

Socialization on Toefl Listening: Benefits and Strategies for Students at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar

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ABSTRACT

This community-based outreach program was conducted to improve Grade XI students' awareness, skills, and motivation in preparing for the TOEFL Listening section at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar. As English language proficiency becomes an increasingly essential requirement for global education and career advancement, early exposure to international standardized tests such as TOEFL is critical. The program introduced students to the structure and function of the TOEFL, including its different types (iBT, ITP, and Prediction) and the specific challenges of the Listening section. Students were trained to use effective strategies such as focusing on the final line in dialogues, identifying synonymous phrases in questions and answers, and avoiding traps based on similar sounds. The implementation included interactive presentations, real-time simulations using Google Forms, and guided listening activities with authentic audio. Students participated actively and demonstrated improved engagement, comprehension, and test readiness. The feedback phase indicated that students gained a clearer understanding of TOEFL Listening tasks and increased confidence in approaching listening-based questions. The combination of strategy-based instruction, digital simulations, and supportive discussion helped students overcome initial anxiety and performance gaps. As a result, this outreach initiative successfully equipped students with practical listening tools, increased their motivation to practice independently, and laid the foundation for future TOEFL preparation. It is recommended that similar programs be extended to other schools to support students' readiness for international English proficiency testing.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate in English is not just an advantage it is a necessity. As the international language of academia, science, and global communication, English proficiency opens access to higher education, scholarship opportunities, and career paths abroad. One key tool in assessing English proficiency for non-native speakers is the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), a globally accepted exam required by universities and institutions around the world. Among its four tested skills reading, listening, speaking, and writing listening is often perceived as the most difficult by high school students, especially those with limited exposure to authentic spoken English

At SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar, observations revealed that students in Grade XI had minimal familiarity with the TOEFL, particularly its Listening section. Most students lacked understanding of the test's structure and common strategies to approach listening-based questions. According to Phillips (2001), successful TOEFL performance, especially in the Listening section, depends on mastering specific techniques, such as recognizing paraphrased language, focusing on implied meaning, and avoiding distractor options with similar sounds. Moreover, the integration of digital tools, such as audiovisual simulations, is essential to promote meaningful engagement and comprehension Kurniawan, (2020); Wulandari, (2022);

To address these issues, a socialization program was implemented by a team from Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. The program was designed not only to introduce the format and types of TOEFL iBT, ITP, and Prediction but also to build students' awareness of its importance and teach practical strategies tailored to the listening section. Key techniques emphasized during the session included focusing on the last line of a dialogue (as it often contains the correct answer), identifying synonym-based answers instead of matching words exactly, and avoiding traps set by similar-sounding but incorrect options. These strategies align with the communicative language teaching approach (Brown, 2001) and the theory of authentic task-based instruction (Richards, 2010), which stress that language learning is most effective when linked to real-world

The outreach program utilized a mix of presentations, audio-based simulations via Google Forms, and group discussions to encourage interaction, critical thinking, and peer learning. During implementation, students responded positively, actively participated in practice sessions, and demonstrated growing confidence in handling listening-based tasks. In line with Rost (2010), listening is not only about hearing sounds but also involves prediction, interpretation, and inference all of which were fostered throughout the program. The final discussion session revealed that students felt more confident, motivated, and better prepared to face the TOEFL Listening section in the future.

METHOD

This activity was carried out as an educational outreach aimed at raising students' awareness and understanding of the TOEFL, particularly the Listening section. The method adopted combined informative delivery with interactive engagement, ensuring students were not only recipients of knowledge but also active participants in the learning process.

The session was divided into two main parts. The first part consisted of a presentation, where students were introduced to the essentials of the TOEFL test. This included an explanation of the different types of TOEFL (such as iBT, ITP, and Prediction), its academic and professional relevance, how to find free online practice resources, general test fees, and locations, as well as practical tips for answering questions efficiently. The material was delivered through an engaging PowerPoint presentation, designed to be both accessible and visually appealing.

