

Teachers' Perceptions and Challenges: Evaluating TOEFL Training in an Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

In response to the growing importance of English language proficiency in professional contexts, teacher training for widely used standardized proficiency test such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has become increasingly essential. Despite the growing number of training, there remains limited understanding of how teachers perceive these programs and what challenges they face in applying the training outcomes to their daily practices. This study aimed to examine teachers' perceptions of a TOEFL preparation training program and the challenges they encountered in applying its outcomes. An explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, involving 40 teachers from elementary, junior high, and high school levels at an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia. Quantitative data on teachers' perceptions of the training program and qualitative data on the challenges they experienced were collected through a questionnaire combining closed- and open-ended items. The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to illustrate the levels of teachers' knowledge and perceptions, while the qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic approach. The findings revealed that teachers generally held positive perceptions toward the TOEFL preparation training program. However, several challenges emerged in applying the training outcomes, including institutional and environmental challenges, teacher-related challenges, and issues of professional development and sustainability.



1. Introduction

Many private schools in Indonesia integrate international curricula to equip students with global competencies and prepare them for further education or professional engagement at an international level (Holandyah et al., 2022; Islam & Fajaria, 2022; Mustadi & Junaidi, 2024; Qomariyah & Khasanah, 2023). According to Sudarman, 2019, the use of an international curriculum aims to develop essential competencies needed to face globalization, including communication skills, critical and clear thinking, moral reasoning, responsible citizenship, tolerance toward diverse perspectives, and the ability to live in a global society. Studies on international curriculum implementation in Indonesian private schools where English serves as the primary medium of instruction reveal diverse adoption patterns and generally positive educational outcomes. Among the various international curricula, the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) curriculum is one of the most widely adopted in Indonesia. Several private schools have taken proactive steps to strengthen English education by adopting international curricula such as the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) framework. The Cambridge Curriculum emphasizes inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and the use of English as the primary language of instruction. Research on Cambridge curriculum implementation in Indonesian private schools highlights both opportunities and challenges in English language teaching. Several studies (Afriana, 2017; Holandyah et al., 2022; Islam & Fajaria, 2022; Mustadi & Junaidi, 2024; Qomariyah & Khasanah, 2023; Simanjuntak, 2020; Yudha, 2016) indicate that private schools adopt the Cambridge curriculum to enhance students' English proficiency through integrated skills development focusing on listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Among the institutions implementing international curricula is an Islamic boarding school, that has established a partnership with the Cambridge Curriculum as part of its commitment to improving educational quality and expanding students' international opportunities. The integration of Cambridge reflects the school's forward-looking vision of providing world-class education while maintaining a strong Islamic identity. This initiative also aligns with national education policies that encourage schools to incorporate global perspectives into local contexts (Kemendikbud, 2024). As a result, teachers at the Islamic boarding school are expected to deliver instruction that meets both national and international standards, using English as the medium of instruction.

Within this context, teachers' language proficiency plays a vital role, as strong language skills enhance teaching effectiveness and support students' language development. As noted by Renandya et al (2018), language proficiency constitutes a fundamental aspect of a language teacher's professional competence. Teachers also need to master and use classroom language effectively to facilitate learning (Richards, 2017). Thus, the successful implementation of international curricula such as Cambridge largely depends on teachers' readiness particularly their English language proficiency. Teachers serve as the bridge between curriculum objectives and classroom realities. Their ability to use English accurately and confidently influences not only the clarity of instruction but also students' exposure to authentic language input. Research on Cambridge curriculum implementation in Indonesia (Holandyah et al., 2022; Shalihah et al., 2025) indicates that

schools adopt the program to improve students' English proficiency through integrated skills development in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Yet, these studies also highlight a persistent challenge: many teachers still struggle with language proficiency and pedagogical adaptation when teaching through English. In this regard, possessing a certain level of proficiency is crucial for teachers, as it ensures their capacity to deliver lessons effectively and to integrate language learning within subject content.

One of the most recognized international measures of English proficiency is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which continues to serve as a benchmark for academic and professional readiness in many contexts. The TOEFL serves as an internationally recognized benchmark that helps institutions assess teachers' language competence systematically. The TOEFL assesses three primary areas: listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. These skills are considered fundamental for academic success in English-medium education and for participation in global academic and professional environments. To meet this need, Islamic boarding schools have initiated TOEFL preparation training programs aimed at developing teachers' English proficiency to the level required for effective curriculum implementation. Through such programs, teachers are expected not only to enhance their own proficiency but also to acquire strategies for preparing students for standardized English assessments. Multiple studies conducted structured training programs for teachers to enhance TOEFL scores (Abadi et al., 2024; Anggraini et al., 2023; Arifin et al., 2025; Diliana et al., 2024; Erlita, 2024; Romios & Rajendra, 2025). This professional development initiative reflects the schools' broader strategy to strengthen teaching quality and improve student achievement in alignment with international standards.

