

The Use of Skill Academy by Ruang Guru In Improving Elesp Students' Toefl Scores In Listening Section

Yolanda^{1*}, Moh. Syahrin Ibrahim², Helena Badu³, Moon H. Otoluwa⁴, Nurlaila Husain⁵

¹²³⁴⁵Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of the Skill Academy by Ruang Guru in enhancing students' listening comprehension skills for the TOEFL listening section. Using a quantitative pre-test and post-test design, 15 participants from the English Language Education Study Program underwent four sessions of TOEFL listening preparation through the Skill Academy platform. The study aimed to evaluate the platform's impact on standardized test preparation and contribute to research on online education. A paired t-test analysis revealed a calculated value of 5.4, surpassing the table value of 2.145 at $d.f = 14$ and $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicated a significant improvement in participants' scores after the intervention. The findings suggest that Skill Academy effectively enhanced students' listening skills for the TOEFL, proving its value as an exam preparation tool. This research underscores the potential of online learning platforms in improving targeted test skills. Future studies could examine the long-term effects of such programs and compare different platforms to optimize TOEFL preparation strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a standardized English proficiency test developed by the Educational Testing System, an institution based in Princeton, New Jersey, United States. This test is the most widely used test by universities in the United States to determine the English language skills of prospective foreign students (Pyle & Page, 1995).

In its development, the TOEFL test has had several versions, namely paper-based, computer-based, and internet-based TOEFL. What distinguishes these versions is the medium used in the implementation of the test. The components of the test itself are more or less the same, namely Internet based TOEFL also includes a speaking test. This research examines the listening comprehension section of the TOEFL version of the test (hereinafter referred to as listening, structure, reading, writing, and paper base).

TOEFL preparation program is a learning program that improves students reading, structure, and listening skills in the academic English language (Sakurai, 2020). In addition, listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. It is understanding the sound and focusing on what listeners hear. Listening is a major component in language learning and the teaching process; it is the basic skill in each person before they can speak, read, and write (Sari, 2021). If people become good listeners it is most likely they have a good result in another skill. Language learners will be successful if they master the language they learn to the point of using it in communication. The main point of listening skills is not just to hear and understand what the listeners hear but they should know about what the means, how the means, and what the knowledge that they hear (Schnell, 1995). However, listening is not an easy language skill to master. There are many problems faced by the listeners in the TOEFL listening test process (Sari, 2021).

*Korespondensi Author

Email: yolandamsuna@gmail.com

TOEFL Listening Comprehension Test in this section measures the ability to understand spoken English. The oral features of the language are stressed, and the problems test includes vocabulary and idiomatic expression as well as special grammatical constructions frequently used in spoken English. There is no way to "study" for listening comprehension (Buck, 2001).

Listening ability was one of the most important aspects of the TOEFL exam, as it reflected students readiness to understand academic conversations or lectures in an international environment. However, many students in the English Language Education Study Program faced major obstacles in obtaining an adequate TOEFL score, especially in the listening section.

Based on the results of the preliminary study, the main challenges included high anxiety when answering listening questions, lack of motivation to practice independently, and limited access to quality learning resources, such as authentic audio materials and effective strategies for solving TOEFL questions. Anxiety was often a significant inhibiting factor, especially when students felt unfamiliar with the accent, intonation, and speaking speed in TOEFL audio. Research by Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that anxiety in foreign language learning could hinder students performance, including in listening. In addition, low motivation to learn was also a challenge faced by most students, especially since conventional learning methods often failed to capture their attention or did not suit their individual needs.

In this context, Skill Academy by Ruang Guru was a strategic choice to address these challenges. This platform was known as one of the technology-based education services offering flexible, affordable, and relevant learning solutions to modern needs. Skill Academy provided TOEFL modules designed to help students master questioning strategies, including listening, through an interactive and practical approach.

This study aimed to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of Skill Academy in helping English Language Education Study Program students improve their TOEFL scores, especially in the listening section. The results of this study were expected to make a significant contribution to the development of technology-based learning methods that could be integrated into the formal education system, especially in preparing students for the TOEFL exam.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TOEFL Overview

TOEFL is an abbreviation of "Test of English as a Foreign Language". Some experts have given some brief definitions of TOEFL. They use different words and sentences to express the definition of TOEFL. Even though they use different words and sentences, all of them have the same meaning to express the definition of TOEFL which is a standardized test designed to measure the English language capabilities of non-native English speakers.

According to (Pyle, 2000), TOEFL is a test designed to decide whether non-native English students have good skills in English to understand the courses at colleges or universities in the United States and Canada.

