

## ASSESSING STUDENTS' ENGLISH AND DIGITAL LITERACY SKILLS THROUGH TOEFL AND DLQ

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### Abstract

Students are expected to have English language skills and digital literacy in the 21st century. These two capabilities are closely related to cope with current technological developments. This research aims to describe student responses to the TOEFL and DLQ process, explain the TOEFL and DLQ test results, and assess the accuracy of TOEFL and DLQ in assessing students' English language and digital literacy skills. The method used is a case study through direct observation. The results show that students respond positively to the TOEFL and DLQ processes and have good English language and digital literacy skills according to specific criteria. TOEFL and DLQ are appropriate for assessing students' English language and digital literacy skills. These results will motivate teachers to apply TOEFL and DLQ in assessing students' English and digital literacy skills.

**Keywords – Digital Literacy, DLQ, English, TOEFL, Twenty-First Century**

### Introduction

Language learning and teaching fields have been intricately linked with technological progress. Technology has significantly improved language acquisition and assessment, from audiovisual aids to the current era of immersive digital encounters (Zhang et al., 2023). Stanley (2013) also previously examined this progression, emphasizing significant landmarks such as implementing language labs, multimedia materials, and the transition to interactive online platforms. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the historical backdrop is essential for fully grasping the importance of technology in contemporary language instruction.

Stanley offers a thorough manual on the pragmatic procedures for successfully using

technology in language instruction. The process involves choosing suitable digital tools, creating interactive online tasks, and promoting collaborative learning environments. It gives educators the necessary skills and strategies to effectively incorporate technology into their language classrooms by highlighting the significance of connecting technology with pedagogical objectives (Theodorio, 2024; Zhang, 2022). This systematic method guarantees that technology becomes a valuable and meaningful language-learning resource.

Technology is gaining greater significance in the twenty-first century. Twenty-first-century talents refer to skills anticipated to be highly significant in the future (Hilt et al., 2019). It is impossible to predict the nature of talent 20 years from now due to the rapid evolution of

technology and the annual fluctuations in the types and trends of abilities. In order to address the skill requirements of the modern day, it is uncertain what challenges students will encounter or the specific occupations they will require upon entering the workforce of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Purwanto et al., 2023). Proficiency varies according to the circumstances and encompasses multiple components. Proficiency in twenty-first-century abilities is essential for individuals to thrive in modern education and professional environments, enabling them to excel as students, employees, and individuals. As skills become increasingly common in education and the industry, the anticipated standards of proficiency are projected to evolve fast (Griffin & Care, 2015). The goal is to equip students with the necessary skills to use their knowledge and abilities effectively. In the 21st century, talents focus on effectively understanding, distributing, and using abundant, easily accessible information (Nurhidayat et al., 2024). The curriculum places a high importance on project-based, inquiry-based, and experiential learning to assist students in cultivating these skills. Proficiency in specific skills, such as English, is insufficient without also possessing technology skills.

Previously, teaching and assessing English was mainly about grammar, spelling, and vocabulary in a traditional way. The focus was often on memorizing and learning by rote. Nevertheless, there has been a shift towards a more communicative and interactive approach in the technological era (Farmasari, 2021; Fadilah et al., 2023). The focus is on developing the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening through authentic materials and real-life situations. Focusing on cultural awareness and sensitivity is another significant change in language teaching and assessment. It helps students learn how to interact well with people

from different backgrounds and cultures using I.T.

The concept of digital literacy has been evolving recently. Digital literacy is an umbrella term for many technologies (Tinmaz et al., 2022). How the concepts are used and defined remains unclear (Spante et al., 2018). To guarantee that all students can benefit from this learning mode, we propose that the teachers learn the knowledge and skills related to digital literacies (Yuan et al., 2019). There were inconsistencies in acquiring the skills to teach digital literacy practices within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a public setting (García-Montes et al., 2022). The recent research underscores digital literacy's dynamic nature, emphasizing the technological landscape's continuous evolution. This understanding is essential to cultivate comprehensive views and effective implementation of digital literacies for the benefit of all students.