Despite their importance, TOEFL preparation training programs are implemented within complex institutional contexts that can limit their effectiveness. In Islamic boarding schools, teachers are expected to meet English proficiency standards while managing heavy teaching workloads and religious responsibilities. In addition, TOEFL training often includes teachers from diverse academic backgrounds, including non-English subject teachers with limited experience in test-oriented instruction. These conditions create unequal opportunities for teachers to benefit from the training and apply the acquired skills consistently. As a result, a gap emerges between institutional expectations for English proficiency and teachers' ability to sustain the outcomes of TOEFL-based professional development.

Nevertheless, despite the growing number of such training initiatives, there remains limited understanding of how teachers perceive these programs and what challenges they face in applying the training outcomes to their daily teaching practices. Teachers' perceptions are critical because they influence motivation, engagement, and the extent to which newly acquired knowledge and skills are implemented in classrooms. Without a clear understanding of teachers' views and the contextual barriers they encounter, institutions may struggle to design training programs that are both effective and sustainable. Therefore, exploring teachers' perceptions and challenges offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of TOEFL-based professional development and provides a

foundation for improving teacher training programs that support successful implementation of international curricula in Indonesian schools.

Based on these problem statements, this study aims to achieve two primary objectives. First, it seeks to explore teachers' perceptions of the TOEFL preparation training program. Second, it aims to identify the challenges teachers face when applying the training outcomes. Addressing these questions is crucial for understanding not only the program's impact but also the contextual factors that affect its success.

2. Literature Review

The present study, which investigates teachers' perceptions and challenges regarding a TOEFL preparation training program in an Islamic boarding school, is situated within two critical areas of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) field: the role of the Paper-Based Test (PBT) in EFL contexts and the best practices for teacher professional development in test-oriented instruction. These two areas are closely related to the focus of this study. The TOEFL Paper-Based Test (PBT) functions not only as a measure of English proficiency but also as the main framework guiding TOEFL preparation training in many EFL contexts, including Indonesia. As a result, teachers' perceptions and challenges are strongly influenced by the test's focus on listening, structure, and reading skills. At the same time, the effectiveness of TOEFL training depends on principles of teacher professional development, as teachers' ability to apply test-related knowledge is shaped by how training is designed and sustained. Examining TOEFL PBT alongside teacher professional development therefore provides an appropriate foundation for understanding teachers' perceptions and challenges in this study.

2.1 TOEFL PBT in EFL Contexts and sub-skills

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), administered by Educational Testing Service (ETS), is one of the world's most widely recognized and accepted standardized measures of English-language proficiency, particularly for non-native speakers seeking to enrol in English-speaking academic environments (ETS, 2025). While the Internet-Based Test (iBT) is the dominant format globally, the TOEFL Paper-Based Test (PBT), or its institutional counterpart, the TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program), continues to be a common requirement for purposes such as university admissions, job applications, and graduation mandates, especially in EFL contexts like Indonesia (Lastari et al., 2025).

The TOEFL PBT/ITP consists of three main sections:

1. Listening Comprehension: Assesses the ability to understand spoken English as used in colleges and universities.
2. Structure and Written Expression: Measures the ability to recognize correct grammar and appropriate usage in standard written English.
3. Reading Comprehension: Evaluates the ability to understand academic reading materials (Lastari et al., 2025).

A key structural difference from the TOEFL iBT is the lack of a mandatory Speaking section and the separate scoring of the Writing section (EF Global Site, 2021). The PBT

format, primarily relying on multiple-choice questions, has been criticized for testing literacy over more meaningful communicative and productive language outcomes (Lastari et al., 2025; Kasim et al., 2020). Despite this, its high reliability and practicality, including being relatively low-cost, ensure its sustained relevance in many institutional settings.

