



**STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION ON TOEIC TO IMPROVE THE ENGLISH ABILITY:
A CASE STUDY IN A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL**

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) continues to be a crucial assessment tool globally, particularly in Asia, vocational school students are required to master it where it could help them both academic and industrial world context. This research was to find out the students and teachers perception about TOEIC to improve the English ability. The research used qualitative research using case study design. Data were collected by using interview question of semi-structured interview. Sample of the research were two English teachers and 45 vocational school students. Then, it was analyzed by using content analysis. The research shows that TOEIC improves the English knowledge and ability, enriches the vocabularies, encourages the high competition in the industrial world and global mobility for the positive perception and for the negative perceptions is that TOEIC presents more English in industrial context. This research gives contribution for students and teachers to show their understanding about TOEIC. It was limited into a vocational school in Padang, West Sumatera.

Keywords: TOEIC, Student perceptions, Vocational High School, English language skills

ABSTRAK

Sekarang ini, TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) terus menjadi alat penilaian penting secara global, khususnya di Asia, siswa sekolah kejuruan diharuskan untuk menguasainya di mana hal itu dapat membantu mereka dalam konteks dunia akademis dan industri. Penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui persepsi siswa dan guru tentang TOEIC untuk meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan pertanyaan wawancara wawancara semi-terstruktur. Sampel penelitian adalah dua guru bahasa Inggris dan 45 siswa sekolah kejuruan. Kemudian, data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis konten/isi. Penelitian menunjukkan bahwa TOEIC meningkatkan pengetahuan dan kemampuan bahasa Inggris, memperkaya kosakata, mendorong persaingan yang tinggi di dunia industri dan mobilitas global untuk persepsi positif dan untuk persepsi negatif adalah bahwa TOEIC menyajikan lebih banyak bahasa Inggris dalam konteks industri. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi bagi siswa dan guru untuk menunjukkan pemahaman mereka tentang TOEIC. Penelitian ini dibatasi di Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan di Padang, Sumatera Barat.

Kata kunci: TOEIC, Persepsi siswa, Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan, Kemampuan bahasa Inggris

Introduction

Nowadays, the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) continues to be a crucial assessment tool globally, particularly in Asia. The test is taken by approximately 4.5 million candidates annually, and it is recognized in over 160 countries. The TOEIC is

highly valued by companies, especially in industries like automotive, electronics, and software, where many of the top Fortune Global 500 companies use TOEIC scores to evaluate English proficiency for hiring and promotions. Nur Hafiza et al., (2024) stated that the TOEIC test remains a global standard for assessing English communication skills in a business context. It is used extensively by corporations, educational institutions, and government entities to make informed decisions about hiring, employee development, and academic placements. The test's popularity persists, especially in countries where English is not the native language but is crucial for international business and global communication. For many professionals and students, achieving a good TOEIC score can open doors to better job opportunities, career advancements, and educational prospects (Pasara Namsaeng, 2021).

TOEIC can significantly improve English language ability, particularly in a business context, through its structured assessment of key communication skills by focusing skill development where it means that TOEIC tests evaluate listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills, which are essential for effective communication in English by preparing for the TOEIC encourages learners to develop these skills in a balanced manner, ensuring comprehensive language proficiency (Sumartana et al., 2023). Next is for a real world application in which TOEIC test questions are designed around real-life workplace scenarios. This means that test-takers practice English in contexts they are likely to encounter in their careers, helping them apply their language skills more effectively in professional settings. TOEIC encourages motivation and goal setting where preparing for TOEIC gives learners specific goals to work towards, which can be a strong motivator. Achieving a high score can validate their efforts, boosting confidence and encouraging further language learning. The last is structured learning resources where TOEIC preparation materials, such as official learning preparation courses and practice tests, provide structured and targeted practice. These resources help learners focus on areas of improvement and track their progress over time. Overall, TOEIC not only assesses English proficiency but also supports the development of practical language skills needed in the global workplace (Fauzi, 2020).

The relationship between vocational school students and English proficiency is crucial, especially in a globalized economy where English is often the language of international communication. Generally, English proficiency impacts vocational school students such first enhanced employability. It means that vocational education is designed to equip students with specific skills for the workforce (Natsir et al., 2022). Proficiency in English adds an essential layer to these skills, making students more competitive in both local and international job markets. Many companies, particularly in sectors like hospitality, tourism, IT, and engineering, require employees who can communicate effectively in English. Second, it is an access to global resources. It defines that English proficiency allows vocational students to access a vast array of global learning resources, including technical manuals, online courses, and industry standards, which are often available in English. This access can enhance their technical knowledge and expertise.