Research on assessing English competence in Indonesia consistently demonstrates a continual upward trend. Renandya et al. (2018) examined the challenges and potential for improving English language skills in Indonesia. Raharjo (2020) evaluated the level of English proficiency in Indonesian higher education institutions by utilizing the TOEFL as a standardized test. Assessing one's level of English proficiency using examinations such as the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) can be a dependable and accurate method. This examination comprises three distinct sections: the auditory comprehension section, the grammatical structure section, and the textual comprehension component. The listening phase will consist of fifty questions and will require around thirty-five minutes to finish. The structure and written expression component will have forty questions and is expected to require around twenty-five minutes. The reading comprehension portion

will consist of fifty questions and will require around fifty minutes to complete.

Assessing students' English and digital literacy skills is being conducted collectively in a subject, thus making this gap even more visible. As English literature students (as the subject of this research), technological developments also require us to update their digital literacy skills. Therefore, this research adopts previous research in its implementation and administrative techniques. For example, the researchers adopted the digital literacy instrument called DLQ (Digital Literacy Questionnaire) from Son et al. (2017) to learn how to improve students' digital literacy. Of course, some things need to be replaced according to the needs of the research topic or current conditions since technology development is rapid. Mostly, digital tools do not last forever. Digital literacy can quickly change because of new technologies and the way people communicate online (Cote & Milliner, 2018). However, further research is required to understand better how assessing students' English and digital literacy skills influences students' English proficiency and digital literacy. While research on the assessment has aided teachers in comprehending the evaluation of students' digital literacy skills, the anticipation is that it will enhance the approach for upcoming research.

From the literature above, it can be concluded that TOEFL and DLQ are needed to assess students' English language and digital literacy skills. This study aims to answer these needs as a novelty. This research aims to describe students' responses to the TOEFL and DLQ

process, explain the results of the TOEFL and DLQ tests, and assess the TOEFL and DLQ assessments in assessing students' English language and digital literacy skills.

### **Methodology**

The method used is a case study through direct observation. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews given in class. Respondents were 30 6th-semester students of the English Literature study program at a private university in Central Java.

The questionnaire is specifically tailored for the classroom setting and seeks to ascertain students' perspectives on the TOEFL and DLQ. The measure employed is a 5-point Likert scale that spans from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This questionnaire aims to collect students' feedback on the impact of TOEFL and DLQ on their lives. It draws inspiration from the work of Cote and Milliner (2018). The questionnaire from Cote and Milner is utilised due to its alignment to gather insights from participants regarding digital literacy in the EFL context. In addition to the questionnaire data, the researchers performed an interview to assess how the TOEFL and DLQ could effectively measure their talents. The researchers chose 4 volunteers to take part in the interview process.

### **Finding and Discussion**

The following are the results of the questionnaire given to students.

Table 1. TOEFL for assessing English skills

No	Students' perception of TOEFL for assessing English skills	S.D.	D	N	A	SA
1	I think TOEFL can assess students' English proficiency.	0	2	3	5	20
2	I like the TOEFL test process.	1	6	8	14	1
3	I think TOEFL measures someone's English skills better than the other standardized tests or assessments.	0	2	9	18	1
4	I have gained a lot of experience and knowledge from TOEFL. It influences my learning journey.	0	1	7	10	12

**Notes:** S.D. (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree), S.A. (Strongly Agree)

Based on Table 1, 20 participants strongly agreed that TOEFL could measure students' English skills. It aligns with what has been done in various agencies (Hutabarat, 2023; Basnia, 2024). TOEFL is still necessary in assessing students' English language skills today.

The second perception is also related to the TOEFL process. In addition, 14 students agreed that they liked the TOEFL process. This finding aligns with (Dewi et al., 2015; and Maharani & Putro, 2021). It is basically due to the test structure, which does not take longer than other informal tests.

The third perception emphasizes how the TOEFL is better than other standardized tests. It is also discussed in the other studies from Suryaningsih (2014) and Sadeghi and Mede (2021), where there is some good washback effect of TOEFL compared with IELTS and other English Proficiency exams. It has been proven by 18 students who agree with it. This answer is still reasonable because the TOEFL test is more affordable and practical.

