

Readiness of Students, Lecturers, and Stakeholders Towards TOEFL as a Graduation Policy: A Study at FTK UIN Mataram's ELT Program

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ABSTRACT

This study examines stakeholder readiness toward the implementation of TOEFL as a graduation requirement in the English Language Teaching (ELT) Study Program at the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, UIN Mataram. The research employed a mixed-method design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Data were collected through a TOEFL prediction test, open-ended questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews involving 400 students, 10 lecturers, and 3 administrators. Quantitative data from TOEFL scores were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative data from questionnaires and interviews were examined thematically. The findings indicate strong overall support for the policy across stakeholder groups. However, the average TOEFL score of 381 reveals a considerable gap between expected and actual English proficiency levels. Key challenges include limited curriculum integration, test anxiety, and insufficient preparation resources. Stakeholders emphasized the need for systematic curriculum embedding, regular practice tests, and strengthened institutional support. The study underscores the importance of context-sensitive and evidence-based interventions to bridge the gap between policy expectations and stakeholder readiness, contributing to more effective and equitable English proficiency policies in Indonesian teacher education.

Keywords: TOEFL graduation requirement, Stakeholder readiness, English Language Teaching, higher education internationalization

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji kesiapan pemangku kepentingan terhadap penerapan TOEFL sebagai syarat kelulusan di Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (PBI) Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan UIN Mataram. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain mixed-method yang mengintegrasikan pendekatan kualitatif dan kuantitatif untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes prediksi TOEFL, kuesioner terbuka, dan wawancara semi terstruktur kepada 400 mahasiswa, 10 dosen, dan 3 tenaga kependidikan. Data kuantitatif dari skor TOEFL dianalisis secara deskriptif, sedangkan data kualitatif dianalisis melalui pendekatan tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya dukungan yang kuat terhadap kebijakan tersebut dari seluruh pemangku kepentingan. Namun, skor TOEFL rata-rata sebesar 381 mengindikasikan adanya kesenjangan yang cukup besar antara capaian aktual dan standar yang diharapkan. Hambatan utama meliputi keterbatasan integrasi kurikulum, kecemasan menghadapi tes, serta kurangnya sumber daya untuk persiapan. Para pemangku kepentingan merekomendasikan pengintegrasian TOEFL secara sistematis ke dalam kurikulum, pelaksanaan tes praktik secara rutin, serta penguatan dukungan kelembagaan. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya intervensi berbasis konteks dan data untuk menjembatani kesenjangan antara tuntutan kebijakan dan kesiapan aktual, sehingga dapat mendukung kebijakan kecakapan bahasa Inggris yang lebih efektif dan berkeadilan dalam pendidikan guru di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: syarat kelulusan TOEFL, kesiapan pemangku kepentingan, pendidikan bahasa Inggris, internasionalisasi pendidikan tinggi.

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INTRODUCTION

Many Indonesian universities actively pursue recognition as world-class institutions by expanding their internationalization strategies, particularly through stronger emphasis on English language proficiency requirements. The nation continues to experience notable difficulties in developing solid English abilities, as indicated by its relatively low positions in worldwide language assessments. Such limitations reduce graduates' opportunities to thrive in global employment settings, join international research projects, and support broader economic advancement. To address this situation, government guidelines in higher education promote the adoption of standardized assessments like TOEFL, aiming to equip learners with skills that match worldwide expectations and raise the profile of local institutions (British Council, 2021; Renandya et al., 2018).

This approach has led to the widespread adoption of minimum TOEFL scores as a condition for degree completion across numerous universities and vocational institutions. The measure is meant to confirm that learners have developed sufficient academic English skills necessary for successful careers and further scholarly pursuits. Even so, putting the policy into practice frequently involves various difficulties, such as uneven levels of student readiness, restricted availability of effective learning materials, differences arising from socioeconomic backgrounds, and weak connections between test items and the unique needs of specific academic disciplines or professional training areas (Azhari et al., 2022; Rahayu, 2019).

