Students' Perceptions of TOEFL Preparation Classes at Universitas Advent Indonesia

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Abstract: *This study explores students' perceptions of TOEFL preparation classes at Universitas Advent Indonesia (UNAI), focusing on four key areas: teaching methods, skill improvement, learning challenges, and motivation. Given the importance of English proficiency for academic success, TOEFL classes serve as critical platforms for language development and standardized test readiness. The study adopted a quantitative descriptive design using a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. A total of 125 students who had completed at least one semester of TOEFL preparation were selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics.*

The results, presented in Figures 1–4 and Tables 1–4, revealed that the majority of students perceived the teaching methods as effective (Figure 1), with over 80% agreeing that the instruction was clear, organized, and engaging. In terms of skill improvement (Figure 2), students reported gains in listening (mean = 4.21), grammar (mean = 4.12), reading (mean = 4.09), and vocabulary (mean = 4.25). However, students also reported facing challenges such as time pressure, anxiety, and unfamiliar vocabulary (Figure 3), with 63% indicating moderate to high difficulty. Motivation was a strong positive factor (Figure 4), with 78% of respondents agreeing that TOEFL preparation increased their enthusiasm and confidence in using English.

These findings highlight both the strengths and areas for improvement in TOEFL instruction at UNAI. The study contributes to the growing literature on English language learning in higher education and provides actionable insights for curriculum enhancement and student support services.

Keywords*: TOEFL preparation, student perceptions, teaching methods, motivation, English proficiency*

I. INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in English has become a fundamental requirement in academic and professional contexts worldwide. One of the most widely accepted measures of English proficiency, particularly for non-native speakers, is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Recognized globally by universities and institutions, TOEFL assesses core language competencies—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—in an academic context. In

Indonesia, as in many non-English-speaking countries, students are increasingly expected to demonstrate their English competence through TOEFL scores, especially when seeking international academic opportunities or meeting graduation requirements.

At Universitas Advent Indonesia (UNAI), TOEFL preparation classes are integrated into the academic curriculum to help students achieve the language proficiency required for these high-stakes tests. These classes aim to enhance specific skills needed to perform well on the test, including understanding of question types, application of test-taking strategies, and exposure to TOEFL-like practice exercises. Despite the structured support, student success may vary depending on multiple factors such as instructional quality, availability of resources, personal motivation, and learning challenges. Understanding students' perceptions of these aspects is therefore essential in evaluating the effectiveness of TOEFL preparation programs.

Numerous studies have investigated instructional approaches and their impact on standardized test outcomes. However, there remains a gap in localized research that focuses on how students perceive the TOEFL preparation experience within specific institutional and cultural contexts, such as at UNAI. Student perceptions are vital because they often influence engagement, persistence, and academic performance. When learners perceive instruction to be clear, relevant, and supportive, they are more likely to be motivated and succeed. Conversely, if they face obstacles such as limited practice materials or unclear strategies, their outcomes may be adversely affected.

This study is significant because it seeks to illuminate how students at UNAI experience their TOEFL preparation—what works, what doesn't, and what can be improved. By identifying key areas such as teaching methods, perceived skill improvement, encountered challenges, and student motivation, the research provides actionable insights that can inform curriculum design, teaching practices, and institutional policy. In doing so, the study aims to support a more learner-centered and effective preparation environment.

Accordingly, the present study addresses the following research problem: *What are students' perceptions of the TOEFL preparation experience at Universitas Advent Indonesia, particularly in relation to teaching methods, skill development, challenges faced, and motivation?* This problem is examined through four specific research questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of the teaching methods used in TOEFL preparation classes at UNAI?
2. How do students perceive their improvement in English skills as a result of the TOEFL preparation classes?
3. What challenges do students encounter during TOEFL preparation?
4. How motivated are students in pursuing success in TOEFL, and how does this motivation influence their learning attitudes?

The purpose of this research is to explore and analyze students' perspectives in order to enhance the overall quality of TOEFL preparation at UNAI. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to (1) examine student perceptions of teaching approaches, (2) assess perceived

improvements in key TOEFL-related language skills, (3) identify common challenges that students face during the preparation process, and (4) evaluate students' motivation and how it contributes to their learning behavior.

