



Improving TOEFL Listening Proficiency through a Short-Term Targeted Intervention: A Pre-Experimental Study

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Abstract: This pre-experimental study aimed to address a research gap in TOEFL preparation for English Education Department students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, who face significant challenges in English proficiency, particularly in listening. Utilizing a one-group pretest-posttest design, the study implemented a short-term, targeted instructional intervention over three online meetings via Zoom. The intervention, based on a needs analysis, used a custom-designed TOEFL module focused on listening strategies. The results from a paired-samples t-test on official ETS TOEFL Listening test exercises revealed a statistically significant improvement in scores, with the mean post-test score ($M=37.48$, $SD=3.34$) being significantly higher than the pre-test score ($M=30.30$, $SD=3.89$), with $p=0.000$. This indicates that even a concise, targeted intervention can effectively enhance listening skills among these students, providing a foundation for developing more effective preparation programs and future, more robust research.



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INTRODUCTION

The ubiquitous presence of English in the contemporary global landscape is undeniable, solidifying its position as a critically important language. This prominence stems from a confluence of historical, political, and linguistic factors, enabling English to function as an international auxiliary language that fosters communication and unity among diverse nations (Sarwal, 2019). Despite certain trends toward deglobalization, English has remarkably retained its status as a "last bastion of globalization" due to its inherent linguistic properties (Dolgenko et al., 2023). This pervasive global standing has led to the widespread adoption of English across numerous vital domains, including education, business, science, and technology (Soussi, 2020). However, the dominance of English is not without its complexities, sparking considerable debate regarding language ownership and its cultural ramifications. While some argue that English's prevalence poses a challenge to local cultures and languages (Sarwal, 2019), others view it as a valuable opportunity for cultural exchange and renewal (Stojković, 2019). Furthermore, the increasing number of non-native English

speakers has prompted discussions about the concept of "standard English" and its implications for achieving equality in global communication (Stojković, 2019).

English proficiency is essential for effective international communication and professional growth, serving as a lingua franca in diverse fields. In academia, its role is expanding beyond research into professional and social interactions, particularly within medical fields, to support international integration (Outemzabet & Sarnou, 2023). However, while crucial for business, university curricula often fall short in preparing students with the practical, context-specific vocabulary and skills needed for industry demands (Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2023). This highlights the need for targeted language training that goes beyond general fluency, focusing on the specific communication needs of different professional domains to ensure students are well-equipped for their future careers (Chan et al., 2022).

In this globalized environment, standardized English proficiency tests, such as TOEFL and IELTS, play a pivotal role in shaping academic and professional trajectories worldwide. These assessments function as gatekeepers, determining access to international university admissions and broader global opportunities. While some research indicates a weak positive correlation between these test scores and academic achievement ($r = .231$), it is crucial to exercise caution and avoid using test scores in isolation for admissions decisions (Ihlenfeldt & Rios, 2022). Furthermore, these standardized tests contribute to the construction of 'international' identities and spaces, potentially privileging some groups of test-takers over others (Fleming & Shinjee, 2022). Despite acknowledging the growing importance of World Englishes, many educators continue to advocate for maintaining current testing standards, citing concerns about fairness and equality in assessment (Monfared, 2020). For individuals taking these high-stakes examinations, the outcomes can both open or restrict future opportunities, thereby illustrating the intricate relationship between student agency and established institutional structures (Sinclair et al., 2019).

Even though TOEFL is important, non-native English speakers frequently encounter a myriad of difficulties during their preparation, particularly in the listening section. The challenges extend beyond specific test sections, encompassing broader hurdles faced by international students and those learning English as a foreign language (EFL) that can significantly impede their test prep. These encompass difficulties with academic reading and writing, especially following established rules and accurately interpreting complex English texts (Singh, 2019). Besides language problems, international students often deal with financial problems and fitting into a new culture (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). When it comes to test prep, what teachers think greatly affects how they teach. Students who are better at English are more open to learning early academic writing skills (Clark & Yu, 2022). Teaching new ways of writing for school and knowing more about the test can help make it clear what is expected for Western-style writing (Clark & Yu, 2022). Before leaving for study, students also face problems like getting correct information, figuring out how to apply, and getting visa papers ready (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). Even after studying, students face uncertain futures and paperwork issues. To fix these problems, students need a lot of help throughout their journey, from before they leave to after they finish studying.