Third is a career advancement opportunities. Many vocational students aim to work in industries where English is the primary language of communication . For example, in multinational corporations, employees with strong English skills are more likely to be promoted to managerial or supervisory roles, as they can communicate effectively with international clients and colleagues. Fourth is an international work and study opportunities. English proficiency opens doors for vocational students to work or study abroad. Many vocational training programs and institutions in non-English speaking countries have partnerships with organizations in English-speaking countries, providing students with opportunities to gain international experience. At last is effective communication in

multicultural environments. In today's diverse work environments, the ability to communicate in English is essential for collaborating with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. This is particularly relevant in industries such as hospitality, healthcare, and customer service, where communication is a key to providing quality service. Overall, English proficiency enhances the practical skills learned in vocational schools, making students more adaptable, competitive, and prepared for a variety of career paths both locally and internationally (Paulsrud & Toth, 2019).

TOEIC is increasingly recognized as essential for vocational school students, as it plays a significant role in enhancing their English language abilities. In today's globalized job market, proficiency in English is not just an asset but often a requirement for career advancement, especially in industries like tourism, hospitality, IT, and engineering, where international communication is frequent. By preparing for and taking the TOEIC, vocational students are encouraged to develop key language skills—listening, reading, speaking, and writing that are directly applicable to workplace scenarios. This targeted skill development not only improves their ability to communicate effectively in English but also increases their employability, making them more competitive candidates in both local and international job markets. Additionally, the process of preparing for the TOEIC provides students with structured learning resources and specific goals, motivating them to reach a higher level of language proficiency. Thus, TOEIC is not just a test; it is a tool that equips vocational students with the linguistic skills necessary to thrive in a globalized world (Muliyah & Aminatun, 2020).

There have been some previous researchers about TOEIC. Dari & Zasrianita, (2021) conducted a research about analysis the vocational high school students' problem in answering TOEIC reading and listening test. They used a test for the research instrument. It is shown that there is internal and external factor causing the students difficult to answer the TOEIC test. The internal factors are like students did not understand the questions, vocabulary, or material being tested. The external factor is like beyond the ability of students, such as the facilities needed by students to take the test are still minimal. Wijayanti et al., (2022) also researched about perception of vocational school students towards online learning and their TOEIC scores. Data were collected by survey and document of TOEIC test. Data were analyzed by using SPSS. The research shows that 69% of students' responses had a positive view of the online class. There was no significant correlation between the students' perception of online learning they attended and their TOEIC score achievement. Third is Rahayu et al., (2022) who conducted a research on novice student's experience of taking TOEIC using a phenomenological case study. Data were collected by using semi-structured interview and analyzed by using thematic analysis. The research shows that policymakers such as EFL teachers, program and curriculum developers, and other stakeholders pay more attention to the students' voices stating that EFL learning goes to a unique and complex process. Thus, successful English learning cannot be achieved unless their needs and voices are taken into consideration

Based on the information above, it can be found some research gap for this research. First, this research used interview method to collect the data by using the semi structured interview. He used interview question to derive the needed information about TOEIC. Second, this research used case study design. The case study design was selected because the case only occurred in a specific school area in West Sumatera. At last, the sample of this research was students and teachers taking the TOEIC test.

The TOEIC test is a specialized English examination designed primarily to assess the ability to communicate in an international business context (Gaspar & Hartanto, 2018). Unlike other English proficiency tests that may focus on academic or general English skills,

TOEIC is tailored to evaluate how well individuals can use English in practical, everyday situations that are common in global workplaces. This includes understanding spoken English in meetings, interpreting written documents like emails or reports, and engaging in conversations with colleagues or clients from different parts of the world (L, 2021). By focusing on these aspects, the TOEIC test serves as a vital tool for anyone aiming to work in an international environment, where effective communication across borders is crucial. The test's emphasis on real-world communication scenarios makes it particularly valuable for professionals and students who need to demonstrate their ability to function effectively in multinational settings (Miqawati et al., 2021).

The primary objective of this research was to explore the perceptions of both teachers and students regarding the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) and how these perceptions could contribute to enhancing students' English language proficiency. Understanding the attitudes and beliefs of both educators and learners towards the TOEIC is crucial, as these perspectives can significantly influence teaching strategies and learning outcomes. By investigating these perceptions, the study aims to identify potential areas of improvement in teaching practices and learning approaches, ultimately leading to better preparation for students taking the TOEIC and a more effective enhancement of their English language skills.