The fourth perception also focuses on how TOEFL influences their learning journey. They gain experience from the TOEFL process and extensive knowledge from several question items they work on. In this case, as many as 12 students strongly agreed.

Table 2. DLQ for assessing Digital Literacy skills

No	Students' perception of DLQ for assessing digital literacy skills	S.D.	D	N	A	SA
1	I think DLQ can assess students' digital literacy skills.	0	2	2	11	15
2	I like the process of conducting the DLQ test.	0	0	1	10	19
3	I think DLQ measures someone's DLQ better than the other tests or assessments.	0	0	4	9	17
4	I have gained a lot of experience and knowledge from DLQ. It influences my learning journey.	0	0	3	12	15

**Notes:** S.D. (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree), S.A. (Strongly Agree)

Based on Table 2, 15 participants strongly agreed that DLQ could measure students' digital literacy skills. DLQ is usually done

with a performance test, but the DLQ they get consists of 40 question items that reflect their digital literacy skills. Even though DLQ is not

yet widespread and needs much, digital literacy skills must be applied, considering we are now in the 21st century with highly developed technology (Hockly & Pegrum, 2014).

The second perception is also related to the DLQ work process. Additionally, 19 students strongly agreed that they liked the DLQ process. It is basically due to the structure of the test, which does not take as long as other performance tests.

The third perception then emphasizes how the DLQ is better than other tests. It was proven by 17 students who agreed with it. This answer is still reasonable because students rarely or have never encountered other DLQ tests.

The fourth perception also focused on how DLQ influenced their learning journey. They gain experience from the DLQ process and extensive knowledge from several question items worked on. Moreover, 21st-century digital skills will be helpful for them in the future (van Laar et al., 2020; Spires et al., 2019). In this case, as many as 15 students strongly agreed.

Students' responses to the questionnaire show their enthusiasm for the TOEFL and DLQ process. It aligns with Erwansyah et al. (2019), where EFL students have to master digital literacy to fulfil the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. Based on the objectives of assessing English language skills and digital literacy, these two abilities can be benchmarks for students facing 21st-century life.

The interviews with students after the assessment revealed perceptions of students who had completed the questionnaire results. For interview results from 8 students, 3 interview results that are considered different will be displayed here. Note: **Q**=Question, **S**=Student's Response.

Table 3. Interview: Questions 1 & 2 and The Responses.

<b>Q1.</b> "Why do you think TOEFL can assess English proficiency?"
<b>S1.</b> "Yes, because it helps people accurately assess their English ability level. TOEFL contains listening tests, reading tests, writing tests, and speaking tests that are considered trustworthy for determining individuals' competency in English."
<b>S2.</b> "Not really, because participating in the TOEFL test does not mean you can speak or understand English fluently. Many people with good English skills are not taking a TOEFL test."
<b>S3.</b> "Yes, because by studying TOEFL, we can know the levels of English we are both in listening, reading and structure."
<b>Q2.</b> "Why do you think that DLQ can assess digital literacy?"
<b>S1.</b> "Yes, because DLQ helps people to measure people's ability to use technology."
<b>S2.</b> "Yes, because it can evaluate individual ability to navigate and understand digital technologies."
<b>S3.</b> "The DLQ can measure digital literacy skills because it uses structured evaluations, quantitative data, scalability, etc."

The interview results above show that students have different views about TOEFL and DLQ. In Table 3, students generally agree with how TOEFL can measure a person's English language skills. Only a few students (2 out of 28 disagree) with this opinion. They think many people's English skills can be seen without being measured using TOEFL. It was also found in student 2, who had this opinion. In contrast to the DLQ results, where the majority answered in the affirmative, it can reflect the digital literacy test takers' abilities (Maharani et al., 2023; Parmini et al., 2023).

Table 4. Interview: Questions 3 & 4 and The Responses.

<b>Q3.</b> "Please share your experience and insights from TOEFL & DLQ."
<b>S1.</b> "In TOEFL, especially in reading comprehension, sometimes there are some contexts that I find hard to understand, which affects my comprehension. In DLQ, there are still many terms and shortcuts that I am not familiar with."
<b>S2.</b> "The listening test was difficult because I had no idea what the speaker was saying."
<b>S3.</b> "I took the TOEFL online to take it anytime and anywhere, and the test was done according to schedule. Yes, the DLQ test is good, but there are not many tests like this."
<b>Q4.</b> "Based on your opinion, how have TOEFL and DLQ influenced your learning journey?"
<b>S1.</b> "It helps me to keep learning and improving my English. TOEFL helps me to measure my English ability in each element while DLQ helps me to measure my knowledge in using technology."
<b>S2.</b> "I cannot say many words. However, it is constructive."
<b>S3.</b> "With TOEFL and DLQ, we can measure the level of our language ability, not only in writing but also in how well we know digital technology."

In Table 4, students have impressions regarding the implementation of TOEFL and DLQ. They believe TOEFL provides them with experience and knowledge (Suryani, 2021), such as the TOEFL and DLQ tests (Husna, 2023; Budianto, 2023), which can be done online. Some complained about question items that were considered problematic in the TOEFL text but still considered reasonable, as with items in DLQ. These problematic questions reflect that the student is not yet proficient or familiar with the context. Therefore, students feel the assessment instrument is necessary and influences their learning journey.

Table 5. Interview: Question 5 and the responses.

<b>Q5.</b> "Please give your thoughts on the TOEFL and DLQ assessments to measure one's English and digital literacy ability. What (additional/media/supporting materials) should be kept the most?"
<b>S1.</b> "The assessment of TOEFL and DLQ helps people learn and measure their English ability and knowledge of recent technology. I think that English learning websites or apps, digital dictionaries, digital translation tools, digital paraphrasing tools, and artificial intelligence. should be kept in modern technology. Those tools are the most useful in learning English and developing ideas."
<b>S2.</b> "I think learning from the internet can boost our skills more."
<b>S3.</b> "It could be added to the slang vocabulary in the TOEFL test. It needs to be developed for DLQ."

In Table 5, the questions shown are what needs to be added to the TOEFL and DLQ. TOEFL is considered to be reliable and valid as assessment material (Dalimunte et al., 2023). Meanwhile, for DLQ, several things always need to be updated, considering technological developments. The latest language and A.I. dictionaries must be included in the question items so that they are always up to date rather than challenging for test takers, in contrast to TOEFL, which focuses more on language and does not change easily despite developments over time.

Their average TOEFL score is 465 (68.7%), and the results are still categorized as adequate or good enough. In line with that, DLQ, which was carried out at a similar time, produced sufficient results with a percentage of 69.1%. From the data sorting carried out, students assessed that the scores described their abilities. In addition, the TOEFL is a paper-based test carried out by the relevant campus management institution. The question material is taken from accurate and relevant

sources whose reliability and validity are beyond doubt. Meanwhile, DLQ has been reviewed and verified by experts in the field. The findings show that students respond positively to the TOEFL and DLQ processes and have good English language and digital literacy skills according to specific criteria.

English language skills and digital literacy should be paired together, considering that students have entered the 21st century. These two abilities complement each other. Language lessons focusing only on ancient literature and conventional linguistics must be developed to suit market tastes. Therefore, testing of these abilities needs to be given in order to prepare English graduates who are technologically literate. TOEFL and DLQ instruments are considered practical and reliable for students to work on. By working on these questions, students can self-reflect on the skills they already have regarding English and digital literacy.

### Conclusions

Both TOEFL and DLQ are considered practical and reliable instruments for assessing students' English language and digital literacy skills. Given the importance of these skills in the 21st century, it is suggested that English language education should adapt to include digital literacy components. This approach prepares English graduates to be technologically literate, aligning with market demands. The findings support the use of TOEFL and DLQ in assessing students' English and digital literacy skills, thereby motivating teachers to incorporate these assessments into their educational practices.

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