

Student's Learning Strategies During Pandemic To Get a High Score on TOEIC Test

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Abstract

TOEIC is one indicator for mastery of English language skills. SMKN 1 Kadipaten and SMKN 1 Majalengka are two vocational schools that get the opportunity for a free TOEIC test from Ministry of Education and Culture. This research was conducted to find out how students' learning strategies in the pandemic dealing with the TOEIC test to achieve high scores related to learning situations during the pandemic. The study was conducted on the 12th grade students in two vocational schools. Data were obtained from the distribution of questionnaires to students in the two vocational schools, observations and interviews with English teachers. The most of them said they didn't prepare specially for the test (61,9%). For learning strategy they used, just prepare by browse and look at TOEIC tutorial video (24,2%), discuss with a friend (11%), and 6,6% said they did the exercise from the sources that teacher shared. Only 1,6% who got guidance from teacher by WhatsApp chat, 4,9% by direct explanation, 0,5% by zoom/google meet. In conclusion, they used learning strategy by self-study. The lack of guidance from the teachers caused their TOEIC test score to be low. This is also correlated with their low awareness of the benefits of taking the TOEIC test. They said did the test just for experience (51,9%). To improve test results in the future, it is very necessary to have more intensive guidance from teachers and also to growth motivation so that they have the purpose to get the best results.

Keywords: learning strategy; pandemic; TOEIC; score

Article History:

Received 2023-07-28

Revised 2023-10-30

Accepted 2023-11-20

DOI:

10.31949/educatio.v9i4.6294

INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of vocational school graduates continues to receive government attention. The jargon of "SMK Bisa SMK Hebat" continues to be implemented. One of them is by providing TOEIC test facilities to improve students' ability in English. TOEIC (Test Of English for International Communication) is a global standard in the world of international work compiled by institutions or organizations. TOEIC aims to measure students' ability in English from beginner to advanced level. The result score indicates how well a person can communicate in English with others in business, advertising and industry. Moreover, the TOEIC score is internationally recognized as evidence of the ability to speak English to communicate. With a TOEIC score, students who graduate from SMK are more likely to be recruited by companies.

Through the Competency Improvement and Foreign Language Certification program for Vocational High School Students with the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) the Directorate of Vocational High Schools, the Directorate General of Vocational Education, Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia launched the Vocational English Challenge 2021 with the aim of; 1) improve the English language competence of SMK students, 2) provide international standard certification (English language skills) to SMK students and 3) improve the competitiveness of SMK students in facing the global job market. The targets are students in grades X, XI, and XII.

As stated by the Ministry of Education and Culture that TOEIC certification has benefits for students; 1. As a credential for English communication skills in the global work world, 2. increase the confidence and competitiveness of graduates to enter the world of work and further education, 3. Provide added value in students' personal portfolios, 4. Can be used to fulfill any of the following: conditions for applying for a scholarship.

The benefits of TOEIC certification for schools are: (1) As a basis for quality assurance of English language education in schools; (2) As a basis for developing the quality of English language education in schools; and (3) As a benchmark base for English language competence in the global world of work. The TOEIC test is a benchmark for English language skills at school. The TOEIC test not only talks about job performance but also important language skills. TOEIC test tests Listening Skills and Reading Skills. There are 100 questions for listening and reading sessions. In the reading test session, the duration is 75 minutes including 4 sub-tests. While the listening test session takes 45 minutes including 3 sub tests.

Listening test is presented for the first time in the TOEIC test, after that it is only Reading test. The first sub-test is Listening Comprehension with some pictures. Test takers are asked to listen to the statements and choose the correct description based on the picture. The second sub-test is listening to some questions from the audio and answering some questions. Test takers are asked to listen carefully to the questions and choose the correct answer. While the third and fourth sub-tests are listening to brief explanations for several questions. In the third sub-test, the test taker must listen to a short conversation and read the questions. The test taker then selects and reads the possible answers in multiple choice form and chooses the correct one. The fourth sub-test is listening to short conversations. The test takers were asked to listen to some short conversations and answer some questions from the short conversations. Short conversations can be in the form of reports, discussions, announcements or other functional conversations.

