

IMPROVING STUDENTS' TOEFL SCORES USING *TOEFL iBT PRACTICE* ANDROID APPLICATION

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Abstract: The requirement for all Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University students to achieve at least 450 TOEFL score is really hard since they are non-English department students and lack of vocabulary. Students get difficult to understand the meaning of sentences and vocabulary in the TOEFL test. Moreover, students tend to hang their hope to get high TOEFL score only to the teacher who teaches them TOEFL only in 13 meetings in their fourth semester through Intensive English program held by English Center UIN Malang. Hence, it is really important to help them to improve their TOEFL scores by enriching their vocabulary mastery using TOEFL IBT practice android application in which this application is free to be downloaded, practice to be operated in hand phone, and contains thousands words frequently used in TOEFL. Furthermore, this application helps students to be more autonomous to learn various fields of vocabulary in TOEFL.

Keywords: *TOEFL, Vocabulary, Android Application*

Introduction

English is nowadays an international language that is used commonly in daily communication among people in the world. It means that EFL learners are expected to master English skills consisting productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (speaking and listening). That is why it is important to have the standard test to measure students' English proficiency. One of them is TOEFL and it becomes a compulsory subject taught in the 4th semester students in Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang. It is because UIN Malang has proclaimed itself as World Class University which wants to make students to speak both Arabic and English. Instead of being standard test to measure students' achievements in the beginning and the end of the intensive class, TOEFL score is really important for all students to apply job or any others which need TOEFL as requirement. On the other hand, all UIN Malang students need to achieve at least 450 TOEFL score as the requirement to do comprehensive test. Hence, the need to achieve high TOEFL score is urgent.

As the urgency of achieving high TOEFL score, not all students who enter TOEFL class in the 4th semester showed high TOEFL score as the researcher got the pretest score. Then, researcher interviewed 74 students in his class to know students' problems to do the TOEFL test. The result showed that 65% students mentioned the lack of vocabulary as the dominant factor, 25% students believed grammar as the next factor, and 10% students thought that listening part speed as the last factor. It is very reasonable since the vocabulary used in TOEFL test is very specific to the area and field of the topic such as biology and geography terms while the students who join the TOEFL class are non-English Department students. Therefore, researcher assumes that the students of TOEFL classes must master the English vocabulary frequently used in the TOEFL test through familiarization. Yet, it is impossible to teach, give essential vocabulary list, check the vocabulary which have been learned, and correct them during the teaching and learning process of intensive classes because the duration of each meeting is very limited.

The TOEFL class in the Intensive program is limited only in 16 meetings reduced by 3 meetings for pretest, mid-test and final test. Furthermore, the need to assess students' English speaking proficiency during the TOEFL class made lecturer reduced the TOEFL class duration for some minutes to teach students speaking skill. That is why, the researcher as one of the intensive program lecturer believed that it is important to not only relying on the TOEFL class time to improve students' TOEFL scores. As the result of the students' interview on their problem to do TOEFL test, the researcher need to improve students' vocabulary mastery first.

To get the students familiar with the vocabulary in TOEFL is by getting them to learn outside the classroom. In doing the learning process, they need tools which can be carried by them anytime, anywhere and very close to them. Smartphone is a gadget which is inseparable from humans' need and becomes necessity in their daily life. This tool can give people what they need in instant time since there are many applications in supporting their activities, including studying TOEFL. TOEFL iBT Preparation is one of the useful applications which is downloadable for Smartphone.

TOEFL iBT Preparation is an application which provides bunch of English vocabulary which are frequently used in TOEFL tests and presents them in both three skills of TOEFL test; listening, structure and reading. This application is very suitable for intensive class students because it can improve their autonomous learning because they can study TOEFL outside the classroom anytime. According to Taylor (2000) that

autonomous learning is also called as student-centered learning that relates to change in focus in the classroom from the teacher to the students (from the teaching to learning).