The TOEFL is used to understand English spoken in North America, to recognize selected structural and grammatical sentences in written English, and to read short passages that are similar to those that students encounter in North American colleges and universities. According to Ascher (as cited in Kadri, 2012), TOEFL is used to know how much students have learned about structures, vocabularies, and sound systems of English and it does not prove the action in the classroom and management of one's English.

The TOEFL has also been used by scholarship selection committees of governments, universities, and agencies such as Fulbright, the Agency for International Development, AMIDEAST, and the Latin American scholarship Programs as a standard measure of the English

proficiency of their candidates (Sharpe, 2013). The admission committees of more than 8,500 colleagues and universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and 130 other countries worldwide require foreign applicants to submit a TOEFL score along with a transcript and recommendations in order to be considered for admission (Sharpe, 2013).

Definition of Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension is one of the key skills assessed in the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). This skill entails the ability to understand spoken information in both conversational and academic contexts. Brown (2007) defines listening comprehension as an active process involving reception, processing, and interpretation of spoken messages. In this process, listeners rely not only on linguistic abilities such as vocabulary and grammar but also on cognitive skills like attention, memory, and inference.

Goh (2000) emphasizes that listening comprehension involves a simultaneous interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing. In bottom-up processing, listeners gradually process linguistic elements, starting from sounds to words and sentence structures. Conversely, top-down processing requires utilizing context, prior experience, and world knowledge to grasp overall meaning. This approach was particularly relevant in TOEFL, which demands participants to comprehend complex conversations and lectures within a limited time.

Buck (2001) describes listening comprehension as a holistic process where listeners must grasp the message's content, the speaker's intent, and the communication's context. He highlights that this process involves a combination of linguistic and non-linguistic skills to construct meaningful understanding.

Skill Academy by Ruang Guru

Skill academy by Ruang Guru was an online learning platform designed to provide skill-based training for various audiences, including students', university learners, and professionals. Developed by Ruangguru, the platform offers courses in diverse fields such as languages, personal development, technology, business, and more. Skill academy by Ruang Guru aimed to meet the learning needs of the modern society by providing flexible access, comprehensive materials, and competent instructors. According to Prasetyo and Sutopo (2021), Skill academy by Ruang Guru excelled in delivering content tailored to participants' practical needs, especially in enhancing specific skills such as TOEFL preparation, job interview techniques, or other technical proficiencies.

METHOD

This research used a quantitative approach. The quantitative approach is one in which we rely on evidence that can be measured and counted. Inference, reduction to specific variables and hypotheses, measurement, observation, and the use of theoretical tests were all critical tools in scientific inquiry. According to Ary, et al., (2009, p. 26), "a quantitative survey is a survey that uses operational definitions to generate numerical data and answer specific hypotheses and questions". The main focus of quantitative research is the collection and statistical analysis of data.

In this study, the population consists of students enrolled in the English Language Education Study Programme at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. These students were chosen as the population due to their direct relevance to the research objectives, particularly their engagement in English language learning and preparation for the TOEFL test.

The sample in this study consisted of students who had taken the TOEFL test at UPA Bahasa UNG from January to August 2024 and did not reach the specified minimum score of 500. Based on the data, there were 74 students who took the TOEFL test in that time span, and 57

students did not reach the specified score. Of the total students who failed, the researcher chose 15 students as the research sample.

According to Ary, et al. (2009), one group design is divided into three steps. The first is administering a pre-test to measure the dependent variable, the second step is applying experimental treatment X to the subject, and the last step is reperforming a post-test to measure the dependent variable. Significances of the application of experimental treatment are then assessed by comparing pre-test and post-test scores.

In this research, the data analysis process involves several statistical techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of Skill Academy by Ruang Guru in improving students TOEFL listening scores. Since this study used a pre-experimental design with a single group, the paired sample t-test was applied to compare the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test. This test assessed whether there is a statistically significant difference between the two sets of scores, indicating whether the intervention had an impact.

