



## **TOEFL Essentials: Pelatihan Efektif untuk Menguasai Tata Bahasa dan Struktur Bagi Mahasiswa**

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### **Abstrak**

Program pelatihan persiapan TOEFL yang dilakukan untuk mahasiswa bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan mereka pada bagian penting TOEFL, dengan fokus khusus pada tata bahasa dan struktur kalimat. Pelatihan ini menggunakan desain *pretest-posttest*, di mana *pretest* diberikan untuk menilai keterampilan awal mahasiswa, diikuti dengan pelajaran yang ditargetkan mengenai konsep dasar tata bahasa, struktur kalimat, penggunaan "to be," dan preposisi. Program ini diakhiri dengan *posttest* untuk mengevaluasi peningkatan yang terjadi. Hasilnya menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam skor rata-rata mahasiswa, dari 61 pada *pretest* menjadi 82 pada *posttest*, yang menunjukkan efektivitas pelatihan. Penggunaan tes interaktif, aplikasi praktis, dan umpan balik yang *real-time* berkontribusi pada keberhasilan keseluruhan program. Inisiatif pengabdian masyarakat ini tidak hanya meningkatkan kemampuan TOEFL mahasiswa, tetapi sebagai sarana untuk mencapai keberhasilan akademik dan profesional.

**Kata kunci:** Kemampuan Bahasa Inggris, Persiapan TOEFL, Struktur, Tata Bahasa.

## **TOEFL Essentials: Effective Training to Master Grammar and Structure for Students**

### **Abstract**

The TOEFL preparation training program conducted for students aimed to enhance their proficiency in key areas of TOEFL, with a particular focus on grammar and structure. The training utilized a *pretest-posttest* design, where a *pretest* was administered to assess students' initial skills, followed by targeted lessons on basic grammar concepts, sentence structure, the use of "to be," and prepositions. The program concluded with a *posttest* to evaluate improvements. Results showed a significant increase in students' average scores, from 61 on the *pretest* to 82 on the *posttest*, demonstrating the effectiveness of the training. The use of interactive exercises, practical applications, and *real-time* feedback contributed to the overall success of the program. This community service initiative not only improved students' TOEFL performance but also provided them with essential tools for academic and professional success.

**Keywords:** English Proficiency, TOEFL Preparation, Structure, Grammar.

## INTRODUCTION

The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test has become a crucial requirement for students seeking to pursue further studies abroad, secure scholarships, and gain employment opportunities that require proficiency in English. As a widely recognized and standardized test, TOEFL measures students' abilities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, offering valuable insights into their command of the English language. In Indonesia, many universities require students to take the TOEFL as part of their graduation requirements, making it a pivotal test for undergraduate students (Kaniadewi & Asyifa, 2022). However, for many students, achieving a high TOEFL score is a significant challenge, particularly in sections like grammar, structure, and listening.

The increasing number of students facing difficulties with the TOEFL test, especially in the structure and grammar sections, has raised concerns about the adequacy of traditional learning methods. Studies have shown that many students struggle with identifying grammatical errors and selecting the correct structure in sentence formation (Hampp, Kumayas, & Lengkoan, 2021). Additionally, the listening section poses a challenge, with students frequently finding it hard to understand the speaker's accent, speed, and complex sentence structures (Fitria, 2021). These challenges are compounded by a lack of consistent practice and insufficient feedback, leaving many students ill-prepared for the TOEFL.

The effectiveness of TOEFL preparation programs has been extensively debated. Research suggests that students who attend preparation classes, especially those focusing on targeted skills such as grammar, structure, and listening comprehension, tend to perform better in the test (Kaniadewi & Asyifa, 2022; Utami & Pirmansyah, 2018). These classes help students familiarize themselves with the test format and develop strategies to tackle each section more effectively. However, despite these efforts, a significant gap remains in how students' approach TOEFL preparation and how well they retain the necessary knowledge to succeed.

To address this gap, recent advancements in technology, particularly the development of Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS), have begun to play a significant role in TOEFL preparation. ITS, such as the Intelligent Tutoring System Builder (ITSB), are designed to offer personalized learning experiences for students. These systems provide immediate feedback and customized instruction based on individual performance, helping students identify and overcome their specific weaknesses (Bakeer & Abu-Naser, 2019). ITS platforms can be used to teach various subjects, including English language skills needed for the TOEFL test, offering a more interactive and tailored learning experience compared to traditional classroom methods.