A competitive TOEFL score remains a vital benchmark for students aiming to study or work in English-speaking environments, as it validates language proficiency and facilitates adaptation to English-mediated academic domains (Romios & Rajendra, 2025). In countries like Indonesia, where English proficiency is a prerequisite for academic and professional advancement, TOEFL preparation is a common practice (Lastari et al., 2025). Studies, such as one conducted by Kasim et al., (2020), have repeatedly shown that difficulties in the PBT format often center around specific sub-skills, with reading comprehension frequently cited as the most challenging section for students. This underscores the need for targeted and effective instruction to address these known areas of difficulty. The efficacy of preparation training is supported by findings showing a significant improvement in students' English proficiency after participating in a structured TOEFL preparation program (Romios & Rajendra, 2025).

2.2 Teacher Training in EFL/TOEFL Contexts

Teacher professional development (PD) is widely recognized as a primary factor influencing teacher quality and, consequently, the quality of education (Şahin, 2025). PD programs are essential for improving teachers' professional knowledge and skills, which ultimately contribute to increased student achievement (Şahin, 2025). In the context of high-stakes testing, such as TOEFL preparation, PD is paramount to ensure that educators are equipped with the specialized knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge necessary for test-oriented instruction (Sari, 2019). The literature confirms that an understanding of the test's structure, scoring, and sub-skills is crucial for teachers to effectively guide their students (ETS, 2025).

Effective teacher professional development for test preparation instruction moves beyond simple familiarization with the test format and instead adopts features that lead to meaningful, sustained shifts in practice. Research on effective PD, including a systematic review by Desimone (2009) as referenced in multiple studies, emphasizes five key features:

1. Content Focus: Training must be centered on the specific knowledge and skills teachers need to teach, such as the intricacies of TOEFL sub-skills and test-taking strategies (Şahin, 2025).
2. Active Learning: Effective PD involves teachers' direct participation and practice, such as modeling effective teaching strategies or hands-on application of new pedagogical tools (Şahin, 2025; Amemason et al., 2025)
3. Coherence: The training must align with teachers' existing knowledge, school goals, and classroom realities.

4. Sustained Duration: One-time workshops are less effective; sustained, long-term training is necessary to foster positive and lasting changes in attitudes and competencies (Amemasor et al., 2025).
5. Collective Participation: Collaborative learning environments and peer-to-peer discussion are vital for successful professional growth (Amemasor et al., 2025).

Despite the consensus on best practices, challenges remain. A study by Romios & Rajendra (2025) on teachers' perceptions of TOEFL training revealed that while teachers acknowledge the value of the training, institutional support is often lacking, and training is frequently viewed as optional rather than a coordinated, systemic effort. This disconnect between recognizing the importance of the test and providing structured, sustained support creates significant pedagogical and institutional barriers to effective implementation. Sari's research (2019) further highlights that teachers commonly face challenges in adopting appropriate methods for teaching TOEFL, with many reverting to basic drill and practice methods. Therefore, future training initiatives must focus not only on subject-matter competence but also on creating an institutional environment that provides differentiated support and clearer career incentives for teachers engaged in test-oriented instruction (Romios & Rajendra, 2025). The following figure shows the research framework for TOEFL training in Islamic boarding school which highlight the importance of structured training, assessment, and reflection in sustaining professional growth (Guskey, 2002)