Another sub-test is Reading Comprehension. The fifth sub-test is an incomplete sentence and must choose the correct word or phrase. In the sixth sub-test, test takers are faced with error recognition such as identifying words that are not correct. In the seventh sub-test, the test takers face a variety of reading materials including the context of everyday life such as letters, advertisements, notices. The test taker must choose the correct answer based on what is in the text. The two parts of the TOEIC test above, each have rules that must be carried out by test takers. The TOEIC examinee Handbook (1996) states that there are four listening sections and three reading sections that provide a variety of questions.

The pandemic situation that eliminates face-to-face learning opportunities also affects the implementation of the TOEIC. Students are required to have their own learning strategies in dealing with tests without direct guidance from the teacher. Therefore, researchers are interested in knowing how the results of the TOEIC test scores obtained by SMK students are, what learning strategies they use to get high scores in the midst of learning situations during this pandemic with the aim of improving student learning strategies in order to obtain better results in the future.

The Purpose of Research

Based on the background described above, the writers conducted a study to find out how students' learning strategies are in dealing with the TOEIC test in an effort to get a high score, where the pandemic situation requires them to study at home so it is not possible to get direction and debriefing from teachers at school directly. The target of this research is to find out how well the mastery of English by vocational students through the TOEIC test facilitated by the Ministry of Education and Culture is, how are students' efforts to obtain high scores and what learning strategies are carried out by them in learning situations during the pandemic which are not allow them to get direct guidance and teaching from the teacher in the school. The urgency of this research is to provide an overview and improvement material for increasing students' TOEIC scores in the future with all their learning situations. This study has an output target by obtaining an overview of the English language skills of SMK students in Majalengka through the TOEIC test, the learning strategies applied by students and their efforts to obtain high scores in the TOEIC.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. TOEIC Test

Many test takers do not have a clear understanding of the TOEIC test format. Moreover, their understanding is very poor in reading and listening. Tokunaga (2008) found that most test takers had no previous experience in doing the TOEIC test. In line with that, Tian, as quoted by Cohen (2009), reported

that most test takers did not understand the test format and lacked reading and listening skills. Regarding this issue, there are many problems in learning reading and listening in TOEIC.

Listening skill is the ability to listen carefully while answering the questions asked in this listening session. According to Krashen (1985) and Hamouda (2013), "listening ability is an important element in understanding the intended input. Learning will not occur without input." Most students in Indonesia are still unfamiliar with this listening skill, they still face problems internally and externally related to this listening.

Reading is an important part that must be understood by test takers. Reading includes grammar which is quite complicated. According to Saristo (2015), Grammar is the heart of language. This means that grammar is the foundation in language as structure and reading is the key to understanding a language. English test takers must understand the structure and vocabulary associated with the TOEIC test.

Based on this objective, the researcher is interested in knowing the challenges faced by students when taking the TOEIC test and how they overcome problems in the TOEIC test in Vocational High Schools. By knowing the problem, the results of this study can be input for teachers and students of vocational high schools in Majalengka district so that the results of TOEIC scores in the future can be even better.

2. Learning Strategy

The increase in student achievement can be influenced by the suitability between learning styles and teaching strategies (Grace, 2015). In addition, Damrongpanit & Reungtragu (2013) found that different conditions between teachers' teaching styles and students' learning styles showed different achievements. Similarly, in terms of TOEIC score results. Qualified teachers deliver material based on the learning situation in the classroom. This method is very supportive of both student learning styles and teacher teaching styles and results in consistent learning. The problem is, the pandemic situation does not allow face-to-face learning so that student learning strategies are very decisive in achieving the desired high score in the TOEIC test. In 2013, Prof John Dunlosky reviewed dozens of academic papers and rated commonly used learning strategies from the least to the most evidence-based. They are: 1) Practice testing, 2) Distributed practice, 3) Interleaved practice, 4) Elaborative interrogation, 5) Self-explanation, 6) Rereading, 7) Highlighting, 8) Summarisation, 9) Keyword mnemonic, 10) Imagery for text.

This technique consists of developing internal images that elaborate on the material being studied. Dunlosky's research showed that the benefits of mental imagery are short-lived. The strategy also does not seem to be widely applicable.

In facing TOEIC test, students apply some of learning strategies according to their interest and creativity because of pandemic situation not allowed them to get teaching and directions from the teacher in the classroom.

