

# An Analysis of TOEIC Learners and Recommendations for Better English Instruction in Japanese Universities: From the Joint Perspectives of Japanese and Native-Speaker English Instructors

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the findings from the 2007 TOEIC-preparation program hosted by Kyushu University Career Support Division with the support of the Faculty of Languages & Cultures, based on the perspectives of three Japanese English instructors and two native-speaker English instructors. To propose further refinements of the courses and improve faculty development, this paper covers five topics: (1) a review of the whole program and data analysis based on the test scores; (2) possibilities of a TOEIC program as ESP for graduate students and researchers; (3) an error analysis and its implications; (4) the instructor's roles for an advanced course courses and proposals; (5) a native-speaker English instructor's view toward test preparation.

## **Introduction**

Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is administered in 90 countries, and over 5 million people take the test every year (ETS, 2009d). In Japan, the number of TOEIC test takers is increasing each year, reaching 1,718,000 in 2008 (ETS, 2009b). There are two versions of TOEIC. TOEIC SP (Secure Program) is administered by the TOEIC Steering Committee, and TOEIC IP (Institutional Program) is administered by schools or companies to which test takers belong. For university students, TOEIC is becoming increasingly important for finding a job or entering graduate schools, and 489 universities conducted TOEIC IP in 2008 (ETS, 2009b). According to a report by ETS (2009a), 51.9% of 553 companies surveyed answered that they consider job applicants' TOEIC

scores when making hiring decisions, and 22.2% answered that they would like to start doing so in the future. ETS (2009c) also reports that 149 of 600 private and public graduate schools use TOEIC scores instead of or in addition to their entrance examinations.

To meet students' needs to improve their TOEIC scores, many universities now offer TOEIC preparation classes. However, there is a little research done on the effects of such courses. Robb & Ercanbrack (1999) studied gains on TOEIC test scores among English major and non-English major Japanese university students who studied in three different types of English classes: general (4 skills) English, business English and TOEIC preparations. They concluded that direct TOEIC instruction had little impact on English major students who studied comprehensive English program, while it had a significant positive effect on non-English major students' reading scores. Nishitani (2007) conducted a small-scale research on the effect of TOEIC preparation classes and communicative grammar classes on sentence completion sections (part 5 and part 6) of the TOEIC test. She found that students who were in the TOEIC preparation class performed significantly better than the other group in the post test.

This paper discusses the findings from the 10-week TOEIC-preparation program hosted by Kyushu University Career Support Division with support of the Faculty of Languages & Cultures in October through December, 2007. This program was a not-for-credit extracurricular course separate from the regular curriculum. There were seven different courses offered: 3 classes aiming for a score of 600, 2 classes aiming for 700, 1 class aiming for 800, and 1 class titled "English for Career Development." These courses were taught by one of the three Japanese English instructors and two native English speaker instructors who are the authors of this paper. The participants were 129 Kyushu University students in different years and majors, and they chose a course according to what they felt were the appropriate level for themselves and their schedules.

## **1. Effect of short-term TOEIC preparation program at Kyushu University** (TOKUNAGA, Miki)

This section of the paper reports on the results of the 10-week TOEIC preparation program. The participants of the program took TOEIC IP in October, attended 10 weeks of weekly 120 minute classes, then took another TOEIC IP in December.

### **Subjects**

A total of 129 students participated in the program, but this section of the paper considers 78 who took both TOEIC IP tests in October and December. Program participants who took only one test in October or December were removed from the analysis. The subjects' test scores were compared with the scores of other Kyushu University students who did not participate in the program but took one or both of the TOEIC IP tests. These subjects were assumed to constitute a random sample of Kyushu University students, thus allowing comparison of the test forms. There were 65 in October and 169 in December of such students.

### **Results and analysis**

Table 1.1 shows the results of TOEIC IP tests in October and December. After the 10-week

program, the average total score of the subjects increased by 91 points. While the average scores in October were very similar between the subjects (532) and the others (536), the average score of the subjects in December (623) is much higher than that of the others (570).