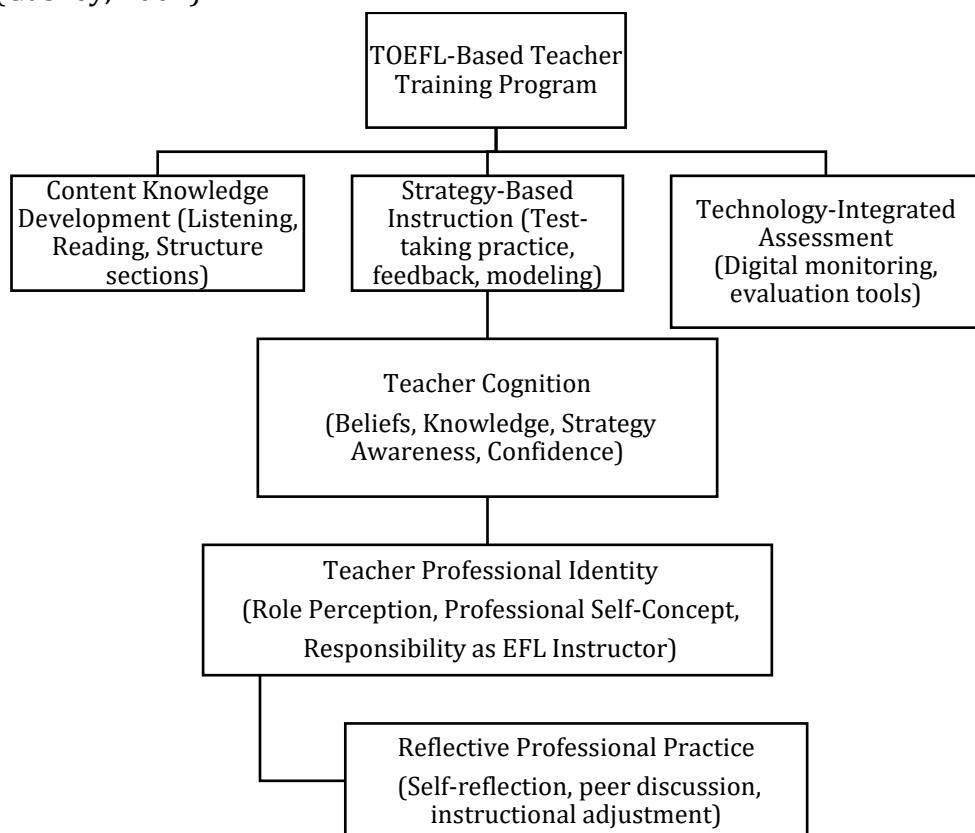


Figure 1. Research framework of TOEFL training

The conceptual model depicts TOEFL-based teacher development in Islamic boarding schools as a structured professional learning process. It begins with content knowledge development, where teachers build understanding of the TOEFL listening, reading, and structure sections. This is followed by strategy-based instruction, in which teachers practice effective test-taking strategies through guided feedback. The third stage involves technology-integrated assessment, using digital tools to monitor progress and support instructional improvement. These stages collectively influence teacher cognition, including teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and confidence, and contribute to the development of teacher professional identity as instructors and curriculum implementers. The model also emphasizes reflective practice as a key element for sustained professional growth. Throughout the process, Islamic boarding school culture, religious values, and curriculum demands mediate how training outcomes are interpreted and applied in classroom practice.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

The data in this study were collected in two phases, both quantitative and qualitative within mix-method approach following sequential explanatory design (Creswell et al., 2003). The quantitative phase provides data regarding how teachers perceive the TOEFL training program, whereas the qualitative phase enables us to investigate further how teachers reveal the challenges they encountered in applying the training outcomes. In this study, quantitative data were collected by distributing close-ended questionnaire to participants, whilst qualitative data were obtained through open-ended questionnaire and document analysis. The data collected were analysed independently.

3.2 Setting and Participants

The present study was situated at an Islamic boarding school in Surabaya, Indonesia, which integrates the Cambridge Curriculum as part of its international education framework. The institution consists of three educational levels, such as elementary, junior high, and senior high school and employs teachers from various academic backgrounds. A total of 40 teachers participated in the study, representing diverse disciplines including English, science, mathematics, and social studies. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as they had all participated in the TOEFL preparation training program organized by the institution. There were 40 teachers comprising 9 males and 31 females who filled out the questionnaire. The demographic information of the research participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demography of the Participants in Survey

Category	Classification	N	%
Gender	Male	9	22.5
	Female	31	77.5
Age	< 25	4	10
	25-34	11	27.5
	35-44	13	32.5
	45-54	9	22.5
	> 55	3	7.5

Years of teaching	1-5 years	9	22.5
	5-10 years	8	20
	11-20 years	14	35
	> 20 years	9	22.5
Educational Background	Bachelor in ELT	29	72.5
	Master/Doctorate in ELT	11	27.5
Fields of Study	English	10	75
	Non-English	30	25

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments utilized in this study comprised both close-ended and open-ended items. Both instruments were adapted from the Critical Levels of Professional Development model proposed by Guskey (2000). The questionnaire consisted of three main sections. Section I gathered participants' demographic information. Section II explored teachers' perceptions of their knowledge before and after the training, their confidence in applying strategies, as well as their satisfaction with and perceived relevance of the training. This section included 15 validated items representing the dimensional constructs of the Critical Levels of Professional Development model (see Table 2). A pilot test was administered to evaluate the validity and reliability of the items. The Cronbach's alpha values was 0.921, indicating high reliability for the instrument. Section III contained open-ended questions designed to elicit teachers' elaborations on their experiences, opinions, and challenges in implementing the training outcomes. Three guiding questions, developed based on the Critical Levels of Professional Development model, were incorporated in this section.