These concerns become especially relevant in programs that prepare future teachers. In such settings, aspiring educators need not only personal mastery of English but also the competence to deliver effective instruction within Indonesia's highly diverse linguistic environment. Islamic state universities, which blend spiritual principles with standard academic training, have commonly introduced comparable language thresholds for completing theses and receiving degrees. Nevertheless, differences in students' earlier language backgrounds, curriculum priorities, and available institutional assistance often lessen the policy's intended outcomes (Wahyuningsih et al., 2023; Lie, 2019).

Within the English Language Teaching Study Program at the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, this graduation requirement functions as a purposeful effort to form English instructors who possess global capabilities while remaining responsive to regional language varieties. However, the preparedness of

students, teaching staff, and program leaders shows considerable variation stemming from disparities in previous educational experiences, material accessibility, and opinions about the policy's connection to everyday teaching responsibilities (Narayana & Soepriyanti, 2023; Anggraini, 2023).

Earlier investigations into the use of TOEFL as an exit condition in Indonesian tertiary education have typically recorded favorable learner opinions, noting its contributions to increased motivation, skill enhancement, and better employment chances. Concurrently, these works regularly highlight practical obstacles, including inadequate guidance for test preparation, heightened anxiety during examinations, unequal distribution of learning resources, and poor fit between assessment content and real-world teaching or disciplinary demands (Farkhan, 2019; Karjo & Ronaldo, 2019; Wahyuni, 2024). For instance, research at a prominent Jakarta-based Islamic university revealed broad student approval of the requirement for career benefits, yet many participants pointed out insufficient campus support and elevated stress levels (Farkhan, 2019). A multi-campus examination similarly observed general endorsement tied to improved job readiness, while underscoring ongoing socioeconomic gaps and preparation shortages (Azhari et al., 2022). Studies focused on language-related fields have questioned whether TOEFL fully suits exit standards, with learners appreciating its role in professional entry but criticizing its limited relevance for developing authentic instructional abilities (Karjo & Ronaldo, 2019; Rahma, 2021). Additional inquiries have stressed the value of targeted training sessions to remedy weaknesses in areas such as grammar and test formats (Wahyuni, 2024). Other analyses have drawn attention to tensions between uniform testing criteria and the realities of vocational programs or multilingual classrooms, particularly outside English-specialized tracks (Rahayu, 2019; Zuhrayana, 2018).

While these earlier projects supply helpful overviews of general viewpoints, the majority concentrate on wide undergraduate groups or campuses located in Java. Far less attention has been given to varied perspectives from multiple parties—learners, instructors, and leaders—inside English teacher preparation tracks at regional Islamic state universities such as UIN Mataram. This shortfall points to an important opportunity to investigate ways of refining such policies so they successfully merge global ambitions with the concrete requirements of training English teachers in settings rich with linguistic diversity (Permana, 2024; Sukyadi, 2023; Mokodompit, 2023). The present research fills this void by exploring stakeholder readiness regarding the TOEFL graduation policy within the ELT Study Program at FTK UIN Mataram.

The present study aims to investigate stakeholder readiness for the TOEFL graduation policy at the ELT Study Program, FTK UIN Mataram. Specifically, the research questions are:

1. How do students, lecturers, and program administrators perceive the TOEFL graduation policy in the ELT Study Program at UIN Mataram?
2. What barriers and challenges do stakeholders encounter in preparing for and fulfilling the TOEFL requirement?
3. What kinds of interventions or support mechanisms are perceived as necessary to enhance stakeholder readiness and ensure more equitable outcomes?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to examine stakeholders' views, lived experiences, and readiness toward the policy requiring a minimum TOEFL score for graduation. The qualitative component aimed to capture rich, contextual insights into how participants interpret and respond to the policy within real educational settings, while the quantitative component provided supportive evidence through TOEFL prediction scores and descriptive statistics. This integrated design allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the issue by linking subjective experiences with measurable proficiency outcomes (Sugiyono, 2013; Anggraini, 2023). Informed by constructivist principles, the study treats knowledge as actively built through participants' personal and social interactions with the TOEFL requirement in their specific institutional setting (Mogashoa, 2014; Suhendi, 2021).

