

INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY PILOT TOEFL PREPARATION COURSE: STUDENTS' SUCCESSES AND INSTRUCTORS' INSIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of a Pilot TOEFL Preparation Course at an Indonesian university designed to address research gaps in test-taking strategy instruction and the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for integrated listening, structure, and reading skills. Thirteen randomly selected students participated, while nine lecturers collaboratively designed and delivered the course through lectures, vocabulary activities, small-group discussions, practice exercises, and motivational sessions. A mixed-methods action research design combined thematic analysis of student and lecturer surveys and lecturers' daily reflections with pretest and posttest data. The study investigated whether the course improved students' English proficiency, TOEFL scores, and lecturers' teaching practices. Findings showed that 69% of students improved their posttest scores and English competencies. Lecturers also reported enhanced pedagogical approaches through collaborative course design. The study recommends longer TOEFL preparation courses and proficiency-based classes to better support university students, contributing practical insights to TESOL and TOEFL instruction.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching; mixed methods; test strategies; TOEFL Prep Course; vocabulary knowledge

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji dampak Program Percontohan Kursus Persiapan TOEFL di sebuah universitas di Indonesia yang dirancang untuk mengatasi kesenjangan penelitian mengenai pembelajaran strategi pengerjaan tes dan penerapan Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) untuk mengembangkan keterampilan listening, structure, dan reading secara terpadu. Sebanyak 13 mahasiswa yang dipilih secara acak berpartisipasi dalam program ini, sementara sembilan dosen secara kolaboratif merancang dan melaksanakan pembelajaran melalui ceramah, kegiatan pengayaan kosakata, diskusi kelompok kecil, latihan soal, dan sesi motivasi. Penelitian tindakan dengan pendekatan mixed methods menggabungkan analisis tematik terhadap survei mahasiswa, survei dosen, dan refleksi harian dosen dengan data pre-test dan post-test. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah program tersebut meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris mahasiswa, skor TOEFL, serta praktik pengajaran dosen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 69% mahasiswa memperoleh skor post-test yang lebih tinggi dan mengalami peningkatan kompetensi bahasa Inggris. Para dosen juga melaporkan bahwa perancangan kursus secara kolaboratif memperkaya pendekatan pedagogis mereka. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penyelenggaraan kursus persiapan TOEFL dengan durasi yang lebih panjang serta pembagian kelas berdasarkan tingkat kemampuan untuk mendukung kebutuhan belajar mahasiswa. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi praktis bagi pengembangan pembelajaran TESOL dan TOEFL di perguruan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: Communicative Language Teaching; metode campuran; strategi tes; Kursus Persiapan TOEFL; penguasaan kosakata

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INTRODUCTION

An eastern Indonesian university provides students with higher education opportunities. Consistent with this endeavor is the recognition that strong English abilities and excellent academic standing are necessary for international and domestic options (Labibatussolihah & Adriani, 2022). The University Rektor requested the visiting professor and multidisciplinary lecturers to create a Pilot TOEFL Prep Course (Prep Course) as a model for improving students' English test scores and strengthening overall English competencies. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) are blended fields relevant to the study. The Prep Course should provide the lecturers with opportunities to expand their teaching methods. Because no specific preparation or training was provided for students prior to TOEFL testing, students normally took up to four test attempts as a score of at least 420 was required for graduation (Farkhan et al., 2019). After four failed TOEFL attempts, students had to complete a general English course for graduation acceptance.

A literature gap exists related to inclusive test-taking strategies content and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods as applied to TOEFL preparation courses. This research provided listening, structure, and reading test-taking strategies, and vocabulary knowledge as content for the Prep Course. For universities, where there are no TOEFL preparation courses, the study offers insights for using CLT methods for teaching collective test-taking strategies and using interactive vocabulary exercises to improve English test-taking results (Alavi & Kaivanpanah, 2006; Berezenko et al., 2022).

Research primarily addressed the importance of developing particular English competencies (Feng & Webb, 2020; Wijayati et al., 2021). Usually, scholars provided studies for one or occasionally two strategies for improving reading, listening, and structure skills. For example, the field research identified studies focused on reading development techniques (Bensalem, 2020; Iftanti, 2023; Mudra & Mckinnon, 2022). Teaching inclusive test-taking techniques provides new considerations for student English test success and English abilities.

Numerous scholars have addressed the value of using the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (Berezenko et al., 2022; Gebhard, 2000; Rezalou & Oktay, 2021). A methodological gap appeared in research regarding lecturers using CLT methods for specifically teaching successful listening, vocabulary, structure, and reading test-taking strategies (Gebhard, 2000). This study investigated the importance of using CLT techniques to improve understanding, retention, and test strategy applications.