**Table 1.1 TOEIC IP Results**

	Max.	Min.	Average		
			Listening	Reading	Total
October Others (N=65)	915	270	285	251	536
October Subjects (N=78)	845	240	273	259	532
December Others (N=169)	940	310	302	267	570
December Subjects (N=78)	890	355	333	291	623

Table 1.2 shows the t-test results for the October TOEIC IP. In October, no significant differences were found between the subjects and the others in Reading ( $p=.355 > .05$ ), Listening ( $p=.516 > .05$ ) or Total ( $p=.881 > .05$ ) of the TOEIC IP scores. In December (Table 1.3), however, significant differences were found in all parts of the TOEIC IP scores (Listening  $p=.001$ , Reading  $p=.014$ , Total  $p=.002 < .05$ ).

**Table 1.2 T-test results of TOEIC IP test in October**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of Difference	
								Lower	Upper
L Equal variances assumed	2.042	.155	-.929	141	.355	-11.026	11.871	-34.494	12.443
Equal variances not assumed			-.922	132.131	.358	-11.026	11.954	-34.672	12.621
R Equal variances assumed	.078	.781	.651	141	.516	7.731	11.877	-15.749	31.210
Equal variances not assumed			.652	136.915	.516	7.731	11.865	-15.731	31.192
T Equal variances assumed	.426	.515	-.150	141	.881	-3.295	22.005	-46.797	40.207
Equal variances not assumed			-.149	133.831	.882	-3.295	22.101	-47.008	40.419

**Table 1.3 T-test results of TOEIC IP test in December**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of Difference	
								Lower	Upper
L Equal variances assumed	.647	.422	3.355	245	.001	30.222	9.008	12.478	47.965
Equal variances not assumed			3.411	156.091	.001	30.222	8.861	12.719	47.725
R Equal variances assumed	3.732	.055	2.488	245	.014	23.471	9.435	4.887	42.055
Equal variances not assumed			2.366	133.070	.019	23.471	9.921	3.848	43.095
T Equal variances assumed	.194	.660	3.106	245	.002	53.693	17.285	19.647	87.739
Equal variances not assumed			3.056	144.009	.003	53.693	17.570	18.694	88.423

Table 1.4 and 1.5 show the t-test results comparing the October and December TOEIC IP scores within each group. While the subjects (Table 1.4) showed a significant difference in all parts of the scores (Listening  $p=.000$ , Reading  $p=.007$ , Total  $p=.000 < .05$ ), significant differences were not found in the scores of test takers who did not participate in the program (Table 1.5) (Listening  $p=.073$ , Reading  $p=.101$ , Total  $p=.067 > .05$ ). Although the results are bordering on significance and do not rule out equating error between the test forms contributing to score gains, the meaningfully larger and statistically significant gains by the target group support the hypothesis that participating in the program contributed to the improved scores of the subjects.

**Table 1.4 T-test results of October and December TOEIC IP test of the subjects**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of Difference	
								Lower	Upper
L Equal variances assumed	.003	.989	-5.608	154	.000	-59.295	10.573	-80.182	-38.407
Equal variances not assumed			-5.608	153.325	.000	-59.295	10.573	-80.183	-38.407
R Equal variances assumed	.558	.456	-2.716	154	.007	-31.859	11.731	-55.033	-8.685
Equal variances not assumed			-2.716	153.472	.007	-31.859	11.731	-55.034	-8.684
T Equal variances assumed	.331	.566	-4.409	154	.000	-91.154	20.676	-132.000	-50.308
Equal variances not assumed			-4.409	153.964	.000	-91.154	20.676	-132.000	-50.308

**Table 1.5 T-test results of October and December TOEIC IP test of non-subjects**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of Difference	
								Lower	Upper
L Equal variances assumed	1.306	.254	-1.801	232	.073	-18.047	10.023	-37.795	1.700
Equal variances not assumed			-1.724	106.793	.088	-18.047	10.470	-38.804	2.709
R Equal variances assumed	.419	.518	-1.647	232	.101	-16.118	9.784	-35.396	3.159
Equal variances not assumed			-1.599	109.614	.113	-16.118	10.079	-36.093	3.857
T Equal variances assumed	.310	.578	-1.839	232	.067	-34.166	18.579	-70.771	2.439
Equal variances not assumed			-1.777	108.668	.078	-34.166	19.227	-72.275	3.943

To understand the subjects' score gains at the individual level, as opposed to the group level, it is necessary to consider the standard error of difference (SEdiff) of the TOEIC test. According to the TOEIC Technical Manual (ETS, n.d.), the standard error of difference for both Listening and Reading sections is 35 points, and if an individual's score increases or decreases more than 35 points ( $\pm 1$  SEdiff), there is a 68% probability that the score has changed. The manual also states that, the minimum score change required to for 95% probability of change is 69 points ( $\pm 1.96$  SEdiff).