RESULT

Students' Scores of Pre-Test

Table 1 Students Scores of Pre-test

No	Class Interval	F Absolute	F Relative
1	31-35	1	6.67%
2	36-40	6	40%
3	41-45	5	33.33%
4	46-50	2	13.33%
5	51-55	1	6.67%
	Total	15	100%

Based on the table, it show that the students' pre-test scores are distributed across five class intervals: 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, and 51-55. The majority of students scored in the 36-40 interval, with 6 students (40%) achieving scores in this range. This indicates that a significant portion of the students started with moderate listening skills prior to receiving the intervention through Skill Academy. The second most frequent interval is 41-45, where 5 students (33.33%) scored, reflecting that a considerable number of students had slightly higher but still mid-range scores

Students' Treatment

The treatment in this study was designed as a series of learning sessions using the Skill Academy by Ruang Guru TOEFL preparation course. It aimed to enhance the students listening comprehension skills through focused training and practice. The treatment was conducted over four sessions, with each session targeting specific skills relevant to the TOEFL listening section.

Students' Scores of Post-Test

Table 2 Students Scores of Post-test

No	Class Interval	F Absolute	F Relative
1	40-45	4	26.67%
2	46-50	10	66.67%
3	51-55	1	6.67%
4	56-60	0	0%
	Total	15	100%

The post-test scores were distributed across four class intervals: 40–45, 46–50, 51–55, and 56–60. The 46–50 interval has the highest frequency, with 10 students (66.67%) achieving scores in this range. This suggests that the majority of students performed well after the treatment, showing considerable improvement compared to their pre-test results. The second most frequent interval was 40–45, with 4 students (26.67%) scoring in this range. This indicates that a smaller portion of the students remained in the moderate score range, reflecting some improvement but not enough to

Hypothesis Verification

To determine the effectiveness of the Skill Academy by Ruang Guru program in improving students TOEFL listening scores, a paired samples t-test was conducted. The hypotheses are:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest TOEFL listening scores.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest TOEFL listening scores.

Calculations

Number of participants (n): 15

Mean score (pre-test):

$$\bar{X} = 46 + 40 + 44 + \dots + 37 + 32 = 42.33$$

15

Mean score (post-test):

$$\bar{X} = 45 + 50 + 45 + \dots + 48 + 42 = 48$$

15

Mean difference ($\bar{X}$):

$$\bar{X} = \sum D / n = 5.67$$

Paired T-test

The formula used for the paired samples t-test is:

$$t = \bar{X} / (S / \sqrt{n})$$

where:

$\bar{X}$ = Mean difference between pretest and posttest scores

S = Standard deviation of the differences

n = Number of participants

The t-test analysis showed a mean difference ($\bar{X}$) = 5.6, with a standard deviation (S) = 4.06, $t = 5.4$, and $df = 14$ (for more detailed information, please refer to Appendix 3 on page 3). At a significance level (α) of 0.05 for a two-tailed test, the critical t-value for 14 degrees of freedom is approximately 2.145.

Decision Making

Based on the results of the paired t-test, the t value is 5.4, while the t table value at $df = 14$ and $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed) is 2.145. Since $t (5.4)$ is greater than t table (2.145), we reject the null hypothesis (H_0). This indicated that there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores.

The results indicate that the Skill Academy by Ruang Guru program significantly improved the students listening skills, as evidenced by the increase in their TOEFL listening scores. This suggests that the program was effective in enhancing the participants' listening comprehension and preparing them for the TOEFL exam.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study aligned with Listening Comprehension Theory (Brown, 2007), which emphasized that listening skills improve through structured exposure to spoken language combined with practice using both bottom-up (sound recognition) and top-down (meaning inference) processing strategies. Skill Academy provided listening exercises that simulated TOEFL exam conditions, allowing students to develop these skills effectively.

According to Goh (2000), listening comprehension not only depended on students linguistic abilities but also on the listening strategies they employed. Skill Academy offered detailed explanations of correct and incorrect answers after each exercise, aiding students in identifying their strengths and weaknesses independently. This emphasis on constructive feedback aligned with Sadler's (1989) theory, which proposed that effective feedback enhances students learning processes, helping them understand their mistakes and providing opportunities for improvement.

Furthermore, the study supported e-learning effectiveness theories (Clark & Mayer, 2016), which highlighted that online learning platforms can enhance learners' outcomes when they offer interactive, flexible, and goal-oriented content. Skill Academy provided structured, self-paced learning, which reduced cognitive load and increased student motivation. According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, learning happens best in a mediated environment, and although Skill Academy was an independent learning platform, it offered interactive quizzes, video lectures, and progress tracking, fostering a sense of engagement and mastery (Shabani, 2016).

The findings also corroborated Vandergrift's (1999) earlier research, which showed that explicit listening strategies significantly improved students comprehension of spoken language. In this context, Skill Academy served as a tool that provided intensive listening practice, honing students technical skills and preparing them for more complex challenges in TOEFL Listening.