In conclusion, by considering the possibility of suitability and effectiveness of the TOEFL iBT Preparation software, the researcher conducted a Action Research using the software as extensive exposure to solve the problems of the 4th semester students of Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang in Intensive English program in achieving better TOEFL score.

Theoretical Basis

TOEFL Test

According to the syllabus of the Intensive class in IV (fourth) semester in Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang, lecturer must help students to practice TOEFL test which consist of listening, structure, and reading test. Then, lecturer must help students to achieve at least 450 score as the limit to pass the intensive English program. The TOEFL tests which are given to the students for teaching and learning process are Baron TOEFL preparation. While the pretest, mid-test, and final test materials are taken from the materials from IIEF Jakarta as UIN Malang has an agreement (MOU).

Autonomous Learning

Little in Benson (2001), the definition on learner autonomy is “a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfer what has been learned to wider contexts.” In this research, by employing the TOEFL iBT Preparation, the learners will be more autonomy to practice the vocabulary anytime, anywhere, with their hand phone. Also, students can check their answer directly which makes them aware of self-assessment. Rice & Nash (2010) states that any testing multimedia (including TOEFL iBT Preparation) makes a good self-assessment tool for students. In the end, this application is able to improve students’ TOEFL score as the impact of students’ improvement on vocabulary mastery since in the application they have to be competitive with the time and correct.

Android Application

Android is a mobile operating system (OS), based on the Linux Kernel, that is currently developed by Google. With a user interface based on direct manipulation, android is designed primarily for touch screen mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets computers, with specialized user interfaces for televisions (Android TV), cars (Android Auto), and wrist watches (Android Wear). The OS uses touch inputs that loosely correspond to real-world actions, like swiping, tapping, pinching, and reverse pinching to manipulate on-screen objects, and a virtual keyboard.

TOEFL iBT Preparation Android Application

TOEFL iBT Preparation is android software which can be easily downloaded in Google Play store. This application can be called as TOEFL vocabulary quizzes since the user must compete with time and duration. The vocabularies are provided into some categories: 1000 words (the frequent words appeared in TOEFL), astronomy, environment, geology, history and art, and social science. In each category, there are four types of practices:

- a. Essential Words (Vocabularies which are presented with English meaning and sound of listening). Here, the students can access the vocabulary in listening format to get them used in hearing the pronunciation then directly read the meaning which also present in English language. It is very good to train listening mastery before they take listening section of TOEFL. This feature is called Essential Words. In this feature, the students are also trained reading because the meaning is presented in English.
- b. Multiple Choice Test (Vocabularies are presented in the context and the synonym in choices). This feature gets the students to choose the synonyms or words with closest meaning in text which the words have been typed in different color and match them with the multiple choices under the text. This feature can teaches the students more vocabulary in the text, guess the meaning through reading the text and improve their reading competence by understanding context.
- c. Group Choice (Vocabularies are provided in multiple choice and one is out of group). This feature lets the students choose one word among other three words which does not belong to the same area.
- d. Word Choice test (A vocabulary is presented and provided four choices with one among four is the synonym). This test requires students to choose the closest meaning of a word with the multiple choices provided.

Method

The study was conducted in Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang which is located on Jl. Gajayana 50 Malang. The subjects were the 4th semester students of class A, B, C, & D, of Architecture Program of Science and Technology Department and class A of Ahwal Syaksiah Program of Syariah Department in academic year 2013/2014; there were 74 students in five classes.

The research design used in this research was Action Research of Extensive vocabulary practice TOEFL since the researcher implemented it to solve the teaching TOEFL problems of the research subjects in achieving better TOEFL score. In this research, the researcher applied collaborative Action Research which focused only on a particular classroom. Collaboration was done with another Intensive English lecturer who was also teaching TOEFL too. The researcher herself acted as the practitioner who conducted the teaching and learning activities by using TOEFL iBT Preparation, whereas the collaborator performed as the observer during the implementation of the action.