Table 2. Dimensional Functions of Critical Levels of Professional Development

Dimensional functions	Questionnaire items (n)
Participants' Reaction	3
Participants' Learning	3
Organization Support and Change	3
Participants' Use of Knowledge and Skills	3
Learning Outcomes	3

Source: Guskey (2000)

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over a two-week period following the completion of the TOEFL training program, which was delivered through face-to-face sessions. The sessions were facilitated by experienced English instructors with prior expertise in TOEFL preparation and language assessment. The training program aimed to familiarize teachers with the structure and content of the TOEFL Paper-Based Test (PBT), focusing on three key components: Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. Each training session followed several key steps:

- 1) The instructors built content knowledge in the listening, reading, and structure sections of the test.

- 2) The instructors guided teachers in applying effective test-taking strategies through practice and feedback.
- 3) The instructors integrated digital tools to monitor and evaluate learner progress.
- 4) The instructors facilitated reflective practice to promote teachers' professional growth.

During the face-to-face meetings, participants engaged in group discussions to reinforce their understanding of test-related skills. In the final week, participants completed a full-length TOEFL PBT simulation to assess their improvement and identify areas for further development.

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained permission from the program coordinator, and participants were asked to provide informed consent. The questionnaire was distributed in digital form to ensure accessibility for all participants. The Likert-scale items measured teachers' perceptions of the training, while the open-ended questions gathered information about challenges encountered during implementation. Participants responded to the Likert-scale items using a five-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted in two phases consistent with the mixed-methods approach. Data from the close-ended questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) to identify teachers' overall perceptions of the training program. The analysis focused on determining the level of agreement regarding the training's usefulness, relevance, content quality, and applicability to classroom practice. Responses from the open-ended questionnaire items and document data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The data were coded, and the codes were categorized into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview data were analyzed in three steps: (1) familiarizing and organizing, (2) coding, and (3) summarizing and interpreting. To ensure confidentiality, teachers' names were replaced with initials (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, and T6). The qualitative findings were used to triangulate the quantitative results, and both data sets were integrated during the interpretation phase. This integrated analysis went beyond descriptive statistics to identify the advantages and challenges of the TOEFL preparation training, highlighting positive outcomes as well as contextual factors affecting teachers' ability to apply the training.

4. Result

4.1 Teachers' Perceptions of the TOEFL Preparation Training Program

The analysis of close-ended questionnaire data revealed that teachers generally held positive perceptions toward the TOEFL preparation training program. The evaluation covered five main categories, namely participants' reaction, participants' learning, organization support and change, participants' use of knowledge and skills, and learning outcomes. Overall, the results suggest that the training was perceived as effective, relevant, and beneficial for teachers' professional growth and teaching practices.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Category 1	40	4.55	0.52
Category 2	40	4.14	0.61
Category 3	40	4.39	0.56
Category 4	40	4.25	0.67
Category 5	40	4.10	0.62

Based on the results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire, a general overview of the training's effectiveness was obtained across five evaluation categories. In Category 1, which measured participants 'reaction toward training, teachers expressed a high level of satisfaction with the training implementation, as indicated by an average score of 4.55 ($SD = 0.52$). Most participants found the training sessions engaging, well-organized, and relevant to their teaching needs. The materials were considered practical and applicable to classroom contexts. This high satisfaction level demonstrates that the training successfully met participants' expectations and provided a positive learning experience.

In Category 2, concerning participants' learning, teachers reported that the program significantly enhanced their knowledge and skills related to English proficiency and TOEFL test components, with an average score of 4.14 ($SD = 0.61$). Participants stated that they gained a better understanding of TOEFL test structures, test-taking strategies, and classroom techniques to support students' preparation. Although the majority of respondents agreed that the training improved their competence, a few noted that additional practice and follow-up sessions would be beneficial for deeper mastery.

In Category 3, focusing on organizational support and change, teachers' responses also reflected positive perceptions of institutional support, with an average score of 4.39 ($SD = 0.56$). They acknowledged that the educational institution had provided sufficient facilities, opportunities, and administrative encouragement to apply the training outcomes. Such institutional backing played an important role in motivating teachers to integrate TOEFL-based approaches into their teaching.

In Category 4, which examined participants' use of knowledge and skills, the mean score of 4.25 ($SD = 0.67$) indicated that most teachers had begun to implement strategies learned during the training in their teaching practices. Teachers mentioned incorporating listening and reading activities modelled after TOEFL tasks and using more communicative techniques. However, the degree of implementation varied depending on class conditions and student readiness.

