learning are mediated by teachers, learners, instructional practices, and educational contexts rather than being produced by the test alone. This distinction is particularly important because washback should not automatically be interpreted as positive. Research on TOEFL preparation has found that test preparation can produce positive attitudes and score gains while also encouraging an excessive focus on test performance at the expense of broader language-learning activities. Thus, the present findings support a more cautious interpretation: the structured preparation created opportunities for students to become more familiar with test demands and strategies, but the study does not establish broader changes in students' language-learning behavior.

4.6 Discussion of the Overall Findings

The central finding of the study is the descriptive change in students' TOEFL-like performance following a structured preparation program. All 88 participants obtained post-test scores above 450, and 35 participants (39.7%) obtained scores above 500. These findings indicate that the program was followed by a substantial upward shift in the observed score distribution. The result is broadly comparable with findings from other TOEFL preparation studies conducted in Indonesian higher-education contexts. Previous studies have reported improved TOEFL scores following structured preparation programs using pre-test/post-test designs. For example, studies involving Indonesian university students have reported statistically significant pre-post differences following TOEFL preparation interventions. More recent work has also examined targeted preparation, including interventions focusing specifically on listening strategies. The contribution of the present study therefore lies less in establishing that TOEFL preparation can improve test performance—a relationship already reported in previous research—and more in demonstrating how a short, structured, institution-based preparation model can be implemented among final-year students in a specialized higher-education institution with limited prior TOEFL exposure.

The three-stage model—diagnostic pre-test, strategy-oriented instruction, and post-test evaluation—provides a straightforward structure that can be incorporated into institutional English-support programs. The diagnostic stage identifies students' initial performance and perceived difficulties; the instructional stage addresses the specific demands of the

test; and the post-test provides an opportunity to evaluate changes in performance.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the research design. Because the study used a one-group pre-experimental design, the absence of a control group means that changes between the pre-test and post-test cannot be attributed exclusively to the intervention. Other factors, such as additional English exposure, practice outside the program, familiarity with test procedures, or repeated testing effects, may also have contributed to the observed changes. Furthermore, the post-test distribution alone cannot establish statistical significance. The final analysis should therefore report the pre-test and post-test means, standard deviations, paired statistical test, *p*-value, and effect size. This will allow the study to distinguish between a descriptive increase in scores and a statistically supported pre-post difference.

4.7 Implications for TOEFL Preparation in Higher Education

The findings have practical implications for institutions that provide English support for final-year students. The high proportion of participants without previous TOEFL preparation suggests that introducing students to the format and demands of standardized English testing may be an important component of institutional preparation programs. At the same time, the findings do not support the claim that TOEFL preparation alone improves students' employability. Employability was not directly measured in this study. Similarly, the findings cannot establish that the intervention increased general English proficiency beyond the domains measured by the TOEFL-like test. A more defensible implication is that institutions may consider integrating structured TOEFL preparation into existing academic-support or English-language programs for students who are required to demonstrate standardized English proficiency. Such programs can combine diagnostic assessment, targeted strategy instruction, guided practice, and post-intervention assessment. The intervention may also serve as a basis for longer-term preparation. The relatively small proportion of students reaching the highest observed score range indicates that a short intervention may be more appropriate for initial preparation and familiarization than for achieving advanced levels of standardized English performance. Longer-term programs could incorporate continued practice, formative assessment, and independent learning activities.

4.8 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study used a one-group pre-experimental design without a control group. Consequently, the observed pre-post changes cannot be interpreted as definitive evidence of a causal effect of the training. Second, the study was conducted at a single higher-education institution and involved students from four academic programs. The findings may therefore not be directly generalizable to students from other institutions or academic contexts. Third, the study focused on three TOEFL-like assessment domains—Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. It therefore does not provide evidence about students' speaking or writing proficiency. Fourth, the study relied partly on classroom observation and questionnaire responses to provide contextual information. These data are useful for describing students' experiences and engagement, but they should not be interpreted as direct measures of anxiety, motivation, or employability unless validated instruments were used. Finally, the

interpretation of the score improvement depends on transparent reporting of the TOEFL-like test's source, item construction, scoring procedure, and pre-post statistical analysis. These details should be fully documented to strengthen the validity and replicability of the findings.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the TOEFL Preparation syllabus, students' performance was measured through a pre-test and a post-test administered at the beginning and the end of the program. These assessments functioned not only as diagnostic and evaluative tools but also as empirical indicators of the learning outcomes achieved through the structured instructional process. The following sections present a detailed analysis of the pre-test and post-test results, highlighting students' initial proficiency levels and the extent of improvement after participating in the program. The most significant finding in this study is the participants' improved performance in the Structure and Written Expression section. As highlighted in the theoretical review, the syntax gap between Bahasa Indonesia and English often leads to fossilized grammatical errors. By utilizing sessions 5, 6, and 7 specifically for error analysis and sentence completion strategies, the instructors moved the students from rote memorization to a conceptual understanding of English logic. Students were taught to identify distractors—options that look grammatically correct but fail to meet specific structural requirements (such as subject-verb agreement or parallel structure). This confirms the theory by Hawkey and Green (2021) that improving strategic competence is just as vital as increasing linguistic knowledge in a standardized testing context (see table 1).