The study took place in the Tadris Bahasa Inggris (English Language Teaching) Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training (FTK), at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Mataram. This location was deliberately chosen for its central function in training future English teachers and its commitment to raising educational standards, improving graduate competitiveness, and supporting the university's goals for higher accreditation and international recognition.

Multiple data collection strategies were used to thoroughly address the three research questions. Primary data came from a TOEFL prediction test (prepared by the researcher according to ETS standards), open-ended online questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Secondary data consisted of academic literature and official university documents. Perceptions of the TOEFL graduation policy among students, lecturers, and administrators (Research Question 1) were explored mainly through questionnaire responses and interview discussions on attitudes and acceptance. Barriers and difficulties in preparing for and meeting the requirement (Research Question 2) were examined via detailed interview questions about personal challenges, resource shortages, test anxiety, and gaps in teaching skills, supported by prediction test outcomes. Suggested interventions and support needed to strengthen readiness and promote fairness (Research Question 3) were directly elicited through specific interview prompts and open-ended questionnaire items asking for recommendations on

training programs, curriculum changes, and institutional assistance.

A total of 400 undergraduate students from different academic years were randomly selected to complete the questionnaires and prediction tests. Additionally, 30 students, 10 lecturers, and 3 administrative staff members took part in semi-structured interviews to obtain varied viewpoints and reach data saturation.

After collection, numerical data from questionnaires and test scores were presented using basic descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to give an overall picture. The qualitative information from interviews and open-ended answers was processed following an interactive analytical framework involving data condensation, visualization, and drawing/verifying conclusions (Miles et al., 2014; Sugiyono, 2013). Thematic coding and content analysis helped uncover recurring patterns and key themes related to stakeholder views, obstacles, and proposed solutions.

Trustworthiness was ensured through methodological triangulation, comparing results from the prediction tests, questionnaires, and interviews (Carter et al., 2014). Selected participants also reviewed draft interpretations for accuracy (member checking). All instruments underwent expert review beforehand to confirm their relevance to the research objectives and questions.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. Students, Lecturers, and Program Administrators' Perceptions of the TOEFL Graduation Requirement

Stakeholders across the English Language Teaching (Tadris Bahasa Inggris) Study Program at FTK UIN Mataram showed predominantly positive perceptions toward implementing TOEFL as a graduation requirement. This policy was widely viewed as a valuable mechanism to enhance English proficiency, motivate consistent learning, and align graduates with global academic and professional standards.

Students demonstrated strong support, with 17 out of 18 interview participants expressing agreement. They considered the requirement a positive form of academic pressure that would encourage serious preparation and provide long-term benefits for scholarships, master's programs, and career opportunities. Representative statements include: "I think this policy is very good because if we are not required, we usually do nothing. If graduation requires a TOEFL score, it creates pressure that makes us focus on preparing for the next level" (R5); "It should be implemented because it is useful for our future, especially if we want to continue to master's degree" (R6); and "I agree because if TOEFL is applied, students will study harder and understand English better. Personally, I think the minimum score should be 400" (R10).

Lecturers (all 10 informants) fully supported the policy and saw it as essential for improving program quality and institutional competitiveness. They recommended integrating TOEFL elements into courses and extending the requirement to lecturers and staff. Comments such as “The TOEFL test should be implemented for English Education students in particular and for all UIN Mataram students in general... relevant because the vision and mission of the Faculty emphasize international competitiveness” (D1) and “TOEFL should not only be introduced to English Education students but also to all students, educational staff, and lecturers” (D5) reflect this view.

Program administrators (3 leaders) also expressed strong agreement, describing the policy as a strategic step for globalization. They highlighted its role in boosting graduate competitiveness and university reputation: “Introducing the TOEFL test will provide our students with a competitive advantage in the global job market... and enhance our campus’s reputation” (P2). Overall, perceptions across groups converged on the policy as an objective and beneficial standard, though success would depend on proper support.