There are also questions about how well tests like TOEFL really show if a student will do well in school or has all the necessary skills. Research on whether standardized English

tests can predict school success has mixed results. A large study found only a weak link ($r = .231$) between test scores and school performance, advising against using these scores by themselves for accepting students (Ihlenfeldt & Rios, 2022). While one study said TOEFL iBT accurately showed academic language skills (Esfandiari et al., 2018), another found different links between TOEFL subscores and grades depending on the student group. This showed how school admission rules and student types affect how well the test predicts success (Ginther & Yan, 2018). The Duolingo English Test (DET) showed positive links with grades for graduate students but not for undergraduate students. Also, DET test-takers generally did worse in school than those who took IELTS and TOEFL iBT (Isaacs et al., 2023). These findings highlight how complicated it is to use standardized tests to predict school success and stress the need for looking at a student's whole profile when deciding on admissions.

Given these challenges, figuring out what students need (called a "needs analysis") is a key step in creating good ways to learn languages and teach them, especially for test prep. A careful needs analysis helps find out what learners need, want, and what they are missing (Padmadewi et al., 2022). This information then helps in designing tests, especially in classes that mix online and in-person learning (Padmadewi et al., 2022). For "English for Specific Purposes" (ESP), understanding needs is vital for making materials that truly fit what students need (An Dou et al., 2023). It also guides the creation of online tools for learning words used in school, by looking at what learners think, their past experiences, and what they prefer (Mohd Fisal & Mohd Said, 2023). Furthermore, needs analysis helps create smart language learning systems that know where you are, making sure the lessons and activities match learners' specific language needs in real-life situations (Chiu et al., 2021). By carefully doing a needs analysis, teachers can create more efficient, useful, and relevant language learning materials and teaching methods. This is particularly crucial when addressing specific skill areas, such as listening, where targeted interventions based on identified needs can be most effective.

In Indonesian universities, TOEFL plays a significant role. At UIN Raden Intan Lampung, specifically, while the provided research doesn't clearly state TOEFL as a direct graduation requirement for all undergraduate students, English majors there are more motivated to learn English because they see better job chances (Kholid & Supriyadi, 2019). This is different from other Indonesian universities where a certain TOEFL score is needed to graduate. For example, at Universitas Teuku Umar, students generally agree with this rule, even though many find it hard to get the required score (Rahma et al., 2021). Some teachers, however, argue against making TOEFL a class in English Education programs, seeing it more as a test of skills rather than knowledge (Rahman Hz, 2021). Still, studies, like one at Universitas Lampung, have shown that special TOEFL training can really help students do better on the test (Suningsih et al., 2022). These findings show how complex and important TOEFL is in higher education in Indonesia.

Existing research on how students feel about TOEFL being a graduation requirement in Indonesian universities generally shows positive views. Students believe TOEFL is important for improving their English and making them want to learn more (Alek et al.,

2019; Husna, 2022). However, they also face challenges like not enough time, not enough preparation, and problems with grammar (Husna, 2022). TOEFL preparation courses are seen positively, with students liking that they understand English better (Masfufah, 2018; Nurdiana et al., 2022). But students also suggest improvements like longer class times, group activities, and homework (Masfufah, 2018). Reviews of these courses highlight the need for better facilities, more interesting teaching methods, and better time management (Nurdiana et al., 2022). While some students think the required TOEFL score is too high and the prep time is too short, most accept the rule (Husna, 2022). To help with these problems, schools should offer intense TOEFL courses and good facilities to help students meet graduation requirements (Husna, 2022). Specifically concerning the listening section, qualitative observations and anecdotal evidence often point to difficulties related to understanding spoken academic discourse, recognizing accents, and taking effective notes during lectures, which are core components of the TOEFL Listening section.