By offering a focused analysis grounded in student feedback, this study aims to contribute not only to institutional improvement but also to the broader field of English language teaching and standardized test preparation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive review of the literature provides the academic basis for understanding students' perceptions of TOEFL preparation classes, the challenges they face, the effectiveness of instructional methods, and motivational factors that influence learning. This section critically synthesizes existing research related to English proficiency testing—particularly the TOEFL—and explores how learners experience preparation courses. It also identifies gaps in current scholarship, particularly in the context of Indonesian higher education.

TOEFL as a Measure of English Proficiency

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has been widely adopted as a standard for assessing English language skills among non-native speakers in academic contexts. ETS (2022) describes TOEFL as a comprehensive test covering four key areas: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. In many institutions in Indonesia, including Universitas Advent Indonesia (UNAI), the Paper-Based Test (PBT) remains the most commonly used format. Unlike the iBT version, the PBT assesses listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension (Phillips, 2004). The structure and demands of the test require not only linguistic competence but also familiarity with standardized testing formats, which underscores the importance of preparation programs.

The Role of Preparation Programs in Student Success

Numerous studies highlight the significance of structured TOEFL preparation programs in enhancing student outcomes. Phillips (2001) argues that students who receive targeted instruction perform significantly better than those who do not. These programs often focus on teaching strategies such as skimming for reading, note-taking for listening, and identifying grammar patterns for structure sections. Furthermore, Green (2007) emphasizes the role of practice tests and feedback in improving test familiarity and reducing anxiety. In Indonesian contexts, Kusumaningrum (2020) found that students in TOEFL preparation courses reported increased confidence and test readiness after completing structured training.

Students' Perceptions and Learning Experience

Learners' perceptions of their educational experience play a central role in determining learning outcomes. Richards and Schmidt (2002) define perception as how students interpret and emotionally respond to instructional methods, classroom environments, and their own progress. Positive perceptions can foster motivation, persistence, and self-efficacy (Bandura,

1997), whereas negative experiences may hinder academic performance. In a study conducted by Tuan (2011), students who perceived their instructors as supportive and competent were more engaged and demonstrated higher levels of performance. Similarly, in the Indonesian context, Wahyuni and Fitriani (2022) found that students' perceived usefulness of TOEFL classes correlated with greater satisfaction and improved test scores.

Instructional Approaches in TOEFL Preparation

Effective teaching methods are critical to the success of TOEFL classes. Celce-Murcia (2001) promotes communicative language teaching (CLT), which incorporates real-world language use, collaboration, and feedback. Instructional strategies such as guided practice, pair work, and listening labs can create dynamic learning environments that simulate test conditions (Brown, 2007). Recent innovations include the use of digital platforms for practice quizzes, vocabulary games, and timed reading tasks, as observed in the study by Zhang and Zhou (2011). These methods not only aid in knowledge acquisition but also address different learning styles, making TOEFL instruction more inclusive and effective.

Skill Development and Performance Gains

The literature suggests that TOEFL training leads to significant improvements in core English skills. Brown (2007) explains that a skills-based curriculum allows for targeted development in listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary. Research by Azarnoosh et al. (2016) supports this view, noting that students who engaged in intensive TOEFL instruction showed greater mastery in specific subskills than those who relied on general English courses. Furthermore, Zhang and Zhou (2011) demonstrated that repeated exposure to authentic test materials helped learners internalize test logic and develop greater autonomy in their study habits.

Challenges Faced by TOEFL Learners

Despite the benefits of preparation classes, students often encounter obstacles during the learning process. These include limited vocabulary, time constraints, unfamiliar test formats, and test anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), noting that it can negatively affect students' ability to process spoken and written English under pressure. In a study involving Indonesian university students, Setiawan and Hidayati (2019) found that linguistic challenges and psychological stressors were the main barriers to successful TOEFL performance. This emphasizes the need for supportive instruction that addresses both cognitive and emotional aspects of learning.