Building on the strategies content and CLT methods central focus, the research project proposed strengthening students' English test-taking skills and vocabulary abilities to improve their overall English competencies and TOEFL test results (Philips, 2001; Wijayati et al., 2021). Equally, the project intended to expand the lecturers' CLT methods, activities, and materials design by using Realia, modeling, small group discussions, and team activities.

The research provided lecturers with the satisfaction of broadening their individual CLT expertise for redesigning curriculum that could improve students' English test-taking success beyond previous experiences (Rind & Kadiwal, 2016).

During the curriculum meetings, the lecturers developed the research questions that guided the objectives and goals of the Pilot TOEFL Preparation Course study (Philips, 2001). The research aimed to improve students' test-taking skills, strengthen their overall English competencies, and enhance lecturers' Communicative Language Teaching techniques and materials design (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Accordingly, the study focused on three research questions relevant to the TOEFL field. Specifically, it examined whether a Pilot TOEFL Preparation Course recognizably develops students' English skills, improves their TOEFL scores, and contributes to lecturers' teaching methods.

METHODS

Research site and participants

The study used sampling techniques to secure participants from the student representation of the larger student population at an eastern Indonesian university. The Academic Affairs Office sent a message to all 5th Standard and above level students encouraging them to participate in a Pilot TOEFL Prep Course, at no cost. Two hundred and twenty-one students responded in a self-selecting, random sample. The responding students received an RSVP request to attend the Pre-Test as a serious intention to attend the four-week Prep Course. Forty-one students replied and were given the pretest. Four lecturers proctored and tallied the exam scores.

Fifteen students who met the TOEFL score of 357 or above were eligible and invited to attend the Pilot TOEFL Prep Course. Students attended the first class and were instructed regarding the research study and the criteria for attending the Prep Course. Two students chose not to continue due to conflicting commitments (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Thirteen students agreed to classes Monday through Thursday from 10:00 am to Noon, for four weeks. Three absences would be acceptable, but attendance and study participation were commitments for the entire month-long program. Classes would be conducted entirely in English. The attendance and English-only conditions were unique to the Prep Course curriculum.

The nine Master's and doctorate-level lecturers had studied or completed research abroad; their English competencies were excellent. The lecturers had strong academic credentials and were experienced teachers in their specific disciplines. Several educators had extensive expertise related to English teaching.

Research design

Action research requires planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting and is within the scope of qualitative research (Lim, 2025b). The study design included curriculum planning and test-taking strategies and lesson plans. The four-week course that included Communicative Language Teaching and practicing the strategies became the implementation phase. Students were observed each class during lessons, team events, and small group discussions. Instructors provided reflective notations regarding the students' daily participation and English language progress. The study included surveys for the students and instructors' personal reflections. Understandably, instructor bias could occur, but with three instructors in each class, their collaborative student assessment discussions diminished individual bias. The study design provided data for analyzing student class outcomes, survey data, and pre- and posttest score comparisons. In addition, the research provided input for future curriculum planning and teaching strategies that could strengthen student test-taking skills and overall English abilities.

Three weeks prior to the Pilot TOEFL Prep Course, the lecturers met and developed the curriculum. The lecturers committed to teaching two hours a day, four days, for one week. There were four curriculum meetings: three strategies planning sessions and one meeting to assess the teaching and learning progress. The lecturers met in teams and chose strategies and materials for their specific skill sections of listening, structure, reading, and vocabulary.

The lecturers intentionally taught using CLT techniques such as student-centered lesson designs, authentic materials, interactive team word games, and individual teacher-student feedback and correction that improved understanding (Berezenko et al., 2022). Particular attention was given to CLT methods using Realia to connect new words and their meanings, small groups to clarify and practice the strategies, and motivational activities to increase retention. It was the students' first experience of English-only classes. At a review meeting, the lecturers decided the last two days of classes should provide students opportunities to take simulated TOEFL practice tests for listening, structure, and reading (Wijayati et al., 2021).

Behforouz and Al Ghaithi (2022) recognized that correct grammar and expanded vocabulary are the fundamental skills for fluent communication. Lecturers selected the vocabulary words the students learned for the entire course. Vocabulary activities created interactive use of new words, and retention improved. Teams competed to offer definitions, antonyms, synonyms, and create structurally correct sentences. The lecturers used the Frayer Model (1969), as noted in Table 1, for increasing the students' vocabulary abilities. Students learned 25 new words, plus related words, each week for three weeks. The fourth week, lecturers and students reviewed all 75 words and demonstrated their retention through vocabulary activities. Students also reviewed and clarified word meanings during their small group sessions.

Table 1. Modified Frayer Model (1969)

New Word	Use	Picture
Definition/Meaning	Synonym	Antonym
Use the Word in a Sentence		

Each week, the lecturers used motivational word games to strengthen learning and retention (Pratiwi & Waluyo, 2022). Using English only expanded the students' English capabilities, and their progress was recorded by the lecturers in daily student notations.