The second part of the session focused on discussion and interaction. Students were encouraged to ask questions, share their thoughts, and clarify any doubts about the material presented. This open dialogue created a comfortable environment for learning, helping to reinforce key concepts and strategies introduced earlier in the session. Throughout the activity, observation techniques were used to collect qualitative data, particularly focusing on student engagement, attentiveness, and the depth of their responses during the discussion.

This outreach program was implemented on May 16, 2025, at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar, with 25 Grade XI students participating as the target audience. The activity was conducted by a team of six university students: Eksaulina Simanjuntak (1), Indah Peronika Siahaan (2), Imeliana Saragih (3), Diana Dian Sari Tampubolon (4), Putri Anastasia Silalahi (5), and Risma Novalina Sagala (6).

By combining informative presentation with student-centered interaction, the program aimed not only to introduce the basic concept of TOEFL Listening but also to motivate students to start preparing for English proficiency assessments as an important step toward their academic and future career paths.

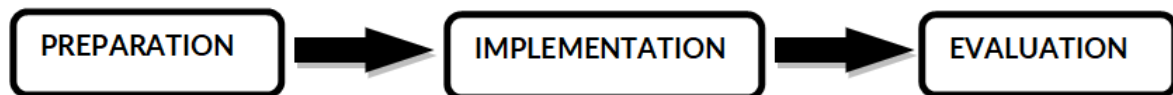


Figure 1. Stages of method implementation

Phase 1: Preparation

In the initial stage, a series of preparatory steps were taken to ensure that the activity would run smoothly and effectively. These included:

1. Coordinating with the supervising lecturer to confirm all academic and logistical requirements for the activity.
2. Conducting a meeting with the principal of SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar to obtain formal approval and support for the TOEFL socialization program.
3. Collaborating with the English subject teacher to identify and confirm a suitable class of students to participate in the program.
4. Preparing all materials and technical equipment, including PowerPoint slides, sample TOEFL questions, and stationery, to support the delivery of content and student interaction during the session.

Phase 2 Implementation

The implementation phase involved the actual delivery of the TOEFL Listening socialization to 25 Grade XI students at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar. The session was led by a team of six university students: Eksaulina Simanjuntak, Indah Peronika Siahaan, Imeliana Saragih, Diana Dian Sari Tampubolon, Putri Anastasia Silalahi, and Risma Novalina Sagala, who presented the material and facilitated discussions. This phase focused on providing students with essential knowledge about TOEFL, particularly the listening section. Key topics included the definition and purpose of the TOEFL, its types (iBT, ITP, Prediction), practical test-taking strategies, and access to free online practice resources. The session combined direct instruction with student-centered discussion to encourage active engagement.

Phase 3 Evaluation

In the final phase, students were given the opportunity to participate in a Q&A and reflection session. During this time, they asked questions, raised concerns, and shared their thoughts regarding the material delivered. Topics discussed included technical aspects of the TOEFL Listening section, strategies to overcome common challenges, and student experiences during the simulation.

The facilitators responded by offering guidance, clarifying confusing points, and recommending practical solutions or study strategies. This closing phase served to reinforce the learning objectives while also assessing students' comprehension and interest in further developing their English proficiency.

RESULTS

Socialization activities regarding the introduction of TOEFL Listening and its benefits to Grade XI students of SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar were carried out to improve students' awareness, confidence, and preparedness in facing the TOEFL Listening section. The activity started with a formal opening, followed by a brief overview of the TOEFL test, its benefits for academic and career advancement, and the different types of TOEFL (iBT, ITP, and Prediction).

Students received detailed explanations about the structure of the listening section, common test challenges, and general strategies to improve their listening comprehension. The session was conducted in an interactive format, combining presentation slides, discussions, and practical exercises.

One of the main features of the session was a simulation of TOEFL Listening using Google Forms, where students listened to authentic audio materials and answered related multiple-choice questions. This hands-on practice gave students the opportunity to experience the test format, manage their time effectively, and reflect on their comprehension skills.