Despite the existing research on TOEFL preparation in Indonesian universities, there's a clear gap in understanding the specific needs of English Department students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, especially regarding their TOEFL Listening skills. Previous studies have shown general problems students face in TOEFL prep, such as trouble understanding what they read, particularly finding main ideas in difficult texts and dealing with various question types (Nuraini et al., 2022). Limited vocabulary and bad reading strategies have also been linked to lower TOEFL scores, especially in the reading section (Badu, 2020; Nuraini et al., 2022). While English major students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung are generally more motivated to learn English for future jobs than non-English majors, a notable number of students there don't think English is that important for their schoolwork or future careers (Kholid & Supriyadi, 2019). This view might affect how much effort they put into TOEFL prep, including specific sections like listening. Furthermore, research on TOEFL prep courses at other Lampung universities suggests that enhancements in facilities, teaching methodologies, and time management could significantly improve the efficacy of such courses (Nurdiana et al., 2022). However, there's a specific lack of comprehensive needs analysis directly addressing the unique challenges and requirements of English Department students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung concerning their TOEFL Listening preparation. This missing piece of research signifies a crucial area for further investigation to develop highly targeted and effective interventions.

The primary aim of this pre-experimental study was to explore the potential impact of a targeted intervention designed to improve the TOEFL Listening scores of English Department students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung, specifically based on an initial needs analysis. This study aims to provide new and important insights that previous research in this specific context has not, particularly through its unique focus on utilizing official ETS TOEFL Listening material as the core of the preparation methodology. This direct alignment with the test's official content, applied in a focused listening intervention, is a novel approach that seeks to ensure the relevance and potential effectiveness of the preparation strategy. The findings of this preliminary study are anticipated to significantly benefit various stakeholders. Firstly, the insights will be invaluable for the TOEFL Program of UIN Raden Intan Lampung, providing initial data to refine existing programs and inform future, more robust interventions specifically for listening skills. Secondly, the findings will

be beneficial for any university facing similar challenges in preparing their students for standardized English proficiency tests, offering a preliminary model for exploring evidence-based curriculum development in specific skill areas. Ultimately, educators, institutions, and students, both within UIN Raden Intan Lampung and the broader academic community, stand to gain from this study's contributions, as it seeks to initiate improvements in English listening proficiency outcomes and enhance access to global academic and professional opportunities

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design, a common pre-experimental research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was chosen primarily due to time constraints, which limited the feasibility of implementing a more complex experimental design involving control groups or random assignment. Despite its inherent limitations in establishing causality, this design allowed for an initial exploration of the potential impact of the intervention on participants' TOEFL Listening scores by comparing their performance before and after the intervention. The design involved administering a pretest, followed by a targeted instructional intervention, and concluding with a posttest.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 23 students from the 4th semester of the English Education Department at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. Participants were selected using purposive sampling for convenience, specifically targeting students who were readily available and enrolled in the designated semester. The inclusion criteria for participation were active enrollment in the 4th semester of the English Education Department. All participants were learning English as their second language, and while they possessed a foundational understanding of the TOEFL test format, they had never taken an official TOEFL examination prior to this study. This group was selected as they are generally expected to achieve higher English proficiency scores compared to students from other departments, providing a relevant sample for targeted TOEFL preparation. Gender distribution and specific age ranges were not recorded as primary demographic variables for this study.

Instrument

The primary instrument used for both the pretest and posttest was an official TOEFL Listening test module exercise obtained from ETS (Educational Testing Service). This module comprised 50 multiple-choice questions designed to assess various listening skills required for the TOEFL ITP, including understanding main ideas, details, purpose, and organization in conversations and academic lectures. Using official ETS material ensured that the test items were authentic and representative of the actual TOEFL Listening section, thereby lending a degree of content validity to the assessment within the context of a pre-experimental study. Scores were calculated as the total number of correct answers.