Finally, Category 5 focused on teachers' perceptions of the impact of the training on their students' learning outcomes. With an average score of 4.10 ($SD = 0.62$), the findings show that teachers believed the training had a positive but moderate influence on students' performance. Nevertheless, teachers noted that the improvement in students' actual TOEFL scores would require continuous practice and sustained support.

In summary, teachers' perceptions of the TOEFL preparation training program were positive across all five evaluation categories, indicating that the training was relevant,

practical, and supportive of their professional and instructional needs. Beyond the descriptive statistical results, the findings highlight several advantages of the program, including improved understanding of TOEFL test components, increased confidence in applying test-oriented instructional strategies, and greater readiness to integrate TOEFL-related activities into classroom practice. The consistently high mean scores in participants' reaction and learning categories further suggest that the training effectively strengthened teachers' motivation and instructional competence in alignment with international education standards. However, teachers also emphasized the need for ongoing institutional support, regular follow-up workshops, and opportunities for collaborative practice to sustain the training's long-term impact.

4.2 Teachers' Challenges when Applying the Training Outcomes

The analysis of open-ended questionnaire revealed that teachers encountered several challenges when implementing the outcomes of the TOEFL preparation training in their classroom practices. Responses from interviews were thematically coded in order to generate the pattern referring to the related construct. The results of analysis were grouped into three main categories: institutional and environmental challenges, teacher-related challenges, and professional development and sustainability challenges. Table 4 further elaborates potential challenges that could affect how teachers perceive the training program.

Table 4. Challenges in TOEFL Preparation Training Program

Category	Focus	Example Challenges
Institutional and Environmental Challenges	School system & policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited academic hours • Lack of mock tests
Teacher-related Challenges	Teacher motivation & ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low proficiency • Low motivation • Lack of confidence
Professional Development and Sustainability Challenges	Sustainability & confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No post-training evaluation • Low teacher self-efficacy • Limited opportunities for continuous professional development • Absence of peer mentoring or follow up sessions

One of the most dominant issues reported by the teachers was related to the institutional setting of the Islamic boarding school. The teachers highlighted that the school schedule was tight with both academic and religious activities, leaving limited class time for TOEFL practice. The institutional policy made it difficult to allocate adequate time for English or TOEFL-related activities. One teacher explained.

"We have a very packed schedule. After religious classes and evening prayers, we barely have time to review or do extra TOEFL practice." (T3)

Another institutional challenge identified in the study was the strong demand for teachers themselves to obtain a high TOEFL score. The institution encouraged teachers to serve as language models for students and to meet certain proficiency benchmarks as part of professional standards. While this policy aimed to promote teacher quality, it also created psychological pressure and anxiety among some participants. Consequently, the pressure to perform well on the TOEFL test, especially for English teachers, became a source of stress that affected their confidence. As one teacher expressed:

"We are expected to achieve a high TOEFL score to set an example for our students, but it's not easy while we still have many other teaching responsibilities." (T3)

Furthermore, some teachers mentioned the lack of administrative and material support, such as insufficient access to TOEFL practice tests and listening facilities. These environmental constraints restricted the full implementation of the teaching strategies and materials introduced during the training. Another teacher expressed as following.

"We need more access to listening materials or mock tests. Sometimes, the equipment doesn't work well, and it affects our practice sessions." (T1)

Teacher-related challenges were also identified, particularly concerning teachers' limited proficiency and lack of confidence in applying TOEFL-related strategies. Several participants acknowledged that their own English competence, especially in listening and structure sections, remained an obstacle in fully mastering the training materials. As one teacher stated:

"Some of us still find it difficult to follow the listening section and understand some difficult vocabulary." (T4)

In addition, a few teachers reported difficulty in transferring the newly learned techniques into their classroom practices due to limited experience with TOEFL-oriented instruction. One participant commented:

"It's not easy to adjust our usual teaching approach to TOEFL format. We need more practice to feel confident using the methods." (T2)

Another recurring issue was the lack of time for independent practice and self-development. Teachers often had to balance heavy teaching loads and administrative duties, leaving little time to reinforce their learning after the training sessions. As one teacher noted:

"Even though we want to practice more, our schedules are already full. There's barely time for self-study or follow-up activities." (T5)

In terms of professional growth, the teachers reported difficulties in maintaining the momentum gained from the training. Although the training program provided useful pedagogical strategies, there was no structured follow-up or mentoring session to ensure

the consistent application of new practices. This absence of post-training support contributed to a decline in confidence and continuity. Several teachers also expressed low self-efficacy, particularly when attempting to implement TOEFL-specific strategies independently without further guidance. The limited professional collaboration within the school environment further hindered the sustainability of the training outcomes. Overall, while the TOEFL preparation training offered clear benefits, its implementation was systematically constrained by institutional, individual, and sustainability-related factors, creating a gap between the intended training goals and teachers' practical classroom realities in the Islamic boarding school context.