2. Main Barriers and Challenges Faced by Stakeholders in Meeting the Policy

Despite positive perceptions, stakeholders faced notable barriers that could undermine the effective implementation of the TOEFL graduation requirement. Objective evidence from the TOEFL prediction test administered to 73 students showed an average score of only 381 (Listening: average ~40, SWE: ~36, Reading: ~37). This score falls significantly below common institutional targets in Indonesian universities (typically 450–500 for English departments), indicating a substantial proficiency gap even among English majors.

Students identified several key challenges. Listening was repeatedly cited as the most difficult section due to unclear audio, fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, single playback, and time pressure (e.g., “The listening section was the hardest because the audio was unclear and the time was very limited” – R1; “The speaker’s pronunciation was unclear, so it was hard to catch the meaning” – R12). Reading difficulties stemmed from long passages, vocabulary demands, time constraints, and loss of focus (e.g., “Reading was difficult because the text was long and time was limited, so I lost focus” – R2). SWE problems related mainly to grammar and sentence construction, often leading students to resort to guessing strategies. Additional barriers included limited prior exposure to TOEFL materials in the curriculum, lack of intensive preparation programs, test anxiety, and inadequate resources. Many students noted that TOEFL was only mentioned briefly in classes such as Listening, Reading, or ESP, with some reporting no exposure at all (e.g., “I was never introduced to TOEFL; I only knew about it recently” – R3). Lecturers and administrators acknowledged systemic issues such as wide variation in student proficiency levels, insufficient infrastructure and funding, and

inconsistent student motivation. These challenges highlight a mismatch between classroom English exposure and the specific skills demanded by the standardized TOEFL format.

3. Potential Interventions and Support Systems for Effective and Equitable Policy Implementation

To address the identified barriers and improve policy effectiveness and equity, stakeholders proposed concrete interventions and support systems. Students emphasized the need for early and systematic integration of TOEFL content into regular courses rather than treating it as an isolated requirement. They recommended regular free prediction tests, dedicated extracurricular programs, and greater use of online resources (e.g., “Courses help because we learn intensively there... I need to study first, not only from books but also from Google and YouTube” – R12; “I hope lecturers will hold more free TOEFL tests to introduce the test and motivate students” – R13).

Lecturers suggested embedding TOEFL-based tasks and strategies directly into lesson plans and assessments across subjects like Listening, Reading, and ESP. They advocated for additional guidance sessions and tailored teaching materials to build familiarity with test formats. Program administrators stressed institutional-level support, including allocation of resources for proper testing infrastructure, funding for intensive workshops, and differentiated preparation programs based on proficiency levels. They also recommended early diagnostic testing and clear communication to give students adequate preparation time, especially for senior cohorts.

Leaders further highlighted the importance of collaboration across the campus community: “We need to make sure that resources and support are available for those who need them... faculty will actively prepare students” (P3). Collectively, stakeholders agreed that combining curriculum integration, regular practice opportunities, resource provision, and ongoing monitoring would help bridge the current proficiency gap (average 381) and ensure the policy benefits all students fairly, ultimately contributing to higher graduate quality and the university’s internationalization goals.

Discussion

The findings reveal predominantly positive perceptions of the TOEFL graduation policy among students, lecturers, and program administrators at the ELT Study Program, FTK UIN Mataram. Students regarded the requirement as constructive academic pressure that fosters motivation and prepares them for global opportunities, while lecturers and administrators viewed it as a strategic instrument for elevating program standards and institutional competitiveness. This supportive stance aligns with recent Indonesian studies demonstrating broad acceptance of TOEFL mandates for enhancing employability and

language development (Farkhan, 2019; Azhari et al., 2022). From a broader theoretical perspective, the positive perceptions reflect Jane Knight's (2004) influential framework of higher education internationalization, which posits that English proficiency benchmarks serve as key enablers for cross-border mobility, research collaboration, and institutional visibility in the global knowledge economy. The near-unanimous agreement (17 of 18 students and all lecturers/administrators) signals a receptive climate that can facilitate smoother policy adoption, provided stakeholder voices continue to shape implementation.