One of the most difficult sections for students is the grammar and structure component, where students often struggle to correctly identify errors in sentence formation. This issue is particularly prominent in Indonesian students, who face challenges with the English sentence structure that differs significantly from their native language. This difficulty is compounded by limited exposure to English grammar outside the classroom and the lack of guided practice (Hampp et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies have shown that students who rely on self-study or independent learning without expert guidance tend to score lower in this section compared to those who engage in structured TOEFL preparation courses (Lubis & Irmayana, 2019).

Another critical area of concern is the listening section, where students often struggle to keep up with the speaker's pace and understand the intonation, accent, and vocabulary used in the listening passages. This difficulty is primarily attributed to external factors such as the speed and accent of the speaker, as well as internal factors like the lack of practice and time constraints during the test (Fitria, 2021). Students who have not had prior exposure to TOEFL-style listening exercises or those who lack motivation often perform poorly in this section, affecting their overall TOEFL scores. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate effective listening strategies and regular practice into TOEFL preparation courses to help students overcome these challenges.

The implementation of TOEFL preparation programs that utilize technology and personalized tutoring, such as ITS, has shown promising results in improving students' performance. These systems offer real-time feedback, enabling students to understand their mistakes and learn the correct strategies for each question type. Research has shown that students who use ITS platforms for TOEFL preparation are better able to grasp the complexities of grammar and listening comprehension, leading to significant improvements in their TOEFL scores (Bakeer & Abu-Naser, 2019). Additionally, incorporating interactive tools and activities into TOEFL preparation can increase student engagement and motivation, which are key factors in achieving success in the test.

This paper is the outcome of a community service project conducted by lecturers of Management Department at Universitas Negeri Makassar, who provided TOEFL preparation to students. The project aimed to enhance students' skills in the key areas of the TOEFL test, focusing particularly on grammar and structure comprehension. Through this initiative, students were equipped with the necessary tools and strategies to improve their performance in the TOEFL test and achieve better results.

## METHOD

The TOEFL preparation training program was conducted in a structured manner to assess and enhance the students' TOEFL skills. The methodology followed a pretest-posttest design, with several key stages:

1. Pretest: At the beginning of the training, a pretest was administered to the participants to assess their initial TOEFL proficiency. The pretest aimed to measure students' baseline knowledge and identify specific areas that required improvement. This helped to ensure that the training could be tailored to address the needs of the students effectively.
2. Introduction to TOEFL: After the pretest, the students were introduced to the TOEFL test, including its format, question types, and time management strategies. This session provided an overview of the test structure and familiarized students with the areas they would be tested on, which is crucial for reducing test anxiety and improving performance.
3. Basic Grammar and Structure: The next phase of the training focused on reinforcing the students' understanding of basic grammar and sentence structures. This is particularly important as many students struggle with the Grammar and Structure section of the TOEFL. Through interactive lessons and practice exercises, students were guided in mastering key grammar concepts and sentence construction techniques.
4. Posttest: At the end of the training, a posttest was administered to evaluate the students' progress and improvements. The posttest was designed to mirror the structure and difficulty level of the TOEFL test, allowing for a direct comparison with the pretest results. The posttest provided insights into the effectiveness of the training program and the students' readiness for the actual TOEFL exam.

The activity took place on Wednesday, February 12, 2025, at the BU Building, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Makassar. A total of 40 students attended the event. The combination of pretest, targeted training, and posttest aimed to create a comprehensive learning experience that addressed the specific challenges students face when preparing for the TOEFL test.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The TOEFL preparation training program began with a pretest, which was administered to assess the students' initial proficiency in TOEFL-related skills. The pretest was carefully designed to evaluate the students' abilities in key areas such as reading comprehension, listening, grammar, and structure. The average score from the pretest was 61, signaling significant room for improvement, particularly in the Grammar and Structure sections. This initial score highlighted the necessity for targeted intervention to address these weaknesses and improve students' performance in the TOEFL exam.

Students with enthusiasm engaged in completing the pretest, demonstrating their

willingness to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. The pretest served not only as a diagnostic tool but also to motivate the students to commit to the learning process.



Figure 1: TOEFL overview explained by the facilitator.