Then, this research has some significance. Firstly, this research has the potential to shed light on the foundational English language abilities of students, particularly in the context of daily conversation. By examining how students navigate everyday interactions in English, the study can reveal their strengths and weaknesses in using the language in practical, real-life situations. This insight is essential, as it helps educators understand the current proficiency levels of their students, allowing for targeted interventions that focus on improving conversational skills. Understanding these basic abilities also provides a baseline from which to measure progress and tailor teaching methods to better support students in becoming more confident and effective communicators in English.

Secondly, this research will serve to inform students about the critical importance of the TOEIC exam, not only for academic purposes but also within the context of the industrial and professional world. Understanding the relevance of TOEIC in academia can motivate students to take the test seriously, recognizing it as a valuable tool for academic advancement, such as fulfilling graduation requirements or enhancing their qualifications for further studies. Moreover, by highlighting the role of TOEIC in the industrial sector, the research will emphasize how proficiency in English, as measured by this exam, can open doors to better job opportunities, career growth, and global communication in various industries. This awareness can drive students to prioritize their English language development, seeing it as essential for both their educational and professional futures. Finally, this research question was how the student and teacher perception about TOEIC to improve student English ability. This research was limited into a vocational school in Padang, West Sumatera.

Method

This research used qualitative research. There are several compelling reasons for employing qualitative research when analyzing perceptions. First, qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of individuals' thoughts, feelings, and experiences, providing rich, detailed insights that might be overlooked in quantitative studies. This approach is particularly valuable when studying perceptions, as it captures the nuances of how people understand and interpret their experiences, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Bailey, 2014). Royadi et al., (2019) commented that qualitative

methods, such as interviews and focus groups, offer the flexibility to probe deeper into participants' responses, uncovering underlying motivations and contextual factors that influence their perceptions. This depth of analysis can reveal patterns and themes that might not be evident through numerical data alone, making qualitative research an ideal choice for exploring the complexities of human perception. Finally, qualitative research fosters a more interactive and participant-centered approach, allowing researchers to build rapport and trust with participants, which can lead to more authentic and candid responses, ultimately enriching the quality and validity of the findings (Shava et al., 2021).

In this research, the case study method was employed to analyze both student and teacher perceptions regarding the role of the TOEIC in enhancing students' English language proficiency. By focusing on specific instances within a real-world context, the case study approach allowed for a detailed examination of how both teachers and students perceive the TOEIC and its impact on language learning. This method provided a comprehensive understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of the participants, offering insights into the practical implications of the TOEIC in an educational setting (Joshi, 2018). Through this case study, the researcher was able to delve into the unique dynamics of the classroom environment, exploring how these perceptions influence teaching practices, learning strategies, and ultimately, the effectiveness of the TOEIC as a tool for improving students' English abilities (Damaiyanti et al., 2022).

In this research, semi-structured interviews were utilized as the primary method for data collection to gather insights into both student and teacher perceptions of the TOEIC exam. By employing a semi-structured format, the researcher was able to maintain a balance between consistency and flexibility in the interview process (Jarudin et al., 2022). This approach allowed for the use of predetermined interview questions, which ensured that key topics were covered while also providing the opportunity to explore participants' responses in greater depth. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to probe further into specific areas of interest, adapt questions based on the flow of the conversation, and capture the nuanced views and experiences of both students and teachers (Maryelliwati et al., 2018). This method was particularly effective in uncovering the diverse perspectives on how the TOEIC is perceived in terms of its role in enhancing students' English language abilities, thereby providing rich, qualitative data for analysis.

The data collected on these perceptions were analyzed through content analysis, a systematic method used to interpret and categorize qualitative information (Imelwaty et al., 2023;). By applying content analysis, the researcher was able to identify patterns, themes, and key concepts within the responses of both students and teachers regarding the TOEIC exam. This analytical approach involved breaking down the interview data into manageable segments, coding the information based on recurring ideas, and then grouping these codes into broader categories that reflected the underlying perceptions of the participants. Content analysis allowed for a structured and objective examination of the data, making it possible to draw meaningful conclusions about how the TOEIC is viewed in the context of improving students' English language skills. Through this method, the researcher was able to uncover the shared beliefs, concerns, and motivations that influence these perceptions, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of the TOEIC as an educational tool.

Sample of this research were students of SMK DEK Business School Padang consisting of 45 students and it was added by two English teachers. The interview was conducted after the students finishing the TOEIC test. It was guided by the interview questions about TOEIC. For the teachers, the researchers asked them one to one and for the students, the students grouped the students into several group and asked their opinion about TOEIC test.