Despite favorable perceptions, substantial barriers were evident, most prominently the low average TOEFL prediction score of 381 among 73 students—well below typical graduation targets of 450–500. Students highlighted specific difficulties in listening (unclear audio, fast speech, time pressure), reading (long passages, vocabulary load), and Structure and Written Expression (grammar gaps leading to guessing), compounded by limited curriculum integration and resource shortages. These challenges mirror patterns documented in recent national research on test anxiety, unequal preparation access, and misalignment between classroom English exposure and standardized testing demands (Rahma, 2021; Wahyuni, 2024). Theoretically, such gaps are well explained by Bernard Spolsky's (2007) language policy model, which distinguishes between language practices, beliefs, and management, emphasizing that successful policy outcomes depend on alignment among these three components. This theoretical lens helps explain why ambitious national mandates often encounter implementation friction in regional Islamic universities like UIN Mataram.

Stakeholders proposed actionable interventions, including systematic integration of TOEFL tasks into core courses (Listening, Reading, ESP), regular free prediction tests, extracurricular workshops, lecturer training, and resource allocation for infrastructure. Students requested greater use of online materials and early guidance, while administrators stressed collaboration and differentiated support based on proficiency levels. These recommendations resonate with recent empirical work advocating intensive preparation programs and curriculum alignment to address proficiency shortfalls in ELT settings (Anggraini, 2023). From a theoretical standpoint, the suggested interventions align with Stephen Ball et al.'s (2012) policy enactment theory, which underscores the necessity of shared responsibility, local interpretation, and contextual adaptation among actors to translate policy intentions into equitable practice. By addressing the current score gap (average 381) through targeted, multi-stakeholder support, such measures can promote fairness across linguistically diverse student backgrounds.

In summary, the study at FTK UIN Mataram demonstrates a generally supportive stakeholder environment for the TOEFL graduation policy, consistent with Indonesian trends from 2019 to 2024 (Farkhan, 2019; Azhari et al., 2022; Rahma, 2021; Wahyuni, 2024; Anggraini, 2023). However, the identified barriers underscore the importance of bridging the

gap between policy ambition and local readiness. Integrating insights from leading scholars—Knight (2004) on internationalization, Spolsky (2007) on language policy components, and Ball et al. (2012) on policy enactment—highlights the need for context-sensitive adaptations. Implementing the recommended interventions would strengthen policy effectiveness, enhance graduate quality, and advance UIN Mataram’s internationalization agenda more equitably and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study reveals that stakeholders in the English Language Teaching (ELT) Study Program at the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, hold predominantly positive perceptions toward the TOEFL graduation requirement. Students, lecturers, and program administrators view the policy as a beneficial mechanism that encourages consistent English language practice, builds academic pressure for improvement, and prepares graduates for global opportunities in teaching, further studies, and professional careers. The near-unanimous support across all stakeholder groups highlights a receptive environment that can facilitate successful policy adoption at this regional Islamic university.

However, despite favorable attitudes, significant challenges remain evident. The TOEFL prediction test administered to students yielded a low average score of 381, well below common institutional targets. Participants frequently identified listening as the most difficult section due to unclear audio, rapid speech, and time constraints, while reading passages proved demanding because of length, vocabulary load, and loss of focus. Structure and Written Expression problems centered on grammar gaps that often led to guessing strategies. Additional barriers included limited prior exposure to TOEFL materials in the regular curriculum, lack of intensive preparation programs, test anxiety, and insufficient institutional resources.

To overcome these obstacles and ensure more equitable implementation, stakeholders recommended systematic integration of TOEFL tasks into core courses such as Listening, Reading, and English for Specific Purposes. They also suggested regular free prediction tests, extracurricular workshops, early diagnostic assessments, and greater provision of online resources and tailored materials based on students’ proficiency levels. Program administrators emphasized the need for adequate funding, improved infrastructure, and collaborative efforts among lecturers, students, and leadership.

Overall, by addressing the current proficiency gap through targeted, context-sensitive support systems, the TOEFL graduation policy can evolve from a mere requirement into a powerful driver of quality improvement. This approach will help produce competent English teachers capable of meeting both international standards and the practical needs of Indonesia’s multilingual classrooms, ultimately advancing UIN Mataram’s internationalization goals in a fair and sustainable manner.

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