The lecturers' encouragement set the tone for the remaining weeks. Four educators participated in teaching the vocabulary words. The lecturers chose listening strategies that included but were not limited to the importance of the second speaker, selecting the answer with a synonym, short dialogue listening practice, understanding inferred meanings, and listening for details. Jaya et al. (2022) provided research that related to and supported the lecturers' selections.

Three instructors taught listening strategies and led small groups where students applied the strategies using authentic practice materials. The educators gave individual feedback and encouragement to strengthen the students' confidence, a practice employed by all lecturers when teaching their sections.

Misnawati and As'ari (2023) focused on the importance of university students developing strong skills for structure and written English abilities to ensure success when taking the TOEFL test. Four lecturers introduced the new vocabulary and reviewed previous word lists. Three lecturers gave specific structure lessons related to subject-verb agreement, recognizing different forms of words, not choosing prepositional phrases as subjects, using commas with conjunctions, verb tenses, and a review of articles. Lecturers' strategy choices were taught, and materials were provided for students to practice recognizing and correcting their errors. Akbari (2014) identified the need for structure knowledge, but he did not include teaching strategies.

According to Pammu et al. (2014), reading problems are less difficult for students who use the scanning strategy to pinpoint facts or keywords in the text and apply the skimming technique to find specific information that helps students answer questions correctly. The lecturers had expertise in teaching both techniques and included simulated reading tests for student practice. Additional strategies included skipping unknown words, predicting meaning, and avoiding constant translation (Gebhard, 2000; Qanwal & Karim, 2014).

For the week focused on reading strategies, three lecturers taught the new words, and it was evident that students were more proficient with the vocabulary activities after three weeks of the exercises. The reading team gave practice tests for the students and provided constructive feedback.

At the end of classes, the daily notations were tallied, indicating the students' learning and engagement progress. Students and lecturers individually completed the Student and Lecturer Surveys. Two different lecturer teams assessed the surveys according to thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lim, 2025a; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Survey questions

were reviewed for accuracy of thematic processing. The teams established the criteria for inclusion of subtheme results based on the collective comments of students and lecturers. The completed surveys and daily notations provided the qualitative data.

Different from the pretests, simulated TOEFL posttests were given to 13 students on the last class day, from 10 am to 12 pm. Four lecturers proctored the exam. Randomly distributed, two posttest versions used the same questions with different sequencing. The students were spaced throughout the classroom. Posttests were scored by the lecturers and represented the verifiable numerical results based on a standardized TOEFL scoring system. The compared results were the basis for the quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Lim, 2025b). A Mann-Whitney U test for small samples was conducted (Reed College, 2026).

The triangulation data reflected the daily recordings of the lecturers comments regarding the daily students’ experiences. The tallied comments verified the students’ challenges and successes of learning strategies, using English for activities, and practicing tests in small group sessions.

The presentation of Pilot TOEFL Prep Course Certificates were given to the 13 students. All students met the course requirements for attendance and engagement. Receiving the certificate meant there was no cost for the program and the student met the TOEFL graduation requirement. The benefits of attending the Prep Course were unique and would not be offered again.

Data collection and analysis

The quantitative analysis revealed the comparisons between the pretest and posttest scores and the results, not only of score difference, but also of the number of correct answers being lower or higher. According to the TOEFL scoring system, the listening, structure, and reading scores were weighted differently for correct answers (ETS, 2011). The quantitative results reflected numerical information provided by specific data (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Lim, 2025b).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative findings

An important purpose of the Prep Course was to improve students’ TOEFL scores and strengthen their overall English competencies. TOEFL is widely recognized as a standard measure of English language proficiency for non-native speakers (Bakri, 2022; Educational Testing Service, 2025). Quantitative results were generated by the pretest and posttest scores (Lim, 2025b). The students’ scores are presented in Table 2. The students were given an alphabetical identification to maintain their anonymity. The same test was not used for pre- and posttests to eliminate memorized or familiarity responses.

The differences in Table 2 identify the Pretest score followed by the Posttest score. The scores allow for comparisons between the differences of the pre- and posttest results. The highest to the lowest pretest scores form the list and avoid student identification.