This study is intended to answer the questions: 1) how are the results of the TOEIC test scores of vocational high school students in Majalengka district?, 2) What are the learning strategies they use in an effort to achieve high scores while the learning situation during the pandemic does not allow them to do face-to-face meetings? 3) What solutions can be taken to improve students' TOEIC scores in the future? As explained above, the increase in student achievement can be influenced by the suitability between learning styles and teaching strategies (Grace, 2015). So that this research is expected to provide input for improving student learning strategies so that their test results also increase.

METHODS

This qualitative study follows an exploratory interpretive paradigm to understand the perceptions of TOEIC test takers and to explore their learning strategies in preparation for the TOEIC test with all the situations they face in learning during a pandemic that does not provide space for face-to-face learning. This means that they are required to be more independent and creative in implementing learning strategies in their efforts to achieve high scores on the TOEIC test. This study was used qualitatively to complete the description of the TOEIC test ability of vocational high school students in Majalengka district. In addition,

this study is also intended to identify learning strategies applied by students in facing the TOEIC test. These findings are based on three research questions.

The TOEIC test in SMKN 1 Majalengka and SMKN 1 Kadipaten was carried out in two steps. The first step was carried out on all students of class XII. The second step was carried out on a number of students whose TOEIC test scores in the first step met the minimum threshold. From the previous data obtained, at SMKN 1 Kadipaten the success rate of students in taking the TOEIC test was only 42 students out of 450 students or only around 9.3%. While at SMKN 1 Majalengka who passed the first stage of selection, 26 students out of 100 students took the TOEIC test or 26%.

From all of students who participated in TOEIC test, it was taken out a number of sample. The sample were selected at random from both of vocational schools.

There were 182 students involved in this study. They are class XII in the first semester with different majors. The majors are Software Engineering (RPL), Computer Network Engineering (TKJ), Marketing Online Business (BDP), Office Automation and Governance (OTKP), Islamic Banking (PBS), Mechanical Engineering (TPM), Electrical Engineering (TIPL), Building Drawing Engineering (TGB), Motorcycle Engineering (TSM), Light Vehicle Engineering (TKR).

The research instruments were questionnaires, observations and interviews. The questionnaire consists of 5 parts, namely: 1) Students' experiences in the TOEIC Test, 2) Preparation/Student Learning Strategies in the TOEIC Test, 3) Listening Skills Questions, 4) Reading Skills Questions, 5) Students' Opinions about Preparation in the TOEIC Test. Interview has 1 to 9 questions (flexibility to ask).

Questionnaires were distributed to the participants after they had conducted the first VIERA selection test on June 12, 2021 and the TOEIC test on August 18, 2021. They were asked to answer questions based on their experiences and feelings. Administration of the questionnaires took 5 – 10 minutes each. After everything was done, some students were brought in to be interviewed about the TOEIC Test. Questionnaires were used to support the data collection of this research. Supporting data was obtained by collecting data through questionnaires. Questionnaires were carried out in two ways, namely by distributing questionnaire sheets and filling out directly/manually and also using a google form. After the data was collected, the data were analyzed and compared with the results of the interviews.

Beside from interviews and questionnaires, data were also obtained from documents contained in schools in the form of the VIERA test and TOEIC test scores that had been carried out. The TOEIC score results in the form of data released from the Ministry of Education and Culture, namely the results of the first stage of VIERA selection which involved all students taking the TOEIC test and the second in the form of TOEIC scores from students who passed the first stage of selection which had been issued in the form of a certificate. The collected data is then analyzed to draw conclusions/results.

The conclusions / results of this study are in the form of an overview of the level of ability of vocational high school students in Majalengka district in English skills, namely through TOEIC test scores, descriptions of student learning strategies in preparation for the TOEIC test in their efforts to obtain high scores and also solutions to problems faced by students as long as they apply learning strategies during this pandemic so that in the future the results of the TOEIC test scores of SMK students in Majalengka district can increase further.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How are the results of the TOEIC test scores of vocational high school students in Majalengka district?

The students who participated in this study were dominated by female students, 161 students, while there were only 21 male students.