5. Discussion

5.1 Teachers' Perceptions of the TOEFL Preparation Training Program

The findings indicate that teachers held generally positive perceptions toward the TOEFL preparation training program. The consistently high mean scores across all five evaluation categories (ranging from 4.10 to 4.55) demonstrate that the training was viewed as effective, relevant, and supportive of teachers' professional and instructional needs. In line with previous studies, teachers expressed favorable attitudes toward TOEFL training programs, recognizing their value for professional growth and language enhancement while also acknowledging several implementation challenges. For instance, Romios and Rajendra (2025) found that teachers recognized the significance of such training for global mobility and academic credibility, yet institutional support remained insufficient. Likewise, Anggraini et al., (2023) reported measurable gains in teachers' proficiency, with average TOEFL scores improving from 426 to 432 following training. Similarly, Diliana et al. (2024) observed enhanced teacher confidence and appreciation of the relevance of the training materials.

The teachers' positive perception in the present study aligns with Guskey's (2000) multi-level evaluation framework for professional development, which emphasizes the importance of measuring participants' reactions, learning, organizational support, application of knowledge, and impact on student learning outcomes. Teachers expressed strong satisfaction with the training implementation ($M = 4.55$), highlighting that the sessions were well-organized, engaging, and relevant to their daily teaching contexts. The result suggests that the training design successfully incorporated principles of effective professional development such as relevance, active participation, and applicability (Desimone, 2009).

In terms of participants' learning and use of knowledge and skills, the training enhanced teachers' understanding of TOEFL test components and strengthened their instructional competence in teaching TOEFL-related skills. This finding resonates with the notion of *transfer of training* (Baldwin & Ford, 1988), in which the application of newly learned knowledge depends on the relevance and clarity of training content. The teachers' reports of integrating TOEFL-based listening and reading activities into their lessons suggest that the training outcomes translated into concrete instructional adjustments. However, variations in the degree of implementation—often depending on

students' readiness and classroom dynamics—indicate that contextual factors mediate how effectively new knowledge is transferred into practice.

The finding that teachers perceived strong institutional support ($M = 4.39$) also underscores the critical role of organizational culture in enabling sustainable professional growth. Support from the school administration, access to resources, and encouragement to apply training content are all pivotal factors in sustaining teacher learning (Fullan, 2007). In this study, teachers acknowledged their institution supports, which positively influenced their motivation to adopt TOEFL-oriented teaching practices. Nevertheless, the moderate score related to student outcomes ($M = 4.10$) suggests that while teachers recognized the benefits of training, improvements in students' TOEFL performance may require more time, consistent reinforcement, and institutional follow-up.

This finding aligns with prior research (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Timperley, 2011), which indicates that the impact of professional development on student learning often emerges gradually and depends on continued practice. The overall positive perception thus reflects the training's success in building foundational awareness and skills, while also pointing to the need for systematic follow-up programs to maintain and deepen the outcomes achieved.

In sum, the TOEFL preparation training program effectively addressed teachers' professional learning needs by improving their competence, confidence, and classroom practices. However, to maximize long-term impact, professional development initiatives of this kind should be complemented by post-training mentoring, peer collaboration, and structured reflection sessions. These elements would help ensure that training outcomes are not only applied but also sustained and adapted to classroom activities.

5.2 Teachers' Challenges when Applying the Training Outcomes

Despite the overall success of the training, teachers reported several challenges that hindered the full implementation of the outcomes in their classroom practice. These challenges were classified into three major categories: institutional and environmental challenges, teacher-related challenges, and professional development sustainability challenges, each reflecting the realities of teaching within the context of an Islamic boarding school.

Institutional constraints emerged as the most dominant issue. Teachers described the heavy academic and religious schedules that limited time for TOEFL practice. This reflects the broader issue of structural constraints in educational settings, where the curriculum demands can limit teachers' ability to apply new instructional methods (Borg, 2015). Moreover, teachers reported insufficient access to listening equipment and mock test materials, which further restricted their capacity to implement TOEFL-oriented instruction effectively. Such findings highlight how professional development outcomes can be undermined when the organizational environment lacks adequate infrastructural and policy support (Avalos, 2011).