Table 2. Pretest and Posttest Scores

Students		Pretest Score Posttest Score	Points + or -	Differences in correct answers
A	Pre	483		
	Post	503	20	10
B	Pre	430		
	Post	487	57	23
C	Pre	427		
	Post	450	23	9

Students		Pretest Score Posttest Score	Points + or -	Differences in correct answers
D	Pre	410		
	Post	437	27	9
E	Pre	397		
	Post	387	-10	-3
F	Pre	393		
	Post	403	10	8
G	Pre	387		
	Post	353	-34	-8
H	Pre	383		
	Post	413	30	9
I	Pre	383		
	Post	347	-36	-10
J	Pre	377		
	Post	457	80	28
K	Pre	373		
	Post	350	-23	-2
L	Pre	363		
	Post	387	24	8
M	Pre	357		
	Post	427	70	17

The TOEFL scoring system used weighted answer scores, depending on the listening, structure, or reading sections. Each student was able to discuss their experiences and was assured that the lecturers recognized their commitment and daily progress throughout the program.

Lim (2025b) discussed relating quantitative data to statistical significance. According to a Reed College statistical site, a Mann-Whitney U Test is appropriate due to the small sample size (Reed College, n.d.). The U Test was calculated: $U = 64.50$ and $z = -1.0256$. At the significance level of 0.05, a one-tailed test, the p-value was $p = 0.152530$. The two-tailed result was $p = 0.305061$. The test concluded that the distribution of the two groups was not significantly different. The groups could plausibly come from the same population. ($U = 64.50$, $p = .305$). Bashir et al. (2025) used the Mann-Whitney U Test in their study with similar comparison conditions and results, meaning their two groups were not significantly different. Recognizing that there was no statistically significant difference does not diminish the score differences for individuals and the collective students (Lim, 2025a).

The pretest and posttest data implied possible advantages of Communicative Language Teaching and inclusive strategies being taught to students in an English-only learning environment. Even with the limited teaching hours, improved results were recognizable. The results added to the possibility that adaptable CLT techniques and inclusive test-taking strategies offer value for the TESOL and TOEFL fields.

Qualitative findings: Student and Lecturer Surveys

The qualitative results provided data using Thematic Analysis: Categorizing, coding, identifying, reviewing, defining, and analyzing themes embedded in the Student and Lecturer Surveys (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lim, 2025a; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). There were no preset codes; new codes were generated and identified as themes. At times, themes were modified while working through survey responses (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Each Student and Lecturer Survey question was reviewed for accuracy of categorization, specifically coded as comments supporting or giving insights to the questions, and identified as issues linked to one another. Then the steps were reviewed for accuracy of collective codes that became themes with relevance to the individual questions. The comments in general form were analyzed as informative subthemes. The subthemes were established by the respondents' collective comments. The process was completed by two different teams. The students' and lecturers' comments are included as clarification of the subthemes as presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Student Surveys

The Student Surveys each contained eight questions. Four or more student responses clarified one or two subthemes per question. The subthemes became qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Table 3 provides examples of the questions and commentary that evolved into the Student Survey subthemes.

Table 3. Student Survey Questions

Survey Questions	Subthemes	N and % of Responses
1) Discuss valuable Listening Strategies you learned during the first week's classes.	Beneficial Strategies: Strategies were easy to learn and apply. Student F - <i>The Listening Strategies I've learned ...made me feel comfortable taking the TOEFL test. Specifically in listening.</i> Specific Strategies: Listening to the second speaker, being aware of similar sounds, paying attention to details, and finding key words. Student A - <i>After I learned listening strategies about focusing on the second speaker and being careful of similar sounds...it helped me a lot to improve my listening.</i>	N = 13 8 Responses 62% N = 13 6 Responses 46%
2) Share new insights you gained while learning the Structure Strategies.	Weakness: English structure was weakness and harder to learn. Student F - <i>I feel confused learning structure before the class. Now I know that I can do the TOEFL test easier. With the structure strategies the lecturers are teaching me.</i> Feel Better: Felt better using structure strategies after lessons. Student C - <i>I know that my structure was weak, and when the lecturer taught me about that, I felt more comfortable.</i>	N = 13 7 Responses 54%. 4 Responses 31%
3) Identify the helpful Reading Strategies you practiced for TOEFL readings and questions exercises.	Helpful Strategies: Reading strategies taught how to focus on the questions and how to answer them quicker. Student C - <i>Just focus on the question first and then read the passage.</i> Student H - <i>Just focus on what the questions ask.</i> Skim and Scan: Reading strategies were helpful, especially the skimming and scanning exercises. Student D - <i>The helpful thing is skim and scan. This strategy really works for me. It made me focus to find the answer.</i>	N = 13 9 Responses 69% 8 Responses 62%
6) Share ideas about what you found beneficial...	Beneficial Strategies: Appreciated learning the various test-taking strategies and felt they could apply them. Student D - <i>The benefit I got from this program is that you know the reasons why you chose the right options.</i>	N = 13 7 Responses 54%
7) Please express any comments you have related to lecturers...	Lecturer Appreciation: Lecturers cared and provided clear explanations, tips, and easy ways to take tests. Student G - <i>The lecturers in this class care about their students. They support our study with heart.</i>	N = 13 6 Responses 46%
8) You are welcome to share any comments or ideas not addressed in the questions.	Program Continuation: English improved and wanted the university to make the course longer and continue into the future. Student H - <i>I hope this program will be an annual program.</i>	N = 13 8 Responses 62%

The Student Survey responses provided the content for thematic analysis and findings. Students recognized that learning and practicing test strategies improved their test-taking abilities (Par, 2020). Daily use of English contributed to their improvement. Students were aware of the greater interaction with the lecturers and expressed that the learning environment allowed them

to discuss their weaknesses and concerns. Strategies practiced during small group sessions and vocabulary team activities made learning and retention a natural part of the classes.