This study also incorporated Buck's (2001) insights on listening comprehension assessment. Buck highlighted that listening comprehension is a multi-layered skill involving various cognitive processes, such as decoding, interpreting, and memory retention. These processes are critical for accurate comprehension, especially in high-stakes exams like the TOEFL. Buck's work emphasized that successful listening instruction must focus on these cognitive aspects to help students tackle complex auditory texts with confidence.

This study aligned with Buck's perspective by demonstrating that Skill Academy's structured listening exercises encouraged students to engage with authentic spoken material. The platform's technology-driven approach aided learners in developing these essential cognitive skills, leading to better listening outcomes on the TOEFL. Thus, combining Buck's model with Vandergrift's theory of explicit strategy training further strengthened the argument for technology-enhanced listening instruction as a valuable tool in language education.

Effectiveness of Skill Academy by Ruang Guru

Skill Academy by Ruang Guru offers various features designed to facilitate effective listening comprehension learning.

Interactive Learning Videos

Learning videos are a major component of the TOEFL course at Skill Academy. The material presented includes listening strategies such as capturing the main idea, noting important points, and recognizing the speaker's intent. Susanti and Rahmawati (2023) stated that video-based learning equipped with visualizations and real-life examples can enhance participants' understanding more quickly compared to traditional methods.

Several participants mentioned that these learning videos were very helpful in understanding academic conversations and lectures. One participant stated, "The video lessons are very clear and easy to follow, especially when the instructor provides real-world examples." Another participant added, "The explanation of listening strategies in the videos greatly helped me identify key points while listening to recordings." Additionally, some shared, "I found it easier to grasp difficult concepts because of the visualizations and illustrations provided."

Practice Questions and Test Simulations

Practice questions based on the TOEFL format provided by Skill Academy help participants familiarize themselves with the test structure. Vandergrift (1999) stated that intensive practice with immediate feedback helps participants develop metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation.

In this study revealed that test simulations greatly helped them improve their ability to answer questions requiring details and inferences. One participant mentioned, "The test simulations made me more confident because I could understand the question patterns and how to answer them accurately." Another participant said, "The practice questions gave me plenty of opportunities to try different strategies, so I could figure out which worked best for me." Some participants also stated, "Frequent practice with the questions helped me quickly recognize the types of TOEFL questions."

Automatic Evaluation and Feedback

One of the standout features of Skill Academy is the automatic evaluation after participants complete practice or simulated tests. These evaluations provide information about participants' strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to focus on areas needing improvement. Buck (2001) emphasized the importance of feedback in helping participants enhance their strategies for overcoming listening difficulties.

Participants shared that this automatic evaluation feature was very helpful in identifying the types of mistakes they frequently made. One participant stated, "The feedback is very detailed and helped me understand which areas I needed to improve, such as identifying the main idea in conversations." Another participant added, "The automatic evaluation gave me a clear picture of my progress over time." Additionally, some mentioned, "Through the evaluations, I discovered that my biggest weakness was inference questions, so I focused more on practicing that area."

Skill Academy by Ruang Guru's Role in Providing Flexible Learning

The flexibility offered by Skill Academy is one of the key factors behind its success. As a digital learning platform, Skill Academy allows participants to learn anytime and anywhere. Junaedi (2022) noted that this flexibility provides participants with the opportunity to manage their learning time according to their needs, ultimately increasing consistency and motivation in practice.

Participants in this study mentioned that the flexibility of time and location offered by Skill Academy enabled them to learn more efficiently compared to conventional methods. One participant said, "I could manage my own study schedule, which made it easier to stay consistent and not feel overwhelmed." Another participant added, "I often study during my free time, such as while waiting for transportation, and this has greatly helped me save time." Some participants also shared, "This flexible method allowed me to keep learning even though I have a busy schedule."

The findings from this study, based on student feedback, reveal several factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the Skill Academy by Ruang Guru course in enhancing listening comprehension for TOEFL preparation.

Improved Confidence

Students overwhelmingly reported a significant boost in their confidence in handling TOEFL listening tasks. For instance, one participant stated, "Before joining the course, I often doubted my ability to understand conversations, especially those with unfamiliar accents. Now, I feel more confident because I've practiced these scenarios repeatedly."

This sentiment aligns with Susanti and Rahmawati (2023), who emphasize the role of frequent practice in reducing anxiety and increasing familiarity with test conditions. Simulations that mimic TOEFL's format helped participants acclimate to the test structure, fostering a sense of preparedness. Horwitz et al. (1986) also note that reducing foreign language anxiety is crucial for improved performance, highlighting the psychological benefits of such courses.