Figure 1. The Researchers Conducted a Semi-Structured Interview in Group about TOEIC FINDINGS

AND DISCUSSIONS

After conducting the research by using interview question on a semi structured interview, there are some positive and negative perceptions that could be derived from the interview information from students and teachers. The positive perceptions are for example improving the English knowledge and ability, enriching the vocabularies, encouraging the high competition in the industrial world, and global mobility. Meanwhile, for the negative perceptions of TOEIC presents more English in industrial context.

Improving the English Knowledge and Ability

TOEIC can significantly enhance an individual's knowledge and ability in English by providing a structured and focused approach to language learning. The test is designed to assess a range of language skills, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing, which are essential for effective communication in a professional environment. As individuals prepare for TOEIC, they engage in rigorous study and practice, which helps them to better understand the nuances of the English language, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This preparation not only boosts their confidence in using English in real- world situations but also improves their overall proficiency, making them more competitive in the global job market. Moreover, the test's emphasis on practical language use in workplace scenarios helps individuals develop the specific communication skills required in international business contexts, thereby enhancing their ability to function effectively in diverse and multicultural environments.

These conditions are supported by the information from the students where they said that “ *after listening the conversation from the audio, we can know some English expression for daily expression. It is also added by saying “the sentences on the audio is quite easy to understand, so that we know how to respond in English”*. Meanwhile, the teachers also confirmed that *TOEIC really supports our daily English because we often hear the utterances every day*. From the information above, it can be seen that students and teacher comprehend that TOEIC could support their English knowledge and ability.

Enriching the Vocabularies

TOEIC could greatly enrich an individual's vocabulary by exposing them to a wide range of words and phrases commonly used in professional and everyday English. As part of the test preparation, individuals are encouraged to study various texts and listen to spoken English that covers diverse topics, including business, travel, finance, and social interactions. This exposure helps learners to familiarize themselves with new vocabulary in context, allowing them to understand how these words are used in real-life situations. Additionally, the focus on vocabulary during TOEIC preparation encourages individuals to expand their word knowledge actively, improving their ability to comprehend and communicate complex ideas more effectively. By consistently encountering and practicing these words, individuals can integrate them into their active vocabulary, making their language use more precise and versatile.

The students also realize about TOEIC enrich their vocabularies. In their interview information, it is stated that *"we can see the differences of the various expressions and words after listening the audio and read the text.* Other information is like *"by reading the text, we can know the words and when to use it because the text shows the functions.* Here, the students understand that their vocabularies improve after their listening and reading the TOEIC test. The teachers also argued that *we believe that TOEIC shows many various vocabularies in the questions, so that we are sure that students will be able to differentiate the dictions well.* so, from the information from students and teachers, both of them thinks that TOEIC listening and reading test enrich their vocabularies indirectly.

Encouraging the High Competition in the Industrial World

TOEIC encourages high competition in the industrial world by setting a benchmark for English proficiency that companies use to assess and differentiate between potential employees. As English continues to be the global lingua franca, many industries, particularly those that operate internationally, prioritize candidates who can communicate effectively in English. By requiring a TOEIC score as part of the hiring process, companies create a competitive environment where job seekers are motivated to improve their language skills to stand out from the crowd. This emphasis on English proficiency pushes individuals to work harder in mastering the language, leading to a workforce that is better equipped to handle the demands of global business. Furthermore, as more candidates achieve higher TOEIC scores, the overall standard of English within the industry rises, fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement. This, in turn, drives innovation and productivity, as employees with strong communication skills are better able to collaborate, negotiate, and contribute to the success of their organizations on an international scale.

One of the teacher commented that *right now, the industrial world requires TOEIC for applying a job and it will give high value if a graduate has the ability in TOEIC.* Some of the students also informed that *"when we had our internship, the company asks about English ability, especially in TOEIC.* Those information shows that TOEIC could give significance effects about competition for being a worker or applicant in the industrial word. The company likely wants their employee knows about English and could interact in English.