The Action Research consists of cycle (s) in which each cycle consists of four stages namely planning, implementation, observation, and reflection (Latief, 2010: 86-88). However, to know what should be planned in the stage of planning, the researcher did a preliminary study to identify the students' problem. The preliminary study was in the form of test and interviews. In this study, the Criteria of Success emphasized on the students' TOEFL achievement score, and the students' responses (opinion) towards the implementation of TOEFL iBT Preparation in 4th semester intensive English class.

In implementation, students were asked to use TOEFL iBT Preparation software through hand phone at least a category in a day and they had to report it in the short descriptive form what they have learnt just like a diary. Also, they had to write vocabularies they had practiced in software (at least 10 vocabularies a day).

In the process of observation, in the first cycle, lecturer or researcher observed the students descriptive writing submission as the progress of learning. The last step, which was reflection, the lecturer evaluated the success of the software whether students had achieved the criteria of success or not.

Discussion

The Students' Score in Preliminary Study

The result of preliminary study explained that only few students in classes achieve above 400 TOEFL score as describe in the following chart.

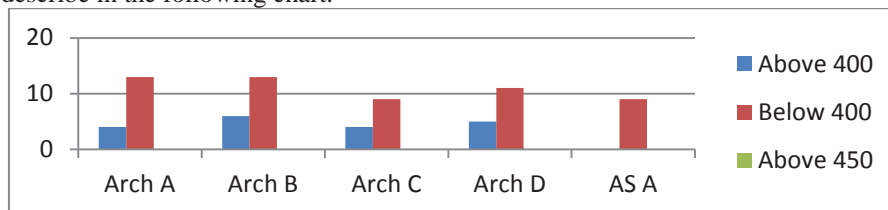


Chart II Students' Preliminary test / Pre-test TOEFL Scores

The chart explained that students' problem were about meeting the university requirement. Their score is far from 450 score and none of student achieved 450 or more score in pre-test or preliminary study test.

The Students' Involvement in Extensive TOEFL Vocabulary Practice

Based on the submission of the students' short descriptive report and the collected vocabularies sheet, it were found that: First, students were not discipline enough to practice to do the tests in TOEFL iBT Preparation software since their short descriptive reports were not completes according to dates and so were the vocabulary list. Second, the students short descriptive, some of them stated that they enjoyed practiced vocabulary through this software rather than memorizing them one by one. Third, students used this software in various times (before sleeping, in free time, break time, etc.) and various places (on bed, in classroom, in friends' house, etc.)

As the reflection, the students were tested again as the result would be considered as part of mid-test scores. The result of the TOEFL in mid-test is as follows:



Chart II Students' Mid-test TOEFL Scores

Based on the data in chart II above, the students' TOEFL scores in cycle I were improved. The students who got above 400 scores were more than the students that achieved below 400 scores. It meant that though students were not discipline enough to practice their vocabulary using the software, the software successfully improved students TOEFL scores.

The mid-test TOEFL scores then were used by researcher as the preliminary test for Cycle II and the researcher asked students to do extensive TOEFL practice again using TOEFL iBT Preparation outside intensive English program class time as in Cycle I. During the implementation of the use of software, the students showed more positive attitudes: First, they submit more complete short description of their TOEFL vocabulary practice and list of vocabulary they had learnt. Second, in the intensive English program class, they became more active. Based on the collaborator observation, students' vocabulary improvements helped them to understand the TOEFL test practice in class. Third, the students' participation in class is more equal or not being dominated by some students. Then, as the Cycle II reflection, the students were administered another TOEFL test as final-test and the result as presented below:

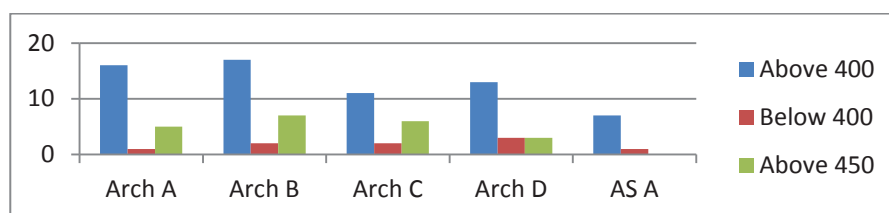


Chart III Students' Final-test TOEFL Scores

Chart III explained clearly the statistical calculation of students TOEFL achievements. The students who achieved more than 400 TOEFL scores increased. Also, students that achieved more than 450 TOEFL scores were more than in mid-test. Moreover, one student achieved 500 TOEFL score.

The Result of the Questionnaire

The short conclusions from the result of students' questionnaires as in Appendix 2 are: First, only eight students were not helped with since the software did not motivate them to learn vocabulary and did not help them to practice listening to vocabulary. Also, they were not helped to understand meaning from context. But, most of students mentioned them in the opposite sides. Second, TOEFL iBT Preparation can be alternative for lecturer to help students to improve their vocabulary mastery in which is reflected by the improvement of TOEFL scores. Third, the questionnaires support the success of TOEFL iBT Preparation software based on the students' TOEFL improvement scores.

Conclusion

Based on the attempt to solve students' problem to improve TOEFL Score, the conclusions are as follows:

- a. TOEFL iBT Preparation software successfully helped the 4th semester students of class A, B, C, & D, of Architecture Program of Science and Technology Department and class A of Ahwal Syaksiah Program of Syariah Department in academic year 2013/2014 to achieve higher TOEFL scores though not all students pass the minimum score (450) as criteria of success. But, some departments in UIN needed only 400 TOEFL score to take comprehensive tests.
- b. This software trained students to be more disciplined, more active in class, and do self-assessment.

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Biodata

Afif Ikhwanul Muslimin is Graduate Program student in ELT in State University of Malang. He has been teaching at Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang since 2012 and University of Muhammadiyah Malang as ESP lecturer since 2009. In the same year, he has been a research assistant and English lecturer in Mechanical Engineering in developing teaching material for EAP for Engineering Department in Brawijaya University.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Questionnaire for students

No	Items	Yes	No
1	Does TOEFL iBT Preparation provide you essential vocabulary for TOEFL?		
2	Are you motivated to practice TOEFL vocabulary using this application?		
3	Does TOEFL iBT Preparation enrich your vocabulary mastery?		
4	Does essential words test in TOEFL iBT Preparation help you to be familiar with vocabulary sound?		
5	Does multiple choice test in TOEFL iBT Preparation help you to be familiar with understanding vocabulary through context?		
6	Does TOEFL iBT Preparation help you to do TOEFL easier?		

Appendix 2 The Result of Students' Questionnaires

Std	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Total		Std	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Total	
							Y	N								Y	N
1	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	41	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
2	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	42	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
3	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	43	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
4	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1	44	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
5	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	45	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1
6	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	5	1	46	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	1
7	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1	47	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
8	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	48	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
9	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	1	49	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	5	1
10	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	50	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	5	1
11	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	51	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	3	3
12	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	1	52	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	3	3
13	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	3	3	53	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1
14	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	5	1	54	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	3	3
15	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1	55	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
16	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	56	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
17	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	57	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1
18	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	58	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
19	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	59	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
20	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	1	60	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	1
21	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	61	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1
22	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	3	3	62	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	3	3
23	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	63	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1
24	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	5	1	64	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
25	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	65	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
26	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	1	66	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
27	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	3	3	67	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
28	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1	68	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1
29	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0	69	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	5	1
30	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	5	1	70	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1
31	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	5	1	71	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
32	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1	72	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	3	3
33	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	5	1	73	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
34	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5	1	74	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0
35	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0									
36	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0									
37	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	5	1									
38	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0									
39	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0									
40	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6	0									
Total															391	53	