Table 1. The Respondents

No.	Sex	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1	Male	21	11,54%
2	Female	161	88,46%

The success rate of students passing the TOEIC pre-selection test is very low. 26% of SMKN 1 Majalengka students and only 9.3% students of SMKN 1 Kadipaten managed to pass to the second stage and get a certificate. The score they get is in the range of 305-465. Only one student get a score of 635.

From the results of the research, it can be described as follow.

1. Did you set a target score that you must get before taking the TOEIC test?

For the first item which asks whether students first set a target score that must be achieved or not, 108 students (60,3%) stated that they did not set a target score and only 71 students (39,7%) stated that they set a target score before carrying out the test.

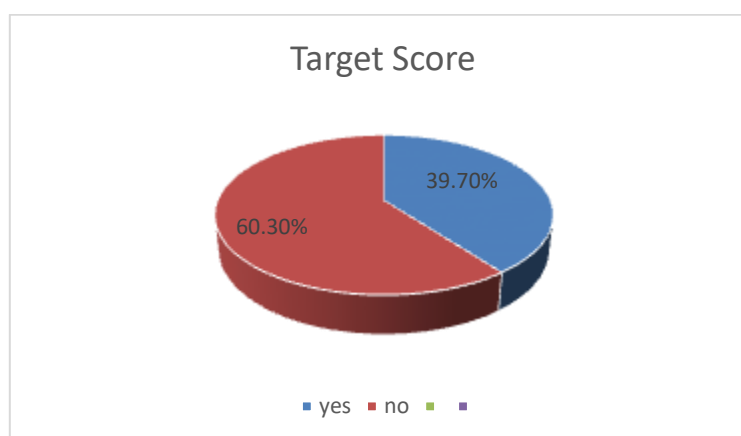


Figure 1. Students set the target score

2. Did you prepare yourself intensively for the TOEIC test?

15 students (8,3%) stated that they did not prepare specifically for the implementation of the test, 54 students (29,8%) stated that they had special preparation and most of the them, 112 students (61,9%) mentioned they only had basic preparation.

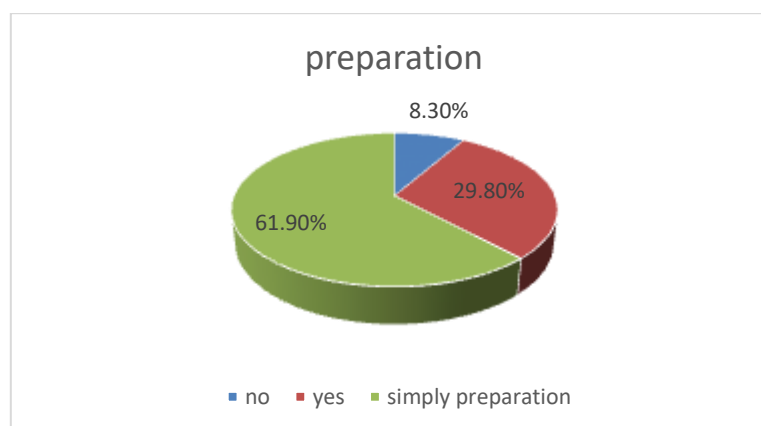


Figure 2. Student's preparation

What are the learning strategies they use in an effort to achieve high scores while the learning situation during the pandemic does not allow them to do face-to-face meetings?

1) About the learning strategies they used, 20 students (11%) answered they learned by discussion with friends, watch tutorials video (24.2%), browsed and did exercises on the internet (24.2%), did not prepare specifically (21.4%) , doing exercises from sources shared by teachers (6.6%), consulting or getting guidance from teachers via WhatsApp chats (1.6%), getting TOEIC material from direct explanations by teachers (4.9%), getting explanations from teachers via zoom or google meet (0.5%), others (2.7%), consult the teacher directly (2.7%)