The following table summarizes the sequence of activities conducted during the session:

NO.	Time	Material Description
1.	09.00 – 09.05	Introduction and opening by the socialization team.
2.	09.05 – 09.20	Explanation of the meaning, tips and trick to answer questions listening skill in TOEFL.
3.	09.21 – 09.25	Explanation of the types of TOEFL (iBT, ITP, Prediction).
4.	09.25 – 09.50	Presentation of TOEFL Listening strategies.
5.	09.50 – 10.20	Simulation of Listening section and answering questions.
6.	10.20 – 10.30	Recflection,open discussion and Q&A with students.

Phase 1: Preparation

The initial stage of this outreach activity involved a careful planning process between the socialization team and SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar. A coordination meeting was held with the English teacher and school principal to discuss technical arrangements and to determine a suitable group of students. After mutual agreement, a Grade XI class was chosen, with a total of 25 students participating in the event.

In preparation for the session, the team developed a set of teaching materials aimed at making the TOEFL Listening section more accessible to students. The core content was organized into an informative and interactive PowerPoint presentation, which was designed to provide clear explanations of listening question types, test format, and general listening tips.

To further enhance the practicality of the session, the team also created a TOEFL Listening simulation using Google Forms. This online platform allowed students to engage directly with sample test questions and apply strategies introduced during the presentation. Not only did this approach promote hands-on practice, but it also gave students immediate feedback on their listening performance.

Overall, the preparation phase focused on ensuring that all instructional components—content, media, and class coordination—were ready to support an effective and meaningful learning experience for the students.

Phase 2: Implementation

The implementation phase was carried out on the scheduled date at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar, involving 25 students from Grade XI. The activity was structured into several segments to ensure clarity, engagement, and active student involvement. Each segment aimed to gradually build students' understanding of the TOEFL Listening section and allow them to practice the strategies introduced.

The session began with a short introduction by the presenters to establish rapport and set expectations. This was followed by a concise overview of the TOEFL test, highlighting its functions, benefits, and various types—including TOEFL iBT, ITP, and the Prediction Test. Students were encouraged to ask questions and share what they already knew about the TOEFL, creating an interactive learning atmosphere.



Figure 2. Introduction by the socialization team to all participants

Next, the team presented general listening strategies tailored to the TOEFL format. These included practical tips for understanding short dialogues and academic talks. The strategies were explained using simple examples to ensure that all students could follow regardless of their current English proficiency level.

After the strategy explanation, students took part in a listening simulation using Google Forms, which included real sample audio and multiple-choice questions. The simulation helped students apply the strategies they had just learned in a test-like environment. Students were guided step-by-step and encouraged to take notes while listening.

Throughout the session, facilitators monitored students' participation, responded to their questions, and provided encouragement. After completing the simulation, the class engaged in an open discussion, where students shared their thoughts, challenges, and strategies that worked best for them.

By the end of the session, students not only became more familiar with the TOEFL Listening format, but also demonstrated increased motivation to improve their listening skills. The structured delivery and interactive elements allowed for meaningful engagement and deeper comprehension of the material.

A. Introduction to TOEFL: Definition, Purpose, and Test Types

To lay a solid foundation before practicing listening skills, the session began by introducing students to the essential background of the TOEFL test. This included its definition, purpose, advantages, and the different forms it takes.

Definition of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

TOEFL is an internationally recognized standardized test designed to assess the English language skills of non-native speakers. Developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the test primarily evaluates how well individuals can use English in academic settings. It is widely accepted by universities, companies, scholarship providers, and governmental institutions across the globe.

Purpose of the TOEFL

The core objective of the TOEFL is to measure the ability of non-native English speakers to comprehend and use English effectively in academic contexts. Because of this, TOEFL scores are often required for university admissions, particularly in English-speaking countries. In many cases, it serves as a gateway to international education, research programs, and career development.