The students' comments and findings revealed the students' experiences and noted that they used English with greater ease with lecturers and classmates and addressed Research Question 1: Will a Pilot TOEFL Prep Course recognizably develop student English skills? The Student Survey findings revealed that, for most of the students, their general and specific use of test-taking strategies indicated that their higher TOEFL scores connected with Research Question 2: Will a Pilot TOEFL Prep Course improve students' TOEFL scores?

Lecturer Surveys

Lecturers planned and taught either listening, structure, or reading test-taking strategies and provided practice materials for the students to use in small groups, so the strategies were understood and applied. Each lecturer participated in teaching the new words and guided students in the activities (Feng & Webb, 2020).

The researchers shared their candid comments and individual perspectives when responding to the Lecturer Survey. Table 4 identifies the subthemes as sample modified questions that occurred when four or more of the nine participants provided comments directly related to the category. Responses from one to three lecturers were valuable but not sufficient for creating a subtheme.

Table 4. Lecturer Survey Questions

Survey Questions	Subthemes	N and % of Responses
2) Discuss your thoughts about and experiences with the students.	Student Commitment, Motivation, and Improvement: Students were committed in their attendance and highly motivated to learn. Using English in class supported developing better TOEFL test taking skills. Lecturer A - <i>The first week of the Listening class was wonderful. The students were excited to learn. The first day they were nervous and shy, but day by day, they improved really well. They were confident in speaking English all day.</i>	N = 9 9 Responses 100%
3) What were the benefits you observed during your focus week?	Learning Vocabulary: The new model for learning vocabulary and the interactive activities made students more comfortable using English daily. Lecturer C - <i>The students understand more vocabulary [new words] and can use them in sentences. I observed their progress of using English daily.</i>	N = 9 7 Responses 78%
4) What were the challenges you experienced during the times you taught?	Student English Levels: Having students with different English skills at times created learning challenges. Lecturer I - <i>The challenges that I experienced...were when I had to deal with some shy students and students with low English proficiency. I had to struggle more on motivating them to be more active and engaged with the class....And they tend to feel insecure with their ability once they were at the same group with more active students.</i>	N = 9 6 Responses 67%
5) Discuss your thoughts related to teaching small group focused strategies.	Student Engagement: Small groups were engaging as they gave one-on-one strategy explanations. Lecturers easily corrected the practice materials and students were comfortable using English because everyone participated. Lecturer H - <i>...small group focused strategies worked well to improve the students' understanding of new vocabularies and listening skills. It gave more opportunities for students to be more focused and more freely delivering their ideas, which is connected to creating the interactive class.</i>	N = 9 9 Responses 100%
6) Discuss your insights related to the style for teaching vocabulary and the practice activities.	Student Excitement and Achievement: Vocabulary techniques and activities were effective, fun, and reduced student anxiety. The method helped students learn meaning and context, use new words in sentences, and maintain greater vocabulary retention. Lecturer F - <i>For me, using the method that included meaning, use, synonyms, and antonyms strengthened the students' vocabulary knowledge. They learned more than just the vocabulary words. Students could use sentences and had, overall, high retention through numerous interactive reviews</i>	N = 9 9 Responses 100%

Survey Questions	Subthemes	N and % of Responses
7) You are encouraged to share additional comments related to the planning and TOEFL prep course project.	Course Solutions: Divide the classes into two levels, one for Basic English skills and one for Intermediate and advanced level students. Extend class hours and course length. Lecturer G - <i>In my opinion, we have implemented effective strategies during the whole program. Probably if we have extra time, we could group the students into the same stat of learning ability, so that each group member has roughly the same learning pace. The program can also be implemented by the university as an option if students do not want to take a TOEFL test since the program also takes their efforts to improve their [English] abilities.</i> Effective Teaching: Continue teaching methods because they were effective techniques for teaching test strategies and for using small groups to develop authentic English use. Lecturer H - <i>If possible, the duration of the next TOEFL Prep Course can be longer. It will be great if we can extend the time. For example, 8 weeks of Intensive Class. Every section takes time for 2 weeks, and the last 2 weeks can be used for review and mock tests.</i>	N = 9 5 Responses 56% 5 Responses 56%
8) Discuss your planning and teaching experiences for your focus week.	Planning and Teaching: Teaching TOEFL test taking strategies, along with practice materials, improved student English learning. Lecturer C - <i>I prepared materials and examples of the questions for the week. I taught Reading strategies and discussed them with the students. I also encouraged the students to speak in English so that their comfortable and use to speaking English.</i>	N = 9 6 Responses 67%