Enhanced Interpretative Listening Skills

Students highlighted their improved ability to grasp implied meanings, speaker intent, and overall discourse. One student commented, "The strategies taught in the course, like understanding tone and context, helped me figure out the purpose behind a speaker's words, even when I didn't understand every word."

This feedback supports Rost's (2011) assertion that understanding context and speaker intent is critical for comprehensive listening. Similarly, Buck (2001) describes listening comprehension as a holistic skill requiring both linguistic and contextual understanding. The course's focus on teaching inference and identifying key points effectively bridged this gap for many participants, preparing them for real-life TOEFL scenarios.

Effective Inference-Focused Exercises

The inference-focused exercises were particularly impactful. Students appreciated these tasks for enhancing their ability to deduce meaning from context. A participant noted, "The exercises pushed me to think critically, especially when faced with unfamiliar vocabulary. They made me realize I didn't need to understand every word to get the main idea."

This observation aligns with Goh (2000), who emphasizes that limited vocabulary can hinder comprehension but can be mitigated through effective inference strategies. Additionally, Vandergrift (1999) highlights the importance of cognitive strategies, such as using contextual clues, to overcome linguistic gaps. Skill Academy's structured, repetitive exercises ensured students could practice these strategies until they became second nature.

Increased Motivation and Engagement

The platform's interactive and visually engaging design significantly motivated students to participate actively in the learning process. One participant remarked, "The animations and quizzes made the lessons enjoyable and kept me focused. I actually looked forward to the practice sessions, unlike traditional classes."

This finding aligns with Nugraha (2021), who found that multimedia-rich content enhances student engagement and information retention. Junaedi (2022) also observed that interactive methods improve retention by 30% compared to passive learning approaches. By combining educational content with engaging visuals and activities, Skill Academy ensured that students stayed motivated throughout their TOEFL preparation journey.

Reduced Stress and Anxiety

Students reported feeling less anxious during listening tests after completing the course. One student shared, "I used to feel overwhelmed when listening to long conversations, but now I'm calmer because I've practiced with similar scenarios multiple times." Another added, "The simulated tests helped me get used to the pacing and types of questions, so I knew exactly what to expect during the real test."

This aligns with Susanti and Rahmawati (2023), who found that simulation-based learning reduces test-related stress by familiarizing participants with exam conditions. The flexibility of the Skill Academy platform, which allowed students to replay lessons and practice at their own pace, also contributed to lower stress levels. This self-paced approach supports Buck's (2001) assertion that a conducive learning environment enhances listening comprehension by reducing external and internal distractions.

Improved Listening to Diverse Accents and Speech Rates

Students frequently mentioned their improved ability to comprehend different accents and handle fast speech. One participant noted, "The practice exercises included various accents, like British and Australian, which helped me adapt to different pronunciations."

This aligns with Rost's (2011) suggestion that exposure to diverse accents is crucial for international tests like TOEFL. Brown (2007) also highlights the challenges of rapid speech and suggests repeated exposure as a solution. The course's use of diverse audio samples ensured that students became comfortable with varying accents and speech rates, a skill that is directly applicable to TOEFL tasks.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Skill Academy by Ruang Guru in improving students TOEFL scores in the Listening section. The findings showed that there is a significant improvement in students performance after the intervention. The average pre-test score was 42.33, which increased to 48 in the post-test. The results of the paired t-test revealed a t value of 5.4, which exceeded the t table value of 2.145 at the 0.05 significance level. This indicated that the improvement in students scores was statistically significant, confirming the positive impact of the Skill Academy program.

In summary, the findings of this study provided strong evidence that the Skill Academy by Ruang Guru was an effective tool for improving students TOEFL listening scores. Skill Academy's structured content, self-paced learning options, and interactive features contributed to students listening development. Additionally, the findings aligned with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasized the role of engaging environments in facilitating effective learning.

While the results demonstrated the effectiveness of Skill Academy in improving students listening skills, the short treatment duration of four sessions might have limited the extent of improvement. Longer interventions could potentially have yielded even better outcomes.

Furthermore, individual differences such as motivation and study habits may have influenced students performance, indicating the need for further research into personal factors affecting online learning outcomes. The significant score improvement observed after just four sessions demonstrated the potential of digital platforms to support students in achieving their academic goals. Future research could build on these findings by further exploring the long-term benefits of such interventions and their impact on other aspects of language proficiency.

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