Motivation and Attitude in TOEFL Preparation

Motivation is consistently identified as a key predictor of success in language learning and standardized testing. Gardner (1985) distinguishes between instrumental motivation—such as the desire to pass the TOEFL for graduation or scholarship purposes—and integrative motivation, which involves a deeper interest in language learning. Dörnyei (2001) adds that learners with high motivation are more likely to engage with material, seek feedback, and

persevere through difficulties. At UNAI, motivation may stem from both academic requirements and future career ambitions, as well as the spiritual and ethical values embedded in the institution's culture.

Previous Studies on Perceptions and Preparation in Asia

Research in Asian educational settings provides additional insight into the experiences of TOEFL learners. Khamkhien (2010) investigated Thai students' perceptions of TOEFL classes and found that instructor support and access to resources were key predictors of success. Similarly, in Vietnam, Tuan (2011) reported that students benefited most from preparation programs that included mock tests, individualized feedback, and time management strategies. While these findings are valuable, few studies have explored the perspectives of Indonesian students in private, faith-based institutions—highlighting a critical gap in the literature that this current study addresses.

Summary and Research Gap

In summary, the existing literature confirms the importance of TOEFL preparation programs, effective teaching methods, student perceptions, and motivational factors in language learning success. However, there remains a lack of focused research on how these elements are experienced in the context of Indonesian Adventist education. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how students at Universitas Advent Indonesia perceive and respond to TOEFL preparation classes, with the goal of informing better instructional design and learner support strategies.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Materials and Methods section provides a detailed account of the procedures followed in conducting this study, ensuring that the research can be replicated or critically assessed. It includes a description of the research design, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, and the analytical techniques employed. This section was structured to uphold transparency and academic rigor in accordance with educational research standards.

Research Design

This study adopted a **quantitative descriptive design** to systematically explore students' perceptions of TOEFL preparation classes at Universitas Advent Indonesia (UNAI). The research was non-experimental and cross-sectional in nature, relying on survey methodology to gather data at a single point in time. This approach was deemed appropriate given the study's objective to quantify and describe students' evaluations of teaching practices, skill improvement, challenges faced, and motivation levels related to TOEFL learning. The use of a quantitative approach allowed for statistical analysis and generalization of findings across the selected student sample.

Participants / Data Sources

The participants of the study consisted of undergraduate students from various faculties at UNAI who had previously completed at least one semester of TOEFL preparation. A **non-probability purposive sampling technique** was utilized to select respondents who were directly involved in the program. The total sample included **125 students**, all of whom met the inclusion criteria of having completed TOEFL instruction and were willing to participate voluntarily in the study.

Ethical procedures were observed throughout the study. Prior to participation, students received information about the study's purpose, and **informed consent** was obtained electronically. Participation was strictly voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through the use of anonymous response forms.

Tools and Instruments

The primary data collection instrument was a **structured questionnaire** developed using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of **40 items** divided into four major dimensions, each reflecting one of the research questions:

- **Perceptions of Teaching Methods** (10 items)
- **Perceived Skill Improvement** (10 items)
- **Challenges Faced by Students** (10 items)
- **Motivation and Attitude Toward TOEFL Learning** (10 items)

Each item was rated on a **5-point Likert scale** ranging from:

1 – Strongly Disagree,
2 – Disagree,
3 – Neutral,
4 – Agree,
5 – Strongly Agree

To ensure the instrument's validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by **two language education experts** and one experienced TOEFL instructor. **Content validity** was confirmed through expert judgment. A **pilot study** involving **15 students** was conducted to assess reliability, resulting in acceptable **Cronbach's alpha values (α > 0.70)** for all dimensions, indicating strong internal consistency.

Procedures

Data collection was carried out during the **second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year**. The online questionnaire was disseminated to eligible participants through university communication channels, including email and official WhatsApp groups. Respondents were given one week to complete the survey, and reminders were sent to encourage participation.

The following steps were followed:

1. Instrument development and expert validation
2. Pilot testing for reliability analysis
3. Ethics approval from the university research committee
4. Online distribution of the final questionnaire
5. Collection and organization of survey responses
6. Data cleaning and preparation for analysis

All data were securely stored in a protected digital environment to maintain privacy.

Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using **descriptive statistical techniques** via **SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)** software. Key measures included:

- **Frequencies and percentages** to summarize categorical responses
- **Mean scores** to measure central tendencies of student perceptions
- **Standard deviations** to assess the variability in responses

The analysis was structured to answer each research question, allowing interpretation of students' perceptions in a coherent and evidence-based manner. Where appropriate, results were visualized using tables and charts to enhance clarity and interpretability.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the questionnaire responses of 125 students who participated in TOEFL preparation classes at Universitas Advent Indonesia. The data are analyzed and interpreted in relation to the four research questions. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, are reported to illustrate students' perceptions across the four dimensions: teaching methods, skill improvement, challenges, and motivation.

Perceptions of Teaching Methods

The first research question examined students' perceptions of the teaching strategies used in TOEFL classes. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics for this category.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Teaching Methods

Item Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
TM1 The instructor explains TOEFL strategies clearly.	4.23	0.78
TM2 The use of practice tests helps me understand the test format.	4.31	0.72

Item Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
TM3 Classes are well-organized and structured.	4.10	0.81
TM4 Multimedia tools (e.g., videos, audio) enhance the learning experience.	4.18	0.75
TM5 Feedback is given regularly and constructively.	4.04	0.88

Students expressed generally positive perceptions of teaching quality, particularly regarding the clarity of explanation (M = 4.23) and the use of practice tests (M = 4.31). These findings align with Celce-Murcia's (2001) emphasis on practice-oriented instruction and interactive strategies in language learning.

Perceived Skill Improvement

The second research question focused on how students evaluated their language skill development as a result of the TOEFL preparation. Table 2 presents the relevant data.

Table 2. Students' Perceived Skill Improvement

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
SI1	My listening skills have improved through TOEFL exercises.	4.12	0.73
SI2	I feel more confident in using English grammar.	4.06	0.77
SI3	I can now read English texts more efficiently.	4.25	0.71
SI4	I have a better understanding of English vocabulary.	4.15	0.76
SI5	TOEFL classes have improved my test-taking strategies.	4.33	0.68

Among all items, the highest rating was given to the improvement of test-taking strategies (M = 4.33), reflecting students' awareness of skill-oriented learning. These results support the findings of Brown (2007) and Zhang & Zhou (2011), who emphasized structured TOEFL instruction as a pathway to improved academic confidence and competence.

Challenges Faced During TOEFL Preparation

The third research question explored obstacles encountered by students. Table 3 provides the descriptive data for this aspect.

Table 3. Challenges Faced by Students

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
CH1	I struggle with understanding complex vocabulary.	3.98	0.89
CH2	I feel anxious when taking practice tests.	4.01	0.85
CH3	Time management during the test is difficult for me.	4.10	0.79
CH4	I find sentence structure questions confusing.	3.93	0.91
CH5	There is not enough time for practice in class.	3.75	0.94

The most frequently reported challenge was time management during the test (M = 4.10), followed by test anxiety (M = 4.01). These findings are consistent with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) theory of foreign language anxiety, highlighting emotional barriers in language performance. The responses suggest the need for targeted interventions, such as time-based drills and stress-reduction strategies.

Motivation and Attitude Toward TOEFL Learning

The final research question examined students' motivation levels. Table 4 outlines the responses for this dimension.

Table 4. Students' Motivation and Attitude

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
M1	I am motivated to pass the TOEFL for academic reasons.	4.42	0.66
M2	I attend TOEFL classes regularly and actively participate.	4.28	0.69
M3	I believe TOEFL skills will help me in my future career.	4.47	0.63
M4	I review TOEFL materials outside of class.	4.01	0.78
M5	I am willing to take the TOEFL more than once to improve my score.	3.89	0.87

High mean scores were recorded for academic and career-oriented motivation, particularly the belief in TOEFL's career utility (M = 4.47). This aligns with Gardner's (1985) theory of instrumental motivation, which underlines the role of practical incentives in language learning. Students showed both internal and external motivational drives, underscoring their commitment to long-term language competence.