Benefits of Taking the TOEFL

During the session, students were also made aware of the broader advantages of having a TOEFL score, which include:

- Meeting university admission criteria both domestically and internationally
- Increasing eligibility for scholarships
- Improving job prospects in global environments
- Serving as a self-assessment tool for English proficiency
- Supporting visa and immigration requirements for study abroad

Types of TOEFL Tests

Students were then introduced to the three common versions of the TOEFL:

1. TOEFL iBT (Internet-Based Test) – The most commonly administered format, evaluating four core skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Scores range from 0 to 120.
2. TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program) – Typically used within institutions in Indonesia. Though not accepted for international admissions, it helps measure academic readiness with a score range of 310 to 677.
3. TOEFL Prediction Test – A mock test modeled after TOEFL ITP. It provides an estimated score and is often used for practice or internal selection processes.



Figure 3. Explanation of initial core material

The third part of the implementation emphasized practical listening strategies, presented as three key skills to help students approach TOEFL Listening questions with greater accuracy and confidence. These strategies were central to the training and became a core component of the simulation practice.

- Skill 1: Focus on the Last Line

Students were trained to listen carefully to the final response in short dialogues. This part of the conversation usually contains the most essential information, such as corrections, confirmations, or implied meaning. By concentrating on the last speaker's line, students could better understand the speaker's intent and respond accurately.

- Skill 2: Choose Answers with Synonyms

Students were encouraged not to depend on identical wording when selecting answers. Instead, they practiced identifying synonyms or paraphrased expressions, since TOEFL questions rarely use the exact vocabulary from the audio. This skill helped students focus on the meaning rather than surface-level word matching.

- Skill 3: Avoid Similar Sounds

Common listening traps in TOEFL include answer choices with words that sound similar to what was said but are incorrect in meaning. Students were guided to avoid being misled by these distractors by listening for context and overall message, not just isolated sounds.

These three skills—focusing on the last line, choosing based on synonyms, and avoiding sound-alike traps—were explained using examples and followed by short TOEFL-style questions to give students immediate practice. The interactive format allowed students to actively apply the strategies and receive support when needed.

B. Key Strategies for TOEFL Listening Success

As part of the implementation phase, the students were introduced to a focused set of strategies designed to enhance their performance in the TOEFL Listening section. The facilitators presented these strategies as three essential skills that students should apply consistently during test-taking. Each skill was explained in detail, followed by practice activities to support mastery.

Skill 1: Focus on the Last Line

Students were taught to direct their attention to the final response in short dialogues, especially in two-speaker conversations. The last line often carries the most relevant information—whether it is a clarification, agreement, correction, or implied message. Understanding this pattern allows students to grasp the speaker's true intention and determine the correct answer based on subtle cues.

(Listening Part A), the answer to the question is often found in the second speaker's response. Therefore, listening carefully to the second line is crucial. An example was provided:

Dialogue:

Man: "Billy really made a big mistake this time."

Woman: "Yes, he forgot to turn in his research paper."

Question: What does the woman say about Billy?

Correct Answer: (D) He didn't remember to submit his assignment.

This example highlighted how the correct answer is based directly on the second line.

Skill 2: Choose Answers with Synonyms

In TOEFL Listening, correct answer choices are frequently phrased differently from the wording used in the audio. To address this, students were trained to identify synonyms and paraphrased ideas rather than relying on exact word matches. This skill helps them understand meaning across a wider vocabulary range and enhances comprehension in varied contexts.

From the Paper and Computer TOEFL Tests On the recording, you hear:

(Woman) Why is Barbara feeling so happy?

(Man) She just started working in a real estate agency.

(Question) What does the man say about Barbara?

(A) She always liked her work in real estate.

(B) She began a new job.

(C) She just bought some real estate.

(D) She bought a real estate agency.

Correct Answer: (B) She began a new job.

Skill 3: Avoid Similar Sounds

Students were also made aware of distractors that use words sounding similar to those spoken in the audio but which do not match the actual content or meaning. They were encouraged to analyze the entire context of the sentence and not be misled by familiar or similar-sounding words. This strategy improves critical listening and reduces errors due to false assumptions based on sound alone.

From the Paper and Computer TOEFL Tests On the recording, you hear:

(Man) Why couldn't Mark come with us?

(Woman) He was searching for a new apartment.

(Question) What does the woman say about Mark?

(A) He was in the department office.

(B) He was looking for a place to live.

(C) He was working on his research project.