The Lecturers' Surveys highlighted that using various CLT methods for vocabulary and inclusive test-taking strategies, and including individual feedback, reduced the students' confusion on how to answer TOEFL test questions. The survey findings suggested positive considerations for Research Question 3: Will a Pilot TOEFL Prep Course contribute to lecturers' teaching methods?

Daily Notations data

Quantitative test comparisons, qualitative surveys, and daily notations comprised the triangulation data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The differences in pretest scores were not the singular deciding factor for recognizing increased English skills, as all students practiced using English when participating in daily class activities. Support data for the survey subthemes was substantiated by the lectures' daily notations (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). While the students' skills did not increase at the same rate, their varying advances were noted. Daily notations indicated that all students improved English abilities to some extent (Lim, 2025a).

Table 5 exhibits some the lecturers' notations that are typical comments for students. Daily notations identify the students' class experiences related to learning strategies and progress in using English. *Positive* addresses understanding and practicing strategies, increasing comfort when using English in class, and quick-thinking participation in vocabulary activities. *Challenge* notes indicated a student was noticeably slower with responses, unable to give answers for some vocabulary reviews, or seemed reluctant to contribute answers when practicing the strategy lessons. Attendance absence meant the student missed some lesson information and that the instructors needed to provide additional support. The student numbers have no connections to identities.

Table 5. Daily Notations

Student 1 <i>Listening Week</i> Positive = Engaged and Learning Challenges = Learning or Practice Uncertainties		
Date	Status	Notations
8/7	Attended Positive	Connected well with listening strategies, highly engaged, learned new words quickly.
8/8	Attended Positive	Eager to practice the different listening strategies, readily engages with classmates and learning games, knows the review words.
8/9	Attended Positive	Respectful and sensitive to all students. Student knows all of the different meanings of each word. She supports classmates to be sure they are learning the listening techniques. Comfortable using English in the class.
8/10 P = 4	Attended Positive	Student is devoted to improving her English. She encourages the other students also.
Student 2 <i>Structure Week</i>		
Date	Status	Notations
8/14	Attended Positive	Chose to give a sentence during the word game, confident in word knowledge.
8/15	Attended Challenges	Intelligent but shy to express his thoughts at times in the structure small groups. Less engaged in discussions.
8/16	Attended Positive	Structure seems a bit of a challenge, but the student responds to practice questions well. Uses English correctly when called upon.
8/18 P =2 C = 2	Attended Challenges	The student seems to be less sure of word meanings, starting to hold back just a bit. The student's understanding of the structure strategies and using new words correctly shows improved use of English in the class.
Student 3 <i>Reading Week</i>		
Date	Status	Notations
8/21	Attended Positive	More comfortable with reading class discussions. Student encourages other students.
8/22	Attended Positive	Really knows vocabulary and thinks about reading strategies.
8/23	Half Day Attendance Positive	Attended half of the class (required to meet with major faculty)...highly engaged in the definition team game.
8/24 P = 4	Attended Positive	Knows vocabulary well, interactive in reading class. thoughtful with other students.

The Daily Notations highlighted the students' English interactions and their increased understanding of how to apply English test taking strategies and vocabulary. The notes reflected learning motivation and engagement with classmates. The observation tallies identified student progress or difficulties related to English use and test taking skills. Table 6 demonstrates the lecturers' collective notations regarding the students' class participation and progress. It is important to note that lecturer-observer bias is naturally embedded within the assessments. Three or four instructors supported one another in recognizing possible bias. Intentional awareness of potential bias aimed to reduce bias as much possible.

Table 6. Daily Notations

Student Participation	Notations Per week	Total Notations	Positive Notations	Learning Engagement	Challenge Notations	Challenges
N=13	4 notations per student, per day = 52 per week	208 Lecturer Notations	152 Positive Notations over 4 weeks	73% of Students had engaged learning days	56 Challenge Notations over 4 weeks	27% of Students had Challenging learning days

The overall positive students' English development (73%) reflected their progress and findings were supported by Student Survey responses. The results related favorably with Research Question 1: Will a Pilot TOEFL Prep Course recognizably develop student English skills?