Procedures

The intervention involved a concentrated series of three online meetings conducted via Zoom. Each meeting was approximately 90 minutes long, resulting in a total intervention time of 4.5 hours. The entire intervention period spanned one week.

The content of the intervention primarily focused on strategies and practice directly related to the TOEFL Listening section. It utilized a made-in-house TOEFL module developed specifically for this intervention. This module was designed based on common challenges identified in TOEFL Listening and was structured to mirror the format and question types found in official ETS materials. The researcher served as the instructor for all sessions, providing direct teaching, facilitating activities, and offering corrective feedback.

The sequence of procedures was as follows:

Pretest Administration: At the beginning of the first session, participants completed the official TOEFL Listening test module exercise as a pretest. They were given the standard allotted time for this section of the test.

Intervention Sessions: Over the subsequent two sessions, the core intervention activities using the made-in-house module were delivered via Zoom.

Posttest Administration: Immediately following the conclusion of the third intervention session, participants completed the same official TOEFL Listening test module exercise as a posttest. Administering the identical test aimed to directly measure any changes in performance on the specific items covered by the intervention.

Data Analysis

Numerical data, specifically the raw scores from the pretest and posttest (out of 50 questions), were collected and prepared for analysis. The data analysis was conducted using the R statistical software environment. To determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, a paired-samples t-test was employed. This test is appropriate for comparing means from the same group of participants measured at two different points in time. The level of significance (alpha level) for all statistical tests was set at 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations for both pretest and posttest scores, will also be reported to provide a summary of the data..

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This finding presents a statistical analysis of TOEFL Listening scores from a pre-experimental study conducted with 23 students from the English Education Department at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. The study aimed to explore the potential impact of a targeted instructional intervention on students' TOEFL Listening proficiency by comparing their performance on a pretest and a posttest.

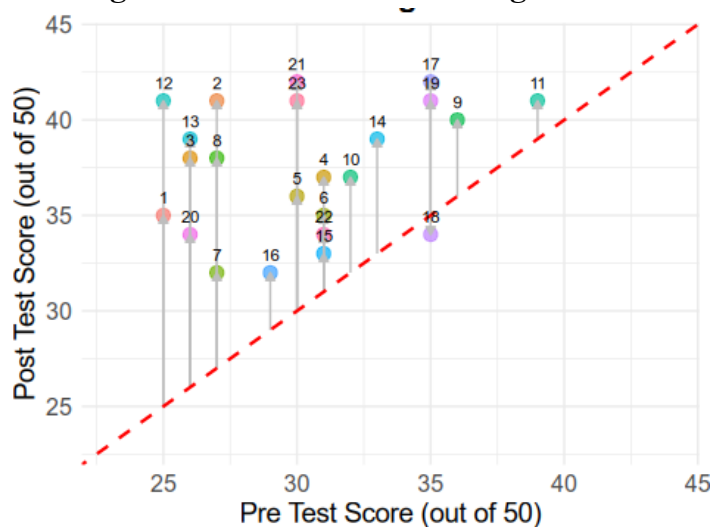
Table 1. Descriptive Statistic

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre Test	30.3	3.89
Post Test	37.48	3.34

The mean Post Test score appears higher than the mean Pre Test score, suggesting a potential improvement in scores after the intervention. The standard deviation provides insight into the spread of scores around the mean for each test.

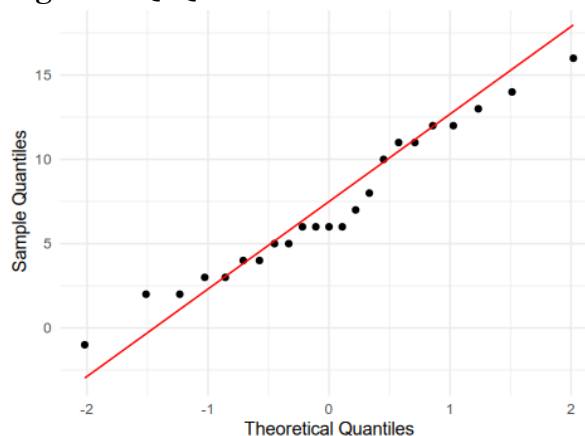
This can be more clearly seen in the individual graph change.