Global Mobility

TOEIC can open the door to global mobility for students by providing them with a recognized certification of their English language proficiency, which is essential in today's interconnected world. As English is the predominant language of international communication, having a strong command of it is crucial for students who aspire to study, work, or travel abroad. A good TOEIC score serves as a testament to their ability to function effectively in an English-speaking environment, whether it be in a university, a multinational company, or even in social settings while traveling. Many educational institutions and employers around the world require or prefer candidates with proven English skills, and a TOEIC certification can give students a significant advantage in the competitive global landscape. Moreover, the test prepares students to handle the practical language challenges they may face in

diverse cultural contexts, enhancing their confidence and adaptability in various international situations. By equipping students with the language skills necessary to succeed beyond their home country, TOEIC facilitates opportunities for personal and professional growth on a global scale.

Some students say that “ *by having an ability of English proficiency such TOEIC, we can go abroad and we can communicate with many people in the world.* The teachers also said that “*our school has an international mobility program where some of our best students will be taken to visit some industries in some countries. We did it several times before pandemic came.* From the arguments above, it can be seen that by learning TOEIC, the students could travel into some countries in overseas. They can communicate with many different people in the world.

TOEIC Presents More English in Industrial Context.

TOEIC presents more English in an industrial context by focusing its content on the language used in professional and workplace settings, making it highly relevant for individuals seeking to enter or advance in various industries. The test is designed to reflect real-world scenarios that employees might encounter in their daily work, such as meetings, negotiations, presentations, and written communications like emails and reports. This industrial focus ensures that test-takers are not only improving their general English skills but are also becoming familiar with the specific terminology, phrases, and communication styles that are prevalent in business environments. By engaging with these industry-specific materials during their TOEIC preparation, individuals gain practical knowledge that directly applies to their careers, making them more effective and confident in their professional roles. Furthermore, this emphasis on industrial English helps bridge the gap between academic language learning and the actual demands of the workplace, ensuring that those who succeed on the TOEIC are well-prepared to meet the communication challenges of their chosen fields. As a result, TOEIC plays a crucial role in equipping individuals with the language skills necessary to thrive in industrial settings, thereby enhancing their employability and career prospects.

This information was also commented by the students where “*sometimes the dictions used on the reading text or listening audio, it is quite difficult for us to get the correct meaning because we don't know about the object or information.* Then, the teachers also agreed that *in some cases, we often get difficulties to understand the text because it is more industrial or company's context.* It means that some students and teacher get confused to understand about some texts used by TOEIC in its audio and reading text.

DISCUSSIONS

TOEIC has already given some positive impacts for the teachers and students where by taking the TOEIC test and learn the TOEIC, it can help them to improve their knowledge and skill about English. It is found that TOEIC could improve the English knowledge and ability, enrich the vocabularies, encourage the high competition in the industrial world and global mobility for the positive perception and for the negative perceptions is that TOEIC presents more English in industrial context.

Some researches agrees about the positive perception about TOEIC such as Prasetya, (2023) where he states that TOEIC could reveal the language barrier and it can take the participant for the global resources. Fauzi, (2020) also informs that TOEIC gives significant improvements on the students' listening comprehension. However, Damayanti & Gafur, (2020) mention in their research that some of the students they are not familiar with topics that lead to the business world. The students are more likely to master listening than

reading. It is caused by the difficulty of students in working on the number of questions in reading comprehension with limited time and the difficulty in understanding texts or essays.

From the findings presentation above, it can be seen that some of the students have positive perception about TOEIC because it can help their English knowledge and skill and it also helps their job or position in industrial world. Yet, to be acknowledged for the proper graduates, the students must have ability to use their English and it is added by the scores that they get whenever they apply for the TOEIC test with the required score from the companies.

CONCLUSION

TOEIC is important for students because it enhances their abilities in both English academics and daily conversation, making them more proficient and versatile in using the language. For academic purposes, TOEIC helps students develop a solid foundation in English by improving their reading comprehension, listening skills, and understanding of complex texts, which are essential for success in academic settings. The test also encourages students to become more familiar with the formal language structures and vocabulary commonly used in educational contexts, thus better preparing them for tasks such as writing essays, understanding lectures, and participating in academic discussions.

In addition to its academic benefits, TOEIC also plays a crucial role in improving students' ability to engage in daily conversations. The test covers a wide range of practical, real-life scenarios that students are likely to encounter outside the classroom, such as social interactions, making appointments, or handling everyday tasks in English-speaking environments. By practicing for TOEIC, students become more confident and fluent in their conversational English, enabling them to communicate effectively with native speakers and navigate various social situations with ease. This dual focus on both academic and conversational English makes TOEIC a valuable tool for students, equipping them with the language skills needed to excel in their studies while also preparing them for the practical demands of everyday communication. However, TOEIC also gives challenges for the test takers where most of the English used related to industrial context of the text and daily conversation topics.

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