Discussion

Pre and Posttests

The effectiveness of the TOEFL preparation course was demonstrated through the comparison of pretest and posttest scores among participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Out of 13 students, a majority showed improvement after attending the course, with 9 students (69%) achieving higher scores in their posttest compared to their pretest. The pretest scores ranged from 357 to 483 points. The scores for the posttest ranged from 347 to 503 points. Important distinctions appeared in the students' individual increases in points over pretest scores: 10, 20, 23, 24, 27, 30, 57, 70, and 80. The results suggest recognizable progress for most participants. Four students (31%) experienced a decrease in their posttest scores: -10 points with (-3) more missed questions on the posttest than on the pretest, -23 (-2), -34 (-8), and -36 (-10).

The weights assigned to each section were important distinctions (Educational Testing Service, 2016; Educational Testing Service, 2025). Note that Student K missed two more questions in the posttest when compared with the pretest score, the difference was 23 less points. Student L missed eight more questions on the posttest and the difference was 24 less points. The weighted point system was responsible for the differences (Educational Testing Service, 2011). The weighted answer distinctions were explained to students as they individually met for their pretest and posttest results. The students understood that the weighted point system gave them substantial score differences per category and number of missed answers. The test results reflected the students' abilities to apply strategies correctly and highlighted their personal motivation to learn and practice the techniques and new words.

The contribution to the research was evident as the importance of teaching students test-taking strategies had a probable impact on score results. The comparison scores allowed instructors and students to assess their efforts throughout the course and realize that motivation, innovative, focused teaching, student learning, and practice actually have a definable outcome. The score comparisons correlated well with Research Question 2: Will a Pilot TOEFL Prep Course improve students' TOEFL scores?

Because of the lecturer's interactive teaching techniques, most students were able to conceptualize strategy applications and were eager to practice the simulated tests (Rezalou & Oktay, 2021). Students were engaged when learning the new words so they could contribute to team success during the vocabulary review activities. Students who found the English-only environment more of a challenge held back somewhat during the test practice. During the small group sessions, test answers were provided, explained, and discussed.

The educational implications of teaching strong pedagogical content with practice sessions were featured as ways to support student test-taking success (Rezalou & Oktay, 2021). The students' degree of understanding of the strategies and individual motivation were the factors that impacted the differences in the students' test results. Collectively, the individual cases reinforce the overall value of the TOEFL preparation course in fostering academic and linguistic development.

Student Surveys

Survey questionnaires completed by both students and lecturers yielded valuable findings, greatly enhancing the understanding of how the Prep Course contributed to improved test scores and English language development. The main objective of collecting the data was to gain deeper insights into participants' perceptions, thoughts, and progress as they participated in the class.

The students' and lecturers' comments regarding their experiences provided data with qualitative perspectives.

Students (89%) felt the use of Communicative Language Teaching methods increased the understanding of lesson content. Strategies, exercises, practice opportunities, reviews, team games, and small group activities were discussed as being helpful to student learning (Pratiwi & Waluyo, 2022). The lecturers' clear explanations, tips, and strategies for taking tests ranked alongside the students' (77%) appreciation for caring support. The Student Survey findings corroborated the lecturers' comments that stressed how important teaching style, course design, vocabulary knowledge, and instructor demeanor are to student learning (Chen et.al., 2022; Elfiondri et al., 2020; Halim et al., 2018).

Interactive learning techniques were a central aspect of the course, and students (62%) noted their impact. The combination of CLT methods, practice strategies, and interactive exercises created an environment where students could build their confidence in using English (Wigati & Indriani, 2021). The survey results showed that students (54%) reported greater confidence, a finding corroborated by lecturers through their student notations.

The 2021 study by Liu highlighted the importance of reducing student anxiety to enhance learning outcomes. For students, the structured test-taking strategies and the interactive activities provided a natural progression for improved English-speaking proficiency, increased confidence, and reduced anxiety (Iftanti et al., 2023; Wijayati et al., 2021).

Lecturer Surveys

The findings from the lecturers' survey responses showed unanimous agreement regarding student engagement in the TOEFL preparation course. All lecturers noted that the students were committed to attending classes and demonstrated a high level of motivation to improve their test-taking abilities as well as their English language competencies. Student dedication contributed to the overall effectiveness of the course.

Lecturers (100%) also observed that students were comfortable learning English in small group discussions. Lecturers (100%) agreed that small group discussions are a valuable methodology that will be used in future classes. Students practiced the strategies and received feedback, which led them to better adapt their test-taking skills. The inclusive strategies lessons and practice sessions in the motivational CLT learning environment made the students' improved scores a worthwhile contribution. The students and lecturers benefited from the Prep Course.

Daily Notations

The lecturers' daily notations provided valuable insights that closely aligned with the findings from the survey responses. The notations were primarily positive, highlighting the areas of student engagement, enjoyment of interactive team events, and increased discussions with peers and instructors (Wigati & Indriani, 2021). The students' developing language strengths were individually evident. As expected, challenges were encountered, specifically regarding students' shyness or lack of confidence and students' difficulties with initial strategy directions (Riasati, 2012).