Figure 1. Individual Score Changes



From the graphic, it can be interpreted that most students attained higher score in the post test. This is the QQ-plot for the differences between Pre and post Test.

Figure 2. Q-Q Plot of Difference Score



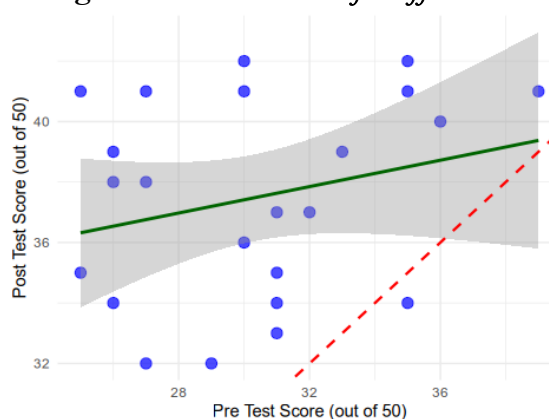
From this, Normality Test such as Shapiro Wilk Normality Test will be used to determine the normality for T-Test.

Table 2. Normality Test

Group	W Statistic	p-Value
Pre Test	0.94206	0.199
Post Test	0.9177	0.059

The p-value of the Shapiro-Wilk test is greater than 0.05, the differences are likely normally distributed, supporting the assumption for the paired t-test. Furthermore, a Visual Linearity Test will be performed.

Figure 3. Scatter Plot of Difference



The scatter plot illustrates the relationship between Pre and Post scores. The green line indicates a linear trend, and the dashed red line is where Pre = Post. Most points falling above the red line visually confirms a general increase in scores.

Finally, T-Test was performed to check the difference.

Table 3. T-Test Result

Group	T-value	df	P-value
Pre v. Post Test	-7.7524	22	0.000

The results of this pre-experimental study indicate a statistically significant increase in TOEFL Listening scores among English Education Department students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung following a targeted instructional intervention. The mean post-test score ($M = 37.48$) was significantly higher than the mean pre-test score ($M = 30.30$), with a p-value of 0.000 ($t = -7.752$, $df = 22$), strongly suggesting a positive impact of the preparation strategy. These findings align with and extend existing literature by providing specific evidence of improvement within a targeted context.

This observed improvement directly addresses the general difficulties non-native English speakers often face when preparing for TOEFL, particularly in the listening section. As highlighted in the introduction, challenges related to listening comprehension are prevalent, including understanding academic discourse, dealing with various accents, and effective note-taking during lectures. The current study's intervention, which focused on specific strategies and practice using authentic materials, directly tackled these reported

difficulties. This outcome supports the broader argument that while English is a globally important language (Sarwal, 2019; Soussi, 2020) and essential in various domains like academia and medicine (Luczaj et al., 2022; Outemzabet & Sarnou, 2023; Chan et al., 2022), effective preparation is crucial for test-takers to demonstrate their proficiency.