The institutional expectation for teachers to achieve high TOEFL scores themselves also contributed to anxiety and psychological stress. Although the policy was intended to

improve teacher quality, it unintentionally created extra pressure on teachers. This phenomenon mirrors Day and Gu's (2007) argument that teacher motivation and confidence are deeply influenced by the alignment between institutional expectations and teachers' working realities. Excessive pressure, when not supported by sufficient resources or mentoring, may lead to reduced self-efficacy and reluctance to innovate in teaching practices.

Teacher-related challenges primarily revolved around language proficiency and confidence. Some participants reported difficulties in mastering TOEFL-related content, particularly in the listening and structure sections. According to Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, confidence plays a crucial role in determining whether individuals persist in applying new skills. This challenge underscores the need for differentiated professional support that takes into account varying teacher proficiency levels.

Another major issue concerns the sustainability of professional growth after the training program. The absence of structured post-training evaluation, mentoring, or follow-up sessions weakened teachers' ability to maintain their understanding. This finding is consistent with Guskey and Yoon (2009), who emphasize that effective professional development requires systematic follow-up and continuous feedback mechanisms. Teachers' heavy workloads and limited collaboration opportunities further hindered collective reflection and innovation, reducing the sustainability of the training's impact.

Overall, the challenges identified reveal that while individual motivation and institutional support are critical, both must be supported with continuous professional learning to ensure long-term effectiveness. Addressing these constraints requires a teacher development that integrates initial training with ongoing mentoring, peer collaboration, and institutional commitment.

6. Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of a TOEFL preparation training program and the challenges they faced when applying the training outcomes. The findings show that teachers viewed the program as effective, relevant, and beneficial for their professional growth. They reported improvements in their knowledge of TOEFL components, and test-taking strategies, which increased their confidence in TOEFL. The findings of this study demonstrate that training reshaped teacher cognition and professional identity.

However, several obstacles limited the full implementation of the training results. Institutional challenges such as limited class hours, lack of facilities, and heavy workloads made it difficult for teachers to apply new methods consistently. In addition, teachers' limited proficiency and low confidence further hindered their ability to transfer learning into practice. The absence of mentoring and follow-up sessions also reduced opportunities for reflection and sustainability. These challenges highlight that successful professional development depends not only on the training itself but also on continuous institutional and pedagogical support.

This study provides a nuanced insight by showing that although teachers perceived the TOEFL preparation training positively and recognized its instructional advantages, these benefits were not fully sustained in practice. The results demonstrate that institutional constraints, varying teacher proficiency levels, and the lack of structured follow-up systematically limited teachers' ability to consistently apply the training outcomes. This finding is important because it highlights that the effectiveness of TOEFL-based professional development depends not only on teachers' positive perceptions and training content, but also on the institutional conditions that support or hinder long-term implementation.

It is therefore recommended that professional development programs be designed as ongoing cycles that include planning, implementation, mentoring, and evaluation. Schools and policymakers should provide time, resources, and support for teachers to practice and reflect on their learning. Building teacher communities of practice can also help sustain collaboration, confidence, and innovation. By taking these steps, institutions can transform short-term training into sustainable professional development.

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Appendices

Questionnaire of Teachers' Perceptions of the TOEFL Preparation Training Program (Guskey, 2000)

Directions: Please answer this questionnaire by selecting one of the four options for each item according to your personal situation and condition (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

1. The TOEFL training was engaging and enjoyable to attend.
2. The training materials were delivered clearly and easy to understand.
3. The training facilities supported my learning process.
4. I gained new knowledge about strategies for taking the TOEFL test.
5. I feel that my English skills have improved after the training.
6. I have a better understanding of TOEFL question structures compared to before the training.
7. The institution where I teach supports the implementation of the training outcomes.
8. There are opportunities to share the results of the TOEFL training with colleagues.
9. The school management encourages teachers to continually improve their TOEFL competence.
10. I apply the strategies learned from the training in my teaching practice.
11. I use the materials and techniques from the training to help my students prepare for the TOEFL/English tests.
12. I feel confident integrating the new skills into my daily teaching practice.
13. My students have shown improvement in their English proficiency after I implemented the training outcomes.
14. Students are more motivated to learn TOEFL after I applied what I learned from the training.
15. Students' test or practice results have improved since I implemented the strategies from the training.