

Enhancing Eleventh Grade Students' TOEFL Listening Ability through Socialization Activities at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a socialization activity that introduced the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to 11th-grade students in the TKJ program at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa. This initiative aimed to raise awareness of the TOEFL test format, its importance, and its relevance to academic and career development. A qualitative descriptive approach was used, involving 16 students through a structured program consisting of preparation, implementation, and evaluation stages. Findings indicated that most students were initially unfamiliar with the TOEFL, especially the listening component. However, this socialization activity effectively increased students' understanding and interest in English learning, especially in the listening section. Challenges such as low prior knowledge and limited engagement were addressed through simplified explanations and interactive sessions. Overall, the activity contributed positively to improving students' English language competence and motivation, preparing them to understand the TOEFL listening section for global academic and professional demands.

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INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that plays a pivotal role in the era of globalization. Proficiency in English is not only essential for communication but also acts as a key requirement in academic and professional environments. According to Harmer (2007), English functions as a “global lingua franca,” serving as the primary medium of communication in education, science, business, and international collaboration. This has led to an increasing emphasis on English language competence in educational institutions, including vocational schools (Sinambela et al., 2023).

One prominent tool to measure English proficiency is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). TOEFL is widely recognized by universities, scholarship agencies, and professional institutions globally. Brown (2004) asserts that TOEFL is a standardized test designed to evaluate the English proficiency of non-native speakers, specifically for academic purposes (Simanjuntak et al., 2025). In line with this, Sharpe

(2008) mentions that TOEFL is often used as a crucial selection criterion for students pursuing international education. Additionally, ETS (Educational Testing Service, 2023) highlights that TOEFL scores are also increasingly used in employment settings to assess job readiness, particularly in industries with global connections.

The TOEFL test assesses four major language skills necessary for academic success:

1. Listening Comprehension, which measures the ability to understand spoken English in lectures and conversations;
2. Structure and Written Expression, which evaluates grammatical accuracy and proper sentence formation (for PBT format);
3. Reading Comprehension, which tests the ability to understand academic written texts;

Several studies have identified areas of difficulty within the TOEFL test. Research by Munir (2016) found that Listening Comprehension is frequently considered the most challenging section among Indonesian students due to the speed of native speakers and exposure to unfamiliar accents (Manurung et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Farhady et al. (2010) argue that Reading Comprehension is the most fundamental skill, serving as the basis for academic learning across subjects. Philips (2001) also notes that weaknesses in the Structure and Written Expression section often result in lower overall TOEFL scores, especially among vocational students who lack formal grammar instruction. The importance of TOEFL extends beyond academic entrance requirements. As highlighted by Crystal (2003), English certification such as TOEFL increases employability and international competitiveness, making it highly relevant for vocational students preparing for careers in a globalized workforce (Saragih et al., 2025; Herman et al., 2025).

Based on initial observations at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa, many students in the 11th-grade TKJ program had limited understanding of TOEFL's purpose, structure, and benefits. Furthermore, their lack of confidence in English skills posed a barrier to academic progress and career preparation. In response to this issue, a TOEFL Socialization Program was implemented to introduce students to TOEFL test components, familiarize them with question types, and provide strategic learning tips. The activity included a three-stage process: Preparation, Implementation, and Evaluation, focusing on interactive presentations, sample practice questions, and discussion sessions.

Through this program, students are expected to gain greater motivation to learn English, understand the relevance of TOEFL to their future goals, and build the necessary skills to succeed academically and professionally.

METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to collect data. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups attach to a social or humanitarian issue. Meanwhile, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) emphasize that qualitative research is descriptive and emphasizes the processes, meanings, and understandings gained through verbal or visual data. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research has several functions, such as:

1. Understanding phenomena in natural settings,
2. Interpreting the meanings people bring to their experiences,
3. Producing rich and in-depth descriptions of specific situations.

These functions are highly relevant to this study, which aims to observe and describe how TOEFL socialization can explore students' listening skills in the classroom. This study focuses on students' listening abilities and how they interact with and comprehend what they hear during the learning process. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative method to observe and describe how TOEFL socialization can explore students' listening skills in the classroom.