Through their observations and notes, lecturers emphasized the significance of maintaining high levels of engagement in the classroom. They noted that when students actively participated, their confidence improved. The lecturers' notations reinforced the importance of support and encouragement in facilitating student learning (Riasati, 2012). The combination of these elements contributed to a classroom atmosphere where students could overcome challenges, develop greater confidence, and engage meaningfully in the learning process.

Research Limitations

Due to the parameters set by the Rektor's office, specific research limitations were recognized. Limited student and instructor participation, due to the summer session, meant that only one small class could be presented. Classes were offered only in the morning. An afternoon class with the same instructors, teaching as usual, and using the same materials would have provided a control group and valuable comparison data. Larger classes would also increase the study's depth.

The strictures of time for two-hour classes, four days a week, reduced the instructors' potential to strengthen the learning results (Rind & Kadiwal, 2016). Nonetheless, students and instructors recognized the positive results due to the design, content, and activities of their Prep Course.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

At the onset of the article, collective test-taking strategies served as the core content, and Communicative Language Teaching methods were identified as the key gaps in the field research. The content difference for this study was the inclusive teaching of listening, structure, and reading test-taking strategies and increasing vocabulary knowledge. Generally, scholars focused on one or occasionally on two strategies when teaching test skills (Elfiondri et al., 2020; Wijayati et al., 2021). The results revealed that the collective test-taking strategies and focused CLT contributed to the majority of students earning higher posttest scores.

The lecturers demonstrated that by expanding CLT methods, by using team exercises and small groups, and by including the three strategy areas, students strengthened their English skills and their TOEFL scores. Most students recognized that practicing the test-taking strategies led to improved TOEFL scores. Students realized that their own motivation and engagement in classes contributed to their level of development. The Communicative Language Teaching methods and strategies developed student confidence when taking English tests and when using English overall (Bakri, 2022; Pratiwi & Waluyo, 2022).

The Prep Course study utilized mixed methods and action research approaches (Lim, 2025a). The pre- and posttest scores produced quantitative results that noted a sixty-nine percent improvement for the TOEFL posttest scores (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Lim, 2025b). The CLT methods and focused content provide relevant knowledge to the TESOL and TOEFL fields. The research also offered data for future university decisions related to English development, and on a broader spectrum, applicable strategies and methods for those designing TOEFL preparation courses.

Qualitative data were the results of surveys and daily notations. Both educators and students agreed that longer class periods and more weeks of training would be beneficial for future TOEFL courses. The lecturers and students experienced communicative learning, especially in small group practice sessions and the educational activities. Students reported that the course structure made learning easier, providing them with valuable strategies such as specific test-taking tips and techniques for understanding new vocabulary. Lecturers stated that they were applying the interactive teaching to their multidisciplinary classes with appreciative responses from their students. The research offered cumulative data encouraging universities to explore English class options based on informed considerations.

The collective survey comments along with the daily student interactions addressed students with varying English skill levels (Alek et al., 2019; Weda et al., 2021). In Indonesia, the one class for all suggests that the lower-level students would be supported by the higher-level students. During the Prep Course, it was accurate that higher-level students offered support; however, the lower-level students often became more reserved and hesitated to share in the classes as they were not as cognizant of all that happened in the class. Even with instructors providing support, the reactions were the norm as in other one-level Indonesian classes (Alek et al., 2019; Weda et al., 2021).

The survey comments along with the daily student interactions identified the need to offer two classes for English learning options. The presence of students with varying skill levels posed challenges, underscoring the need to address these differences in future course designs to ensure effective instruction for all participants. One class for Basic and low Intermediate English ability students and one class for high Intermediate and Advanced level students could have a beneficial impact.

The lecturers were aware of the diverse student needs, but the pilot program was set for one course. The lecturers explained that the research data addresses their desires to have two-level classes for optimal learning. Based on the lecturers' and students' surveys, a redesign of classes could benefit students with different English skills.

Students and lecturers agreed on further adjustments. The Prep Course students requested that all university students have access to future preparation courses. Lecturers suggested that increasing the amount of practice time focused on TOEFL-type questions would be advantageous for students. Extending class hours and the overall course length was recommended to provide more comprehensive learning opportunities.

The research benefits were expressed as insights the lecturers and students experienced throughout the course. Teachers expanded their teaching approaches and focused on student learning needs. The students responded with increased English interactions and verbalized understanding. Improved student learning and retention, a pedagogical core of the education field, was achieved through intentional Communicative Language Teaching and inclusive test-taking strategies. The effective teaching and learning of the Pilot TOEFL Prep Course offers valuable considerations for future university students and lecturers.

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