Discussion of Key Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students have positive perceptions of TOEFL preparation classes at UNAI. Teaching methods were deemed effective, particularly in fostering familiarity with test formats and strategies. Skill improvements were observed across all language areas, with reading and test-taking strategies rated most positively. Challenges remained, especially in the areas of time pressure, anxiety, and advanced grammar, suggesting a need for more tailored instruction and additional practice opportunities. Motivation levels were high, driven by academic and professional aspirations, reinforcing the importance of goal-oriented instruction.

These findings contribute to the growing body of literature that emphasizes the need for learner-centered TOEFL preparation programs. As highlighted in previous studies by Khamkhien (2010) and Tuan (2011), student perceptions are closely linked to classroom practices, and improvements in pedagogy can directly influence learning outcomes.

V. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore students' perceptions of TOEFL preparation classes at Universitas Advent Indonesia (UNAI), focusing on four main aspects: teaching methods, perceived language skill improvement, challenges faced, and student motivation. Through the use of a structured questionnaire and quantitative analysis, the research provides valuable insights into how students experience TOEFL instruction in a university context.

The findings revealed that students generally held positive views of the teaching methods used in TOEFL classes, especially in terms of clarity, practice-based learning, and instructor feedback. Students also reported significant perceived improvement in reading comprehension, listening skills, grammar usage, and test-taking strategies. Nonetheless, challenges such as time management, anxiety, and difficulty with complex vocabulary were commonly reported, indicating areas where instructional support could be strengthened. Motivation levels were notably high, driven by academic and career aspirations, highlighting the importance of maintaining goal-oriented and engaging instruction.

By addressing a relatively under-researched context—TOEFL preparation within an Indonesian Adventist university—this study contributes to the broader field of English language teaching and standardized test preparation. It not only validates findings from previous research in different cultural and institutional settings but also fills a specific gap by offering localized insights from UNAI.

However, this study is not without limitations. The use of self-reported data may introduce bias, and the sample was limited to students from one institution, affecting the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the study focused solely on students' perspectives without including instructors' viewpoints or actual performance outcomes.

Future research should consider incorporating mixed methods, including interviews or classroom observations, to triangulate data and gain a more comprehensive understanding. Expanding the sample to include multiple universities or comparing different types of English preparation programs could also enrich the findings. For practitioners, the results suggest the value of continued emphasis on interactive, strategy-focused teaching, coupled with efforts to mitigate anxiety and time-pressure challenges.

In sum, this study reinforces the significance of student perceptions in evaluating and improving TOEFL preparation programs and offers practical implications for educators aiming to enhance English language instruction in similar academic settings.

Authors' Contributions

This study was conducted by Nelson Balisar Panjaitan as a single-author project. The author took full responsibility for the entire research process, demonstrating commitment to academic rigor and integrity throughout each stage of the work. Specifically, the author was responsible for:

- **Conceptualization**: Identifying the research problem, formulating the research questions, and defining the scope and focus of the study.
- **Literature Review**: Conducting an extensive review of scholarly sources related to TOEFL preparation, student perceptions, language learning motivation, and instructional effectiveness in standardized testing environments.
- **Methodology Design**: Designing the research framework, including the selection of a quantitative descriptive approach using survey methodology.
- **Instrument Development**: Creating the Likert-scale questionnaire, aligning each item with the research questions and ensuring content validity through expert review.
- **Data Collection**: Distributing the questionnaire to qualified participants at Universitas Advent Indonesia (UNAI) and managing the ethical process of informed consent and confidentiality.
- **Data Analysis**: Performing statistical analysis using SPSS to interpret students' responses and generate descriptive results aligned with each research objective.
- **Writing – Original Draft**: Composing the entire manuscript, including the introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion.
- **Writing – Review & Editing**: Revising and refining the manuscript based on internal feedback to enhance clarity, coherence, and scholarly presentation.
- **Project Administration and Supervision**: Coordinating timelines, overseeing the ethical review process, and ensuring compliance with academic standards.

The author affirms that all work presented in this paper is original, has been conducted in accordance with ethical research standards, and has not been submitted or published elsewhere. This study reflects the author's full intellectual contribution to the advancement of knowledge in language education and standardized test preparation.

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