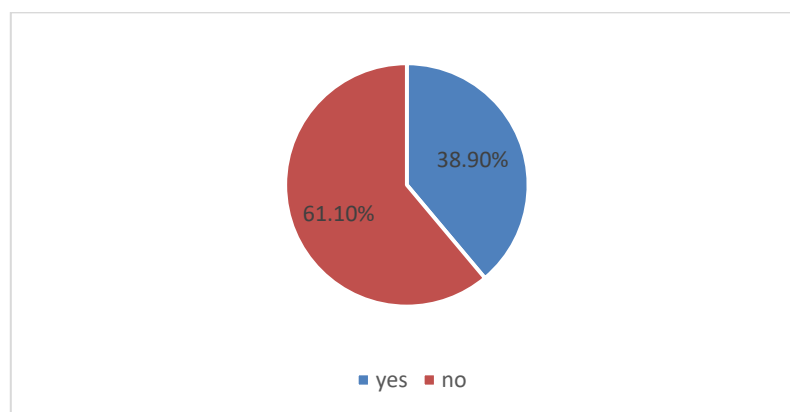
Table 2. Learning Strategy

No.	Learning Strategy	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1	Look at video tutorial	44	24,2
2	Browsing and doing exercises on the internet	44	24,2
3	Not specially prepared	39	21,4
4	Discuss with a friend	20	11
5	Doing exercises from sources that shared by teacher	12	6,6
6	Consult or get guidance from teacher via WhatsApp	3	1,6
7	Obtain TOEIC material from direct explanations by the teacher	9	4,9
8	Get an explanation from teacher via zoom or google meet	1	0,5
9	Consult to the teacher directly	5	2,7
10	Others	5	2,7

What solutions can be taken to improve students' TOEIC scores in the future?

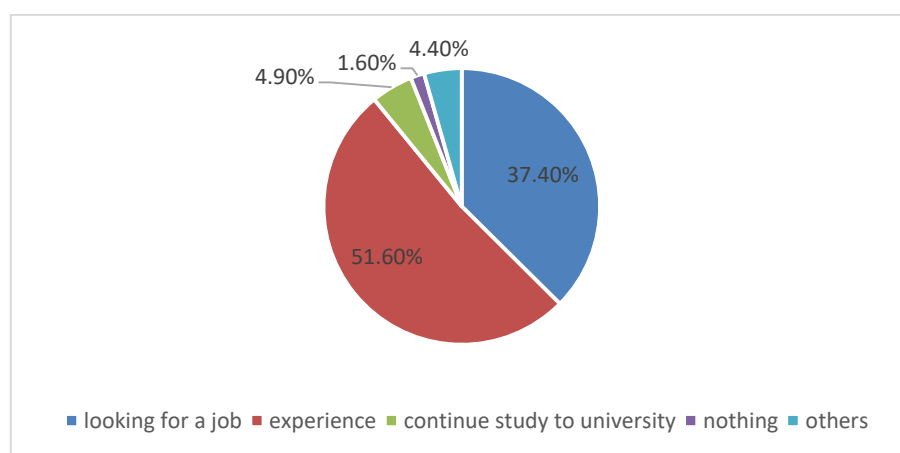
1) Are you satisfied with the score obtained?

Regarding the test scores obtained, 38.9% said they were satisfied, the remaining 61.1% said they were not satisfied.

**Figure 3.** Student's satisfaction

2) The benefits of TOEIC according to students' perceptions.

The most students (51.6%) answered for experience only, 37.4% for looking for a job, 9 students (4.9%) answered for the sake of continuing their studies to college, 3 students (1.6%) answered no benefits, others 8 (4.4%).

**Figure 4.** The benefit of TOEIC Test according to student's perception.

CONCLUSION

The success rate of students in taking the TOEIC test is very low. The pandemic situation that does not allow face-to-face learning is very influential. The low success of students and the low scores they get are inseparable from the pandemic factor so that they learn on their own about TOEIC.

The most of them said they didn't prepare specially for the test. For learning strategy they used, just prepare by browse and look at TOEIC tutorial video and discuss with a friend. The percentage of students who stated that they received direction from the teacher either directly or via WhatsApp chat was very small.

In conclusion, they used learning strategy by self-study. Lack of interaction with teachers also resulted in their low motivation. So that from the results of this study it can be seen that direct guidance by teachers is still an effective way to improve TOEIC test results and also increase their motivation. The lack of guidance from the teachers caused their TOEIC test score to be low. This is also correlated with their low awareness of the benefits of taking the TOEIC test. They said did the test just for experience. To improve test results in the future, it is very necessary to have more intensive guidance from teachers and also to growth motivation so that they have the purpose to get the best results.

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