The population in this study was all 11th-grade TKJ students at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa. The sample was taken from 16 students from class XI TKJ at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa who participated in the TOEFL introduction socialization activity on May 31, 2025, at 7:30 a.m. Western Indonesian Time (WIB). Data collection was conducted through an offline TOEFL introduction socialization activity. Data collection tools included audio recordings played to the students. The research instrument used was audio recordings prepared by the research team. In addition, observations of the activity implementation process were conducted to obtain additional information. This socialization activity consisted of several stages, including:

1. Preparation

As an initial step in implementing the socialization activity, the writer first prepared a power of attorney signed by the lecturer in charge of the course. This power of attorney served as formal documentation to request permission from the principal of SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa, allowing the socialization activity to be carried out officially. The letter specifically requested approval to conduct the activity with 16 students from Grade 11 of the Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) program at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa.

After obtaining approval from the school, the writer proceeded to prepare the socialization materials to be delivered. These materials were carefully structured and tailored to suit the needs and characteristics of the 11th-grade TKJ students, ensuring that the activity would run effectively and achieve the intended objectives.

2. Implementation

The socialization activity began with an expression of gratitude for the opportunity, followed by brief introductions by the socialization team in class. This opening aimed to establish a positive atmosphere and mutual respect between the presenter and participants. Following the opening, the author began the presentation by introducing the TOEFL topic to the 11th-grade TKJ students of SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa. The explanation was delivered using previously prepared materials, ensuring that the information was conveyed clearly and effectively to support students' understanding of the TOEFL and its relevance to their future academic and professional goals.

3. Evaluation

Following the presentation, a question-and-answer session was conducted to further engage the students and clarify any points related to the topic. During this session, the speaker encouraged active participation by inviting students to ask questions and share their thoughts. In addition to answering questions, the speaker also prompted students to express their opinions or provide responses related to the material presented. This interactive approach helped create a dynamic learning environment and ensured that students were involved in the discussion. To conclude the activity, the speaker formally closed the socialization session by summarizing the key points discussed and thanking the students and teachers for their attention and participation. The session ended on a positive note, with the hope that the information shared would be beneficial for the students' academic development.

FINDINGS

The socialization activity, which introduced the TOEFL and its functions to eleventh-grade students at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa, was carried out to help students understand the TOEFL's role in preparing for future studies or career paths. This socialization activity began with self-introductions by the socialization team and the objectives of the activity. The TOEFL socialization activity conducted at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa for the 11th-grade students of TKJ 1 class consisted of three main stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The activity sessions are shown in the following table.

Table 1. Composition of TOEFL introduction TOEFL socialization activities for students

NO	Time	Material
1.	07.30-07.40	Introduction by the socialization team
2.	07.41- 08.00	Explanation of the meaning and function of TOEFL
3.	08.01-08.20	Types of TOEFL
4.	08.21-08.40	TOEFL structure (number of questions, duration and questions)
5.	08.41-09.00	Tips for doing and things to prepare before the TOEFL test
6	09.01-09.10	Question and answer session
7.	09.11-09.30	Evaluation
8.	09.31-09.45	Closing and conclusion

1. Preparation Stages

In this stage, the organizing team coordinated with the school principal to obtain permission for the activity. The socialization was scheduled for 135 minutes. The team also prepared supporting tools such as a PowerPoint presentation, a speaker, and laptop to ensure a smooth implementation.

2. Implementation Stage

The activity began with a greeting, pray and self-introduction by the presenter to the students. The materials delivered included the definition of TOEFL, the purpose and significance of the test for students, the skills assessed in the test, sample questions from the listening, structure and written, reading sections, and the allocated time for each section. In the implementation phase, the outreach team divided this activity into three sessions.

- (1) The first session includes greetings, pray, self-introductions and the objectives of the socialization from team members to the 11th-grade students of SMK TKJ Tanah Jawa.



Picture 1. The socialization team greeted, prayed, introduced themselves and conveyed the socialization objectives of the socialization team

- (2) The second session included an explanation from team members regarding the definition, function, and types of 11th-grade students of TKJ 1 Tanah Jawa.



Picture 2. Explanation of the Definition, Function, and Types of TOEFL

- (3) The third session was a question-and-answer discussion, where students were given the opportunity to ask questions if there were any parts of the material they did not understand.