The use of multimedia tools and real time simulations played a crucial role in lowering the students' affective filters. According to Krashen's theory, high anxiety prevents input from reaching the language acquisition part of the brain. The simulations provided a safe environment for students to make mistakes and learn from them before the final assessment. The 60.2% of students who landed in the 460–500 range represent a group that has moved from being linguistically hindered to functionally proficient. This improvement is a direct result of the interactive nature of the training, which shifted the focus from the fear of failure to the challenge of strategy application. The success of this program at specialized college (STIE) serves as a practical manifestation of SDG 4 (Quality Education). By providing these 88 students with the tools to achieve competitive TOEFL scores, the program directly enhances their employability. This aligns with the Indonesia's Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional (RPJMN) 2020-2024 objectives of creating a globally competitive workforce.

Furthermore, the data proves that even in specialized vocational colleges (STIE), where English might not be the primary focus of the curriculum, intensive and well-structured interventions can produce results comparable to general university settings. The fact that 29.5% reached the 501–550 range proves that the competency gap in Indonesian higher education can be bridged through targeted institutional support and community engagement (PkM). The results suggest that TOEFL preparation should not be a onetime event but rather an integrated part of the final year curriculum. The Three Stage Model (Pretest, Strategy Instruction, Post-test) used in this research provides a replicable framework for other institutions.

However, the findings also suggest a need for longer term engagement. While the scores improved significantly, the 9.1% who reached the advanced level (551–580) indicates that reaching expert status requires more than an intensive short-term course. Future programs should consider blended

learning models, combining these intensive workshops with ongoing digital practice platforms to sustain the progress made during the training.

In conclusion, the training program successfully transformed the students' relationship with the TOEFL. By moving beyond the mechanics of grammar into the realm of test taking strategy and psychological readiness, the 88 participants are now better equipped to navigate the linguistic demands of the professional world. The significant upward trend in scores serves as empirical evidence that structured, strategy-based pedagogical interventions are essential for enhancing the global competitiveness of Indonesian graduates.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a structured, three-stage TOEFL Preparation training model in enhancing the English proficiency of final year students at specialized college (STIE). Based on the findings and the exhaustive analysis of the data, the following conclusions can be drawn:

First, the implementation of a systematic training framework—integrating pretest diagnostics, strategic pedagogical intervention, and post-test evaluation—is highly effective in improving student performance. The quantitative evidence is compelling: 100% of the 88 participants successfully exceeded the institutional benchmark of 450, with a significant majority (60.2%) reaching the intermediate range (460–500) and nearly 40% achieving scores above 500. This shift from a baseline of limited assessment literacy to functional proficiency demonstrates that the competency gap among Indonesian graduates is not due to a lack of innate ability, but rather a lack of exposure to specialized test-taking strategies. Second, the study highlights that Structure and Written Expression remain the most significant cognitive hurdle for learners. However, by shifting the pedagogical focus from rote memorization to critical error analysis and linguistic logic, instructors can effectively dismantle these barriers. The use of interactive simulations and multimedia tools served a dual purpose: they facilitated deeper cognitive processing of complex English syntax and lowered the students' affective filter, thereby reducing test anxiety and fostering a more positive wash back effect. Third, this research underscores the vital role of Higher Education Institutions in fulfilling SDG 4 (Quality Education). By providing targeted English competency training, institutions directly empower their graduates with the strategic competence necessary to compete in a globalized labor market. The success of this program at a specialized college (STIE) suggests that the model is robust and replicable across various academic disciplines, contributing to the broader national goal of enhancing human resource quality.

Based on the conclusions above, the following recommendations are offered to stakeholders, including academic institutions, educators, and future researchers. For Higher Education Institutions, there should be curriculum integration: TOEFL preparation should not be treated as a onetime extracurricular activity. Institutions should consider integrating TOEFL equivalent modules into the mandatory English curriculum for final year students to ensure sustained development. Establish clear English proficiency benchmarks for graduation that align with industrial standards (e.g., a minimum score of 450 or 500) to incentivize students to prioritize linguistic competence. For educators and practitioners, there should be strategic pedagogy that instructors prioritize test-taking strategies (such as skimming, scanning, and error identification) alongside traditional grammar

instruction. Focusing on how the test is structured is as important as the language itself. Finally, utilization of technology in terms of expanding the use of digital simulation platforms. Providing students with unlimited access to computer-based simulations can build the stamina and familiarity required for the actual testing environment.

Future research should track the participants after graduation to measure the actual impact of their TOEFL scores on their career trajectories and job placement success.

Comparative Analysis: Conduct comparative studies between different pedagogical methods (e.g., purely digital vs. face-to-face vs. blended learning) to determine the most cost-effective and efficient model for large-scale student populations. **Focus on Productive Skills:** While this study focused on the passive/receptive skills tested in the TOEFL ITP (Listening, Structure, Reading), future research should explore training models for the TOEFL iBT or IELTS to include productive skills like Speaking and Writing, which are increasingly demanded in the global market.

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