(D) He had an appointment at church.

Correct Answer: (B) He was looking for a place to live.

Distractor choices like "department," "research," and "church" were designed to confuse test-takers who rely on sound rather than meaning. In addition to the explanation, each skill was followed by practice questions to test student understanding.

Each of these three skills was introduced using simple, relatable examples. Students then engaged in simulation tasks and practice questions to reinforce their understanding. The session also included discussion and feedback to help them reflect on how these strategies improved their listening accuracy.



Figure 4. Explanation of TOEFL Listening Section

The fourth session was dedicated to a listening simulation, where students responded to real TOEFL-style audio questions. This activity allowed them to practice applying the strategies they had just learned—such as focusing on the last line, identifying synonyms, and avoiding similar sounds—in a structured, test-like environment. They were also encouraged to take brief notes during the audio playback, helping them identify key ideas, specific details, and speaker attitudes.

The simulation improved not only their comprehension but also their test-taking confidence and time management skills. After completing the task, students participated in a discussion where they compared answers and explained their reasoning. This peer-sharing component encouraged collaboration and helped clarify any misunderstandings.



Figure 5. Participation of class XI students for the Simulation TOEFL Test

The fifth and final session involved a reflection and open Q&A discussion. Students were invited to express their thoughts about the listening activities, including which strategies they found most useful and what difficulties they encountered. Many shared personal challenges with understanding English audio, such as keeping up with fast speech or unfamiliar accents.

The presenters responded to questions by offering practical tips, such as using free online listening tools and creating a regular practice routine. In addition, students were encouraged to support one another by sharing resources and learning together outside the classroom.

This final session not only clarified unresolved questions but also provided space for self-assessment and motivation. By reflecting on their own experiences, students developed a greater sense of ownership over their learning process.

To support all stages of implementation, the team used PowerPoint presentations, Google Forms for interactive quizzes, and authentic listening materials. These tools created an engaging and meaningful learning environment. Overall, students actively participated throughout the program, and many expressed a renewed enthusiasm for improving their English proficiency—particularly in preparation for future TOEFL tests.

C. Conclusion of the Presentation

The session concluded with a summary and reflection on the critical role of listening skills in achieving success on the TOEFL. Students were reminded that consistent and focused practice is essential for developing the ability to understand main ideas, recognize supporting information, interpret speaker tone, and draw inferences from spoken English.

As part of the closing remarks, the presenters emphasized the value of building listening habits beyond the classroom. Students were encouraged to continue practicing independently using free online resources, such as listening exercises, mock tests, and educational platforms.

The event was formally closed with words of appreciation for the students' active participation and enthusiasm. They were also motivated to remain committed to their English language development, especially as they prepare for future academic and professional challenges that require international-standard communication skills.



Figure 6. The conclusion of the presentation

Phase 3: Evaluation

The final stage of the activity was dedicated to evaluating students' engagement, understanding, and responses toward the materials delivered. This evaluation was carried out through a reflective discussion and an open Q&A session, which allowed participants to share their impressions, ask follow-up questions, and voice any difficulties they experienced related to the TOEFL Listening section.

During this closing session, the students of SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar participated actively, demonstrating high interest and curiosity. Many of them posed thoughtful questions, particularly concerning how to prepare effectively for the test, where to take the TOEFL in their area, and how to access free practice resources. These questions reflected their growing awareness of the importance of TOEFL for future academic goals and international opportunities.

Some of the most commonly asked questions during the session included:

- “Where can we take the TOEFL test in our city?”
The team provided information about nearby official test centers and advised students to refer to ETS partner websites and local universities offering TOEFL registration.
- “Is the TOEFL Listening section really that difficult?”
Facilitators explained that while the Listening section can be challenging due to speed, accents, and vocabulary, regular practice using targeted strategies—such as focusing on the final line of a dialogue and identifying synonymous expressions—can significantly improve comprehension.
- “Are there any free platforms for TOEFL practice?”
Students were introduced to accessible resources such as YouTube listening practice videos, test simulators, and the official ETS TOEFL website, all of which provide free materials for independent study.