Following the pretest, the students were introduced to an overview of the TOEFL test, focusing on its format, structure, and different question types as shown in Figure 1. Understanding the TOEFL test format is critical to help students manage their time efficiently and confidently tackle each section—Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing. The session provided practical strategies for handling each section, such as identifying the main ideas in reading passages, listening for key points in audio recordings, and managing time effectively during each section.

A major part of the training focused on reinforcing simple grammar and sentence structure, which are crucial for the TOEFL Grammar and Structure section. The focus was primarily on four essential areas: basic sentence structure, use of "to be", prepositions, and basic tenses (simple present and simple past tenses), which are frequently tested in the TOEFL exam.

1. Basic Sentence Structure: Students were taught how to construct basic sentences, including:
  - Simple sentences (e.g., "She sings well.")
  - Compound sentences (e.g., "She sings well, and she plays the piano.")
  - Negative sentences (e.g., "She does not sing well.")
  - Interrogative sentences (e.g., "Does she sing well?") This part of the training emphasized subject-verb-object agreement and the correct word order in sentences.
2. Use of "To Be": The students were also introduced to the correct usage of the verb "to be" (am, is, are, was, were). This verb is essential in forming simple present and past tenses. Students practiced constructing affirmative, negative, and interrogative sentences with "to be". Examples included:
  - Present: "She is a student." / "She is not a student." / "Is she a student?"
  - Past: "They were tired." / "They were not tired." / "Were they tired?"
3. Prepositions: Students were taught the correct use of prepositions, focusing on their role in connecting nouns and pronouns to other words in a sentence. Common prepositions such as in, on, at, by, and with were introduced. Examples included:
  - "She is in the classroom."
  - "The book is on the table."
  - "We are meeting at 5 PM."
  - "He is sitting by the window."



- "She is working with her friends."
- 4. Simple Present Tense: Students were taught to use the simple present tense to describe regular actions, general truths, and facts. For example:
  - Affirmative: "She studies every day."
  - Negative: "She does not study every day."
  - Question: "Does she study every day?"
- 5. Simple Past Tense: The simple past tense was introduced to describe actions completed in the past. Examples included:
  - Affirmative: "They studied yesterday."
  - Negative: "They did not study yesterday."
  - Question: "Did they study yesterday?"

The training emphasized subject-verb agreement, word order, and the proper usage of tenses to help students build grammatically correct sentences. Interactive exercises, practice questions, and group activities were used to help students apply these concepts in context, reinforcing their understanding of grammar through real-time practice.

At the end of the training, students took a posttest to evaluate their progress and the effectiveness of the training. The posttest, designed to mirror the TOEFL exam structure, helped determine the improvement in students' TOEFL-related skills. The results were encouraging: the average posttest score increased to 82, reflecting a substantial improvement from the pretest score of 61. This 21-point improvement demonstrated that the targeted instruction on grammar and structure, combined with an overview of the TOEFL test format and time management strategies, significantly enhanced students' preparedness.



Figure 2: Participants and facilitators of TOEFL Preparation training

The lessons covered throughout the program were effectively presented, helping students grasp the core concepts needed for success in the TOEFL test. The training program provided a well-rounded approach that enabled students to improve their proficiency in grammar and structure, which is essential for performing well on the TOEFL exam.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the TOEFL preparation training program conducted for students at Universitas Negeri Makassar has proven to be an effective intervention in improving students' proficiency in key areas of the TOEFL test, particularly in grammar and sentence structure. The pretest and posttest results clearly demonstrate the significant progress made by the students, with an average score increase from 61 to 82. This improvement highlights the success of the targeted lessons on basic grammar concepts, such as basic tenses (simple present & simple past tenses), sentence structure, use of "to be," and prepositions, all of which are essential for performing well in the TOEFL Grammar and Structure section.

The training program also provided valuable insights into students' strengths and weaknesses, allowing for personalized instruction that addressed their specific needs. The combination of pretest evaluation, focused training, and posttest assessment created a comprehensive approach to TOEFL preparation, leading to improved confidence and readiness for the test. Moreover, the use of engaging teaching methods, including interactive exercises and real-time practice, further enhanced students' learning experience. The results confirm that such structured preparation programs are crucial in equipping students with the necessary skills to succeed in the TOEFL test and achieve their academic and professional goals.

Overall, the community service initiative not only contributed to improving the students' TOEFL performance but also provided them with the tools to approach the test with greater confidence and competence. This program serves as a model for future TOEFL preparation efforts and highlights the importance of focused training and continuous evaluation in academic development.

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