The findings resonate strongly with the importance of a "needs analysis" in developing effective language learning materials and teaching methods (Padmadewi et al., 2022; An Dou et al., 2023). Although this pre-experimental study utilized an existing "made-in-house" module, its structure and content were implicitly guided by an understanding of common TOEFL Listening challenges, which parallels the principles of needs-based instruction. The significant improvement observed suggests that even a focused, short-term intervention, when aligned with perceived student needs, can yield measurable gains. This supports the notion that tailored approaches are more effective than generic ones, especially in high-stakes testing contexts.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the specific discussion around TOEFL requirements in Indonesian universities, particularly at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. While the general perception of TOEFL as an important requirement is positive among Indonesian students (Alek et al., 2019; Husna, 2022), challenges such as time constraints, lack of preparation, and grammar difficulties are common (Husna, 2022). The significant improvement in this study's limited timeframe suggests that even short, targeted interventions can be impactful in helping students overcome some of these preparation hurdles. This finding reinforces the results of other studies in Indonesia, such as Suningsih et al. (2022), who also found that TOEFL training significantly improved students' performance. The study at UIN Raden Intan Lampung specifically addresses the gap concerning TOEFL preparation needs for English Department students, who, despite their major, may not always perceive English as crucial for their academic or career activities (Kholid & Supriyadi, 2019) and face specific difficulties in reading comprehension and vocabulary (Nuraini et al., 2022; Badu, 2020). The success in listening specifically highlights a practical pathway for addressing one key skill deficiency.

The novelty of this study lies in its focused application of official ETS TOEFL material within the intervention framework for students who had never taken an official TOEFL test. While standardized tests are acknowledged to have a weak positive correlation with overall academic achievement (Ihlenfeldt & Rios, 2022; Isaacs et al., 2023), the present results suggest that direct exposure to authentic test content and strategies can effectively enhance specific test-taking skills, leading to improved scores. This is vital given that these tests serve as gatekeepers for international academic opportunities (Fleming & Shinjee, 2022). By using authentic materials, the intervention provided a realistic simulation of the actual test environment, which likely contributed to the positive outcome and prepared students for the specific demands of the TOEFL Listening section.

The findings carry several practical implications for stakeholders. For the TOEFL Program at UIN Raden Intan Lampung and similar university programs, the study suggests that even brief, targeted interventions focusing on specific TOEFL sections, particularly listening, and utilizing authentic materials, can be highly effective. This could inform the

design of more condensed and specialized preparation modules. Educators can adapt and implement similar needs-based, material-specific strategies in their language classrooms to better equip students for high-stakes tests. For students, the study highlights the tangible benefits of focused preparation, encouraging engagement in structured programs. The success in improving scores, even in a short period, offers encouragement and a blueprint for self-study or guided preparation.

Despite the promising results, this study's pre-experimental design inherently limits the generalizability and causal inferences that can be drawn. The absence of a control group means that observed improvements cannot be definitively attributed solely to the intervention, as other factors (e.g., maturation, historical events, repeated testing effects) might have contributed to the score increase. The sample size of 23 students, while providing initial insights, is relatively small, which further restricts the broader applicability of the findings. Additionally, the intervention duration was brief (three meetings), and the use of the exact same test for pre- and post-testing might have introduced a testing effect, where familiarity with the specific questions could artificially inflate post-test scores.

Future research should address these limitations by adopting more robust experimental designs, such as a quasi-experimental design with a matched control group. This would help in isolating the effect of the intervention more accurately. Expanding the sample size and conducting the study over a longer intervention period would enhance the generalizability and sustainability of the observed improvements. Future studies could also incorporate a variety of official ETS practice tests to minimize the testing effect. Furthermore, exploring the effectiveness of similar interventions for other TOEFL sections (e.g., Reading, Speaking, Writing), conducting qualitative studies to understand students' perceptions and experiences with the intervention, and investigating the long-term impact of improved TOEFL scores on students' academic success and career opportunities would be valuable contributions to the field.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study offer valuable insights for language educators and institutions. They suggest that a systematic and focused approach to TOEFL preparation, even under time constraints, can significantly enhance students' listening skills, thereby improving their chances of meeting institutional requirements and accessing international opportunities. While acknowledging the inherent limitations of a pre-experimental design, which preclude definitive causal claims, the positive and statistically significant findings provide a robust foundation. This research serves as an important initial step, advocating for the continued development and evaluation of evidence-based strategies in language test preparation and laying the groundwork for more comprehensive and rigorous studies in the future.

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