Picture 3. The question-and-answer discussion

During this session, several students asked questions related to TOEFL material they didn't understand. These questions were answered live by the students and teacher in an interactive session. Some of the questions that arose included:

1) Online TOEFL learning resources

Students asked about online resources that can be used to study for the TOEFL. The presenter explained that there are various options, such as the official TOEFL website (www.ets.org/toefl), online learning platforms like Khan Academy, and mobile apps like Duolingo and TOEFL Practice.

2) Facing challenges on the TOEFL test, especially in the Listening section

Another question related to how to overcome difficulties on the TOEFL test, especially in the listening section. The presenter explained that common challenges include time constraints and difficulty understanding the various English accents that appear in the listening recordings.

3. Evaluation Stage

At the closing stage of the activity, namely the evaluation stage, the socialization team assessed the material presented to the students. The evaluation was conducted by providing some sample questions to illustrate the TOEFL test format, particularly the Listening sections. During this stage, the team observed the students' enthusiasm in working on the questions. Students were also given the opportunity to ask questions if they encountered difficulties. During this stage, a discussion ensued between the team and the students as they discussed and solved the questions. As the result active interaction occurred, with students showing interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the material and asking questions about sections they found difficult. The session ended with expressions of gratitude to all parties involved.



Picture 4. Evaluation Stage

DISCUSSION

The TOEFL socialization strategy aimed to prepare students to meet academic demands and face the global job market. The program was designed to introduce students to the structure and function of TOEFL and to raise awareness about the importance of English proficiency in both professional and academic contexts. Through this activity, students gained a comprehensive understanding of TOEFL question types, test duration, and its long-term strategic benefits. They began to realize that TOEFL is a crucial qualification for continuing education or entering the international workforce. As a result, students' motivation to learn English increased.

1. Impact on Vocational High School Students

The TOEFL socialization activity significantly contributed to helping vocational high school students prepare for future academic and professional challenges. As an international standardized test that measures English language proficiency, TOEFL serves as a vital benchmark for students planning to pursue higher education or join the global workforce. The implementation of the TOEFL socialization program at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa helped enhance the students' overall English skills. Exposure to TOEFL information encouraged students to improve their listening, reading, and writing abilities. These improved skills are not only beneficial for the TOEFL exam but also prepare students to compete in academic and professional environments where English proficiency is essential.

2. Challenges During Implementation

Several challenges emerged during the implementation of the socialization activity. One of the main obstacles was that some of the 11th-grade TKJ students lacked basic knowledge about the TOEFL test. This limited understanding made it difficult for them to grasp the context and purpose of the material being presented. Additionally, a few students showed a low level of interest in the topic, which affected

their focus and engagement during the session. This lack of enthusiasm posed a challenge in maintaining their attention and ensuring active participation throughout the socialization activity.

3. Efforts to Overcome the Challenges

To address these challenges, the presenter adjusted the delivery of the TOEFL material by speaking at a slower pace and using clear, accessible language. This approach aimed to help students better understand the content and absorb the information at their own pace. Furthermore, the presenter emphasized the importance of the TOEFL test as a key component of their future academic and career preparation. By highlighting its relevance, the presenter motivated the students to start preparing for the TOEFL early, encouraging them to view it as an achievable goal and an essential step toward their personal and professional development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the community service activity through the TOEFL introduction socialization program held at SMK Nusantara Tanah Jawa, it can be concluded that this activity had a positive impact on the understanding and motivation of 11th grade students majoring in Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) in preparing for the TOEFL test, particularly in listening skills. The main objective of this activity was to introduce the TOEFL format, question types, and the importance of English language proficiency as a prerequisite for both academic and global work. The TOEFL is an important measuring tool for vocational students to prepare for international competition, both in further education and professional careers.

During the socialization process, students demonstrated high enthusiasm, as reflected in their active participation in the discussion, question-and-answer sessions, and practice exercises. The interaction between the teaching team and students created a communicative and interactive learning environment, thereby helping to increase students' interest in learning English. Although some obstacles, such as a lack of prior knowledge and low motivation to learn, were encountered among some students, these were overcome by delivering material tailored to the students' needs and level of understanding, along with engaging and easy-to-understand delivery methods. Thus, this activity proved effective in raising students' awareness of the importance of the TOEFL and encouraging their readiness to face English language challenges with greater confidence and direction.

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