To conclude the session, students were encouraged to continue applying the strategies they had learned, such as Skill 1: Focus on the last line, Skill 2: Choose answers with synonyms, and Skill 3: Avoid similar sounds. The team also motivated them to develop a regular study routine to maintain and improve their listening skills.

Overall, the evaluation phase confirmed that the activity had successfully raised awareness, provided useful strategies, and inspired students to pursue further TOEFL preparation independently.



Figure 7. Documentation with students after socialization

DISCUSSION

The success of this socialization program highlights the importance of providing high school students with structured and targeted preparation for the TOEFL Listening section. The application of specific listening strategies—such as Skill 1: focusing on the last line, Skill 2: choosing synonymous answers, and Skill 3: avoiding similar-sounding distractors—demonstrates consistency with best practices in TOEFL training, as outlined by Phillips (2001). These techniques enable students to engage in deeper listening and make more accurate interpretations of audio input.

As Rost (2010) points out, listening comprehension involves complex mental processes such as predicting content, inferring meaning, and understanding speaker intentions. Through strategic instruction and repetitive practice, students can strengthen these cognitive abilities. The integration of real test simulations and authentic listening materials in this program supports these learning processes and aligns with Brown's (2001) communicative language teaching approach, which emphasizes interaction and real-world relevance in language instruction.

The delivery method—using interactive PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, and Google Forms—fostered active participation and immediate feedback. This approach resonates with Wulandari (2022), who found that students learn listening more effectively in blended learning environments. Kurniawan (2020) also supports the use of visual and digital tools, arguing that they increase learner engagement and improve comprehension retention, especially in listening-focused lessons.

The real-time listening tasks via Google Forms allowed facilitators to monitor student understanding and offer instant feedback, a process that is crucial for effective formative assessment. This reflects the principles discussed by Nicol (2006), who emphasizes the importance of timely and constructive feedback to help learners close the gap between their current and desired performance levels.

Motivational impact was also a notable outcome of this program. As Harmer (2007) states, English functions as a global language of communication, and when students understand the purpose behind learning it—such as preparing for TOEFL—they are more likely to be committed and self-driven. Similarly, Fitriani (2021) highlights that student motivation, when combined with the appropriate use of digital media, can significantly enhance listening development by making practice more accessible and engaging.

In conclusion, this program's strength lies in its ability to combine pedagogical strategies, authentic materials, interactive media, and motivational support into a single, coherent learning experience. It not only prepares students for TOEFL Listening but also equips them with practical listening skills that are transferable to academic and real-world communication contexts.

CONCLUSION

The socialization program on TOEFL Listening conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar effectively enhanced students' awareness of the significance of English language proficiency, particularly in listening comprehension. By engaging students through structured presentations, simulations, and interactive discussions, the program provided essential knowledge about the TOEFL test its types, purposes, benefits, and effective strategies for success.

Despite initial challenges such as limited prior exposure to TOEFL and varying levels of motivation, the program demonstrated that with guided instruction, interactive digital tools, and collaborative support from teachers and school staff, students can significantly improve their understanding and appreciation of English proficiency as a tool for academic and global advancement.

This initiative also showed that early introduction to international standardized tests like TOEFL can positively influence students' mindset and encourage long-term commitment to language learning. It is therefore recommended that similar outreach and training sessions be held regularly and integrated into school programs to better prepare students for global education standards and opportunities.

Thank You Note

The socialization team would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to SMA Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar for the opportunity and trust given in organizing the activity entitled "Socialization of TOEFL Listening Benefits and Strategies."

We are especially thankful to the English teacher, who provided valuable assistance in coordinating the students, preparing the classroom environment, and supporting us during every stage of the activity. Your enthusiasm and collaboration greatly contributed to the smooth flow and effectiveness of the session.

Our sincere appreciation also goes to the Principal and school leadership, whose approval and encouragement enabled this program to be implemented successfully. Your openness and support reflect a strong commitment to advancing the students' academic potential, particularly in English language development.

It is our hope that this partnership will continue in future educational initiatives that aim to empower students to achieve international standards of excellence.

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