Looking at individual score changes, there were 25 subjects whose Listening scores increased more than 35 points (but less than 69 points), and 32 subjects whose Listening scores increased more than 69 points. Thus, the Listening scores of 57 subjects (73.1%) improved with 68~95% probability, and these individuals can claim to have improved by amounts unlikely to be due to chance. For the Reading section, 23 subjects had the increase of between 35 points and 69 points, and 14 had the increase of more than 69. Thus, there were only 37 subjects (47.4%) whose Reading scores improved with 68~95% probability. This supports the view that the program had an effect on more students on the Listening section than on the Reading section.

In general, the average score of the Listening section of the TOEIC test is higher than the Reading section. According to ETS's data (2008), the average scores of TOEIC SP tests in 2007 is 51 points higher in the Listening section than the Reading section, and the difference is 55 points in the same year's TOEIC IP tests (Table 1.6). Looking at the October TOEIC IP results at Kyushu University, the difference between the average Listening and Reading scores for the subjects is only 14, and 34 for the other test takers. Thus, both groups at Kyushu University had much smaller differences than the national averages, indicating that their Listening scores are low in comparison to their Reading scores. In December, however, the difference in averages increased to 42 points for the subjects, while it stayed almost the same (35 points) for the others. The subjects' score balance became closer to the national average after participating in the program.

**Table 1.6 Differences in Listening and Reading scores**

	Average Scores			
	Listening	Reading	Total	Listening – Reading
Subjects in October (n=78)	273	259	532	14
Subjects in December (n=78)	333	291	623	42
The others in October (n=65)	285	251	536	34
The others in December (n=169)	302	267	570	35
TOEIC SP's in 2007 (n=596,630)	315	264	579	51
TOEIC IP's in 2007 (n=915,298)	251	196	447	55

## Conclusion

After the 10-week TOEIC preparation program, the average TOEIC score of the subjects increased by 91 points, and the increase in the Listening section (60 points) was meaningfully bigger than that of the Reading section (32 points). It is reported that improving TOEIC scores by 100 points requires approximately 200 hours of studying (Saegusa, cited in Trew, 2006). As participants in the program signed up for the program in addition to their regular coursework, it is unlikely that they spent 200 hours studying English during the 10 weeks. Thus, the score gain in this case suggests gains in the subjects' proficiency, test familiarity, and test taking strategies. Since Kyushu University is a prestigious public university, it can be assumed that the subjects had strong background in grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension questions which are similar to what they had studied in the past for school tests and entrance examinations, while they had less experience dealing with listening questions. It is possible that, through participating in the TOEIC preparation program, the subjects had the opportunity to practice listening in different ways than they had done in the past, and that contributed to the big increase in their listening scores. With the much bigger increase in the Listening section, their average scores became closer to the national norm. Also, since Listening sections on TOEIC do not allow note taking, test taking strategies such as reading the questions ahead are very important. Since it seems unlikely that the subjects' actual listening ability increased greatly in the 10-week program, learning the test taking skills seemed to have played a role in the score increase. The participants' English proficiency was high to start with, and the TOEIC-specific instructions and practices during the 10-week program helped them reflect their ability better on the test.

## 2. Possibilities of TOEIC Program for Graduate Students and Junior Researchers (TSUDA, Akiko)

The aim of this section is to present the author's recommendations on considering possibilities for TOEIC programs for graduate students and junior researchers. The author was in charge of English for Career Development Course, using TOEIC materials. As the program was organized by the Kyushu University Career Support Division, the author had expected to teach Japanese undergraduate students with homogeneous foreign language skills and intercultural experiences who were preparing to enter the job market in the near future and designed the syllabus to focus on career development especially for Japanese undergraduates. The author specifically prepared materials for their job

interviews, resume writing, and simulations of intercultural communication in office settings. Contrary to the assumptions, two Japanese undergraduates, two Japanese graduate students, one Chinese graduate student, and one Taiwanese graduate student registered for the course. Their English learning experiences, proficiencies, and intercultural experiences were so diverse that the two Japanese undergraduates dropped out the course and only the four graduates could complete the course. Based on the author’s classroom observation and information from the four graduate students, the author reconsidered the application of the TOEIC course and materials for graduate students and junior researchers as well as English for Academic Purposes which focused on presenting research papers both in writing and orally.

Recently, research-oriented universities and graduate schools in Japan, including Kyushu University, have gradually introduced EAP in order to encourage and support their international academic exchanges. However, practical English communication skills have rarely been taught in research institutions and schools tends to leave this area to self-study for graduate students. It is essential for graduate students to acquire “survival English” as junior researchers before participating in the international academic arenas, as they need to register for international conferences, reserve accommodations and transportation before departure, attend receptions, and provide feedback to other researchers in English, both inside and outside of Japan.

The author assumes that TOEIC materials are highly effective and authentic for a “survival English” course for junior researchers, and teachers can design the course systematically considering the types of written communication TOEIC has used. Since ETS has never publicly shown or published the actual TOEIC tests, all 42 questions in Parts 6 & 7 from “Tactics for TOEIC Practice Test 1 & 2” (2007) come from ETS authorized textbooks and are used for the subject analysis and each type of material can be categorized as in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Type of Communication of Parts 6 & 7**

	Practice Test 1	Practice Test 2	Total
letter	5	5	10
article	2	7	9
e-mail	2	2	4
information	2	1	3
memo	2	1	3
table	1	1	2
announcement	2		2
advertisement	2		2
notice	1	1	2
invoice	1	1	2
form	1	1	2
schedule		1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>42</b>

As Table 2.1 shows, the genres of TOEIC materials are diverse, and by using them, undergraduates will be exposed to formats of letters and email in English, which are essential for international

communication among researchers. In addition, TOEIC materials involve using information used in intercultural business culture and commonly used vocabulary in business English, such as: voucher, PIN number, online payment, extension number, car pool, etc... These are hardly taught in EGP (as an official subject) for high school and university students.

## **Conclusion**

As getting a higher TOEIC score is an advantage when searching for jobs with Japanese companies, TOEIC programs are thought to be only for undergraduates and have rarely been designed for graduate students and junior researchers. However, studying TOEIC materials benefits not only undergraduates but also graduate students because they can learn practical English communication. Since English needs for graduate students, who need to participate in the international research arena, are significantly different from those of undergraduates, a course design based on further needs analysis will be useful to make the most of TOEIC programs and materials.

### **3. Students' Self-Reported Error Analysis on the TOEIC test**

(PENNINGTON, Wakako)

This section of the paper reports students' self-reported error analysis on the TOEIC test. One of the main goals in TOEIC preparation classes is to help students score higher. In order to achieve such a goal, it is necessary to find out what the students' strengths and weaknesses are and then try to figure out ways to overcome those weaknesses. This part of the paper discusses weaknesses that my students had, and their own self-reported error analysis after taking two model tests.

## **Differences between commonly used Japanese standardized tests and the TOEIC test**

In order to analyze weaknesses that my students have on the TOEIC test, it is prudent to take a look at the characteristics of common standardized tests used in Japan which most of my students are accustomed to. Here is the comparison of the main basic characteristics of the usual standardized tests in Japan such as the Center Examination (National Center for University Entrance Examinations), with the TOEIC test. The focus of this comparison is on the points that may be influencing the understanding of my students.

### **A. Text characteristics**

The TOEIC test deals with vocabulary and phrases that are more business-related than the Center examination. Especially in the reading section of the TOEIC, the level of the vocabulary used is demanding for Japanese students. Chujo and Genung (2005) reported that vocabulary in junior high school and high school English textbooks are not enough to cover the business related vocabulary that is necessary for the TOEIC test.

The differences in the listening sections that influence my students are pauses and phonological modifications. On the center examination, pauses between questions are about 10 seconds, whereas on the TOEIC test, the pauses between questions are about 3 seconds, which forces the examinees to process information faster. On top of that, phonological modifications such as assimilation or reduction are more naturally used on the TOEIC test whereas on the Center examination, each phoneme is more



clearly pronounced.

## **B. Accuracy vs. fluency**

In the reading section of the Center examination, students are required to pay close attention to small details so that they will not be fooled by tricky questions or make “careless mistakes”. These tests do not usually focus on how much information students can process in a limited amount of time. In other words, accuracy is more important than fluency. However, on the TOEIC test, fluency is a crucial component. On the TOEIC test there are about 6,600 words on average in the reading section. We can estimate that students have to read at the rate of 88wpm in order to read all the text. (6,600 words / 75 minutes=88wpm). Including the time necessary to answer question, students must read about 110 wpm in order to finish answering all the questions. On the other hand, the Center examination includes about 4,000 words in the reading section. Since examinees are given 80 minutes to answer the questions, they need to read at the rate of 50 wpm (The Report of the Evaluation Committee of National Center for University Entrance Examinations, 2009). Including the time necessary to answer questions, students must read at about 70 wpm. This information alone can tell us that on the TOIEC test students must process information about 1.5 times faster than the Center examination students.

On listening tests in Japan, accuracy is more important than fluency as well. On the Center examination, 1,110 words were used in the examination in 2009 and the script is read twice within the 30-minute test. The speech rate is about 160 wpm on average (The Report of the Evaluation Committee of National Center for University Entrance Examinations, 2009). Whereas, on the TOEIC test, approximately 2400 words are used in each 45-minute test. The speech rate can be estimated to be between 160 to 200 wpm depending on the question. Although more refined analysis is necessary, this information can tell us that there are great differences in the information processing needs of the students when taking the tests.

## **C. Content schema**

Content schema is the cultural or background knowledge of the context (Brown, 2001, p299-300). On the Center examination, context is not highly culturally specific, but rather culturally neutral (for example, science, history, social issues, etc...) or concerned with everyday life. Exposure to a foreign culture and knowledge and understanding of a foreign culture is not required so much. Conversely, TOEIC deals with topics such as international business and other practical English as table 7 shows. Without such background knowledge some questions are difficult to answer.

## **Student characteristics**

Students at Kyushu University usually have a solid basic knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary that are necessary for passing the university entrance examination. However, they have the following weaknesses which contribute to their inability to score high on the TOEIC test.

### **A. Amount of audio input**

Current university students did not have much opportunity to learn English aurally nor verbally. As a result, they are not familiar with natural English pronunciation and/or sounds, especially phonological modification and intonation. However on the TOEIC test, half of the examination is

listening (aural).

## **B. Vocabulary, phrases and background knowledge**

As is mentioned before, students do not have enough vocabulary to cope with the TOEIC test. They also are not familiar with cultural or business background information very much although schema development has a big influence on the success of L2 listening (Lantolf, 1999).

## **C. Bottom-up processing and/or top-down processing**

In Japanese secondary schools, the focus is on bottom-up processing skills such as grammar translation and vocabulary in reading. When it comes to listening, educational focus is neither bottom-up nor top-down. However, in order to process information both accurately and fluently, not only top-down processing but parallel processing is necessary (Rost, 2005), which is also essential on the TOEIC test.

## **D. Test taking skills**

Japanese students tend to spend a lot of time on each question and/or try to answer all the questions. However, on the TOEIC test, students do not have the luxury of time to think twice or three times about each question.

## **E. Study skills**

The study skills that are required for the TOEIC test are different from those of university entrance examination. Students' study skills have been developed in order to cope with an examination in which accuracy is more important than fluency. It is essential for students to develop fluency based study skills that are necessary for the TOEIC test. The following table shows the area that my students must work on in order to score higher on the TOEIC test.

**Table 3.1 The areas that my students need to work on for the TOEIC test**

	Listening	Reading
Bottom-up	Vocabulary and phrases	Vocabulary and phrases
	Recognition of sounds and intonation	Grammar
Schema activation	Content and formal schema	Content and formal schema
Fluency	Information processing speed	Information processing speed
	Information processing amount	Information processing amount

## **Research questions**

My first goal was to make students understand that the TOEIC measures different types of language skills from the usual standardized tests in Japan that they are accustomed to. I tried to raise students' consciousness by making them analyze their own errors through categorizing the types of errors they make. I conducted some action research in my classroom.

1. What kind of weaknesses do students find in themselves?

2. Are there gaps between teachers' perception and the students' perception concerning their weaknesses?

## Methods

### *Participants*

Participants included students of two classes (class A and class B). The students took the TOEIC IP test before they started taking the class. The average score of the class A students was 467.2 (M=467.2) and class B students 483.4 (M=483.4). There were 26 students in total (n=26).

### *Materials*

Students took two model tests, each of which contained 100 listening questions and 100 reading questions. Afterwards, the students analyzed the reasons for their errors. Students were allowed to choose multiple reasons for each error they made. Each category was explained and the teacher gave examples for each category every week while going over practice questions.

### *Procedure*

Students took two model tests as homework assignments. They were instructed to answer the questions within the designated amount of time. After answering the questions, they marked their answers and analyzed the reasons of each error using a handout, which contained examples of six types of errors. After the class, students handed in the handout to the teacher for analysis.

## Results

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 list the six categories of errors that the students were instructed to use to self-analyze their errors as well as the results of the students' self-analysis. These categories are made based on the author's own empirical knowledge about her students.

**Table 3.2 Students' self-reported error analysis of the listening section**

	Categories of errors	Numbers chosen	percentages
L1	Lack of knowledge: I did not know the vocabulary, idioms or phrases.	73	9.34%
L2	Lack of knowledge: I did not know the grammar.	10	1.28%
L3	Lack of knowledge: I did not know the cultural, social or business backgrounds.	9	1.15%
L4	Speed: I understand the content perfectly (after reading the script), but it was too fast.	492	63.00%
L5	Pronunciation/Sounds: I was not familiar with the English sounds (including phonological modification).	51	6.53%
L6	Test taking skills: I was still thinking about the previous question, made a careless error, etc...	146	18.69%

**Table 3.3 Students' self-reported error analysis of the reading section**

	Categories of errors	Numbers chosen	percentages
R1	Lack of knowledge: I did not know the vocabulary, idioms or phrases.	85	27.69%
R2	Lack of knowledge: I did not know the grammar.	47	15.30%
R3	Lack of knowledge: I did not know the cultural, social or business backgrounds.	0	0%
R4	Understanding of the content: I did not understand what was written.	72	23.45%
R5	Speed: Because it took too long to answer other questions, I could not finish this question.	39	12.70%
R6	Test taking skills: Time allocation mistake, careless error, etc...	64	20.85%

## Discussion

### *Listening section*

The results of category L2 and L3 tell us that students did not think they were lacking in grammatical knowledge or cultural knowledge very much. 1.28% of their errors were attributed to lack of grammatical knowledge; and 1.15% to lack of background knowledge. Students did not perceive grammar to be a big problem. It is probably because complicated grammar structures are not used often on the listening test. Background knowledge did not seem the strongest ally of my students, however they did not seem to perceive it as such a big problem.

The result of category L1 tells us that 9.34% of their errors were attributed to lack of vocabulary knowledge. On the listening test, the vocabulary level is not as high as the grammar level. Apparently, that is why my students did not find it such a problem either.

We find that 63.00% of the errors were attributed to speed (L4). Students had a difficult time processing the information fluently. However, students did not attribute many errors to "pronunciation"(L5). Despite rigorous and intense instruction of phonological modification and intonation in the class, students had great difficulty identifying phonological modifications. It seems when phonological modification occurs, my students felt that, "it's too fast". That is the likely reason as to why they choose L4 instead of L5.

Lastly 18.69% of the errors were attributed to a lack of test taking skills (L6). Students needed to remember that the text of the each item is read only once. They also needed to be ready to move on to the next question whether they understood the question or not. Test taking skills that the students developed for taking the university entrance examination are not all useful on the TOEIC test.

### *Reading section*

Category R1 tells us that 27.69% of the errors were attributed to a lack of vocabulary knowledge. On the reading test, students thought they needed more vocabulary than on the listening test. Vocabulary that is necessary for the TOEIC test is quite different from the university entrance examination. Also there were students who had forgotten the basic vocabulary they memorized many years before taking the university entrance examination.

Category R2 shows that 15.30% of the errors were attributed to a lack of grammar knowledge. Although my students did have solid basic grammatical knowledge, the focus of the TOEIC test grammatical points is different from the Center examination. Students had to acquaint themselves with different grammar question styles.

Category R4 tells us that 23.45% of the errors were attributed to not understanding the content. This could be because they did not know the vocabulary or phrases, and as a result, many students chose both R1 and R4 for the same error. However, I think many did not understand the content because of the lack of cultural knowledge as well, which is contradictory to the result of the category R3. Nobody chose R3 as a reason for their errors. It may be because they did not realize that they needed cultural understanding or knowledge about business customs, such as using checks, when they read the text.

Category R5 gives us the information about the numbers of the questions that they could not answer because they did not have enough time. 12.70% means 12.70 questions out of 100 questions were not answered just because they did not have enough time left. They clearly need to develop their reading fluency.

Category R6 shows that the students thought 20.85% of their errors were due to test taking skills. It seems students are more aware that different test taking skills are required on the TOEIC test.

## **Conclusion**

The result of this action research shows that students consider speed to be the biggest problem on the listening test, which is the same as my perception. However, it was still difficult to help them identify phonological modification even with explicit instruction about it every week. On the reading test, students found vocabulary, understanding of the content and test taking skills were the problems, which were also in line with the teacher's perspective. On both parts of the test, students are required to develop their fluency in order to score higher on the TOEIC test.

Through self-analysis, students started paying attention to their strengths and weaknesses which helped them raise their consciousness about how to deal with their weaknesses. Once students identified their weaknesses, they wanted to know what to do to overcome those weaknesses. Most of the class time was devoted to showing students how to develop their listening and reading fluency, vocabulary building and test taking skills. Students were also given exercises that focused on listening fluency and phonological modification as well as learning 60 vocabulary words a week as a homework assignment.

In the future, I intend to investigate the differences between the Center examination and the TOEIC test more statistically and then analyze each item of the TOEIC test with regard to its vocabulary, length and overall level. Then, I would like to refine the error categories so that it is possible for students to analyze their errors more accurately and specifically. This analysis should give me the information about what kind of item is difficult for Japanese students and why it is difficult. This will help teachers decide what to teach and what not to teach within a limited amount of class time.

#### **4. Promoting Student Autonomy in Advanced Level TOEIC Classes**

(HARLAND, Jane)

This paper will discuss the various roles of the English teacher when delivering advanced level TOEIC exam preparation courses. The author acted as facilitator for a student-centered intensive advanced TOEIC course (target 800+ TOEIC score). In order to aim for a high level TOEIC score, it is necessary to increase not only knowledge levels, but also improve exam study skills. The instructor has a variety of roles: course designer, deliverer, supporting students throughout the course and role model. In addition, the curriculum was designed with the aim of promoting student autonomy and, since it is important for students to come into contact with English outside the classroom, a simple website was created to enable students to study independently.

Basically, the role of an educator is to enable students to gain knowledge, skills and understanding; however, the instructor has additional roles to that of just “teacher.” One important role of an English instructor as a facilitator is to create a positive learning environment. In addition, both the actual physical layout of the classroom and student-student relationships have considerable influence on classroom dynamics. The purpose of this advanced TOEIC course was different from most university courses in that it was not aiming at speaking and writing perfect English, but at achieving a high TOEIC score. This important point should be emphasized to the students at orientation, and the students and instructor must remember this fact throughout the course.

When the author was assigned the TOEIC 800+ course for the first time, she had several points of concern: in order for students to get scores over 800, what kind of lectures would be appropriate? How much homework should be given? Aside from the material covered in class and the textbook, what else should be studied? What kind of plan would enable students absent from class to study effectively? The more these factors were considered, the more questions materialized. In the case of an intensive TOEIC course such as this, both language knowledge and skills such as time management and guessing strategies should be taught. A student-centered TOEIC course was delivered taking these various issues into account. Also, it was strongly recommended to use an English-English dictionary, whether in book, CD-ROM, or electronic format. Students were encouraged to avoid translating and to think in English as much as possible; this is especially important with language pairs such as English and Japanese where differences in word order can lead students to miss vital information.

The curriculum was designed in order to promote student autonomy. Since it is imperative for students to use English outside of class, a basic website was created so that students could study independently. The website was written entirely in English and the contents included the key points of the material covered in class, homework, study tips and also introduced user friendly Internet study sites. The author did not have any experience of making a website, so consulted a computer store who advised that a blog format website would be the best approach. Blogs are both easy to set up and easy to update, and, more importantly, can be created in a relatively short time even by someone with no experience. The author’s website was created using iWeb software for Mac, but there are other options available for both Windows and Mac computers (details of free blog sites are given in the bibliography). In practice, it took about 3 hours to set up the blog - this included adding photos and links. After each week’s class it took less than 15 minutes to update the blog, proving a time effective way of conveying information. For example, the key point for the 21 November 2007 entry is “Expect the unexpected,”

and there are examples included from that day's class. A few students were absent for various reasons such as academic meetings, research and illness, but if the students accessed the website they could easily get the contents of the class they had missed, review the key points and get details of the homework.

The Internet can be a good resource, provided it is easy for the students to access helpful sites. The Internet has numerous sites relating to English education; unfortunately, there are both good quality and poor quality sites. Simply put, a "poor quality" site is considered to be one that has a lot of Japanese, costs money to use or promises a score of plus XXX points in XX days. Rather than paying money in order to get a high TOEIC score, it would be more beneficial to learn exam strategies. For the above reasons, a website was developed for the students. Naturally, the more students study, the better chance they have of attaining a high TOEIC score. Thus it was recommended that students did not limit themselves to just using the TOEIC textbook, but came into contact with authentic English. For example, by reading newspaper articles, watching TV dramas and listening to CDs. In view of this, self-study links were added to the website.

The self-study links were divided into 4 categories: Listening, Reading, Vocabulary and Other. For example, if you click on the "Listening" link, it will open a new page with links to various listening sites. "ELLLO" (English Listening Lesson Library Online) has a huge variety of contents including games, news and songs. The majority of activities have images, quizzes, transcripts or downloadable MP3 files, so they cater to multiple intelligences and students can find something that suits their individual needs. Now that the new TOEIC test has speakers from countries other than the United States, it is important that students have the opportunity to come into contact with a wide range of English accents. On the "Breaking News English" site students can not only listen to podcasts, but also download them. Since nowadays most students have MP3 players such as the iPod, it has become easy to study English anywhere. The instructor should take advantage of this and try to encourage students to use resources that take advantage of modern technology that students are accustomed to using in their daily lives.

As a native speaker, the author thinks that it is essential to promote an English-speaking environment. In order to do this the classes were conducted in English as much as possible; however, if a student did not understand something a brief explanation was given in Japanese, then the lesson promptly returned to an English only environment. As previously stated, it is effective for students to use an English-English dictionary; yet, even some high level learners disliked using one for the first time. Perhaps this is because under Japan's English education system, there is no chance to use an English-English dictionary. One recommended paper dictionary is the Longman Active Study Dictionary with CD-ROM. It is aimed at intermediate to upper intermediate level students and has both British and American English entries. There is no specific rule on when to use an English-English dictionary based on TOEIC scores, but undergraduate and postgraduate students must use an English learner's English-English dictionary.

## **Conclusion**

In order for the instructor to be responsible for effective study, it is necessary to guide and support the students. It is essential to stress the use of English, not only speaking English, but also using an English-English dictionary and the instructor should try to maximize the students'

opportunities to study English independently. In this course, technology and catering for multiple intelligences were employed successfully. “Blended learning”, a combination of e-learning and face-to-face instruction, has a lot of possibilities in language education and instructors should explore the use of such opportunities.

## **5. Recommendations for more Effective TOEIC class organization and registration.**

(PENNINGTON, Randall )

This section of the research has to do with the analysis of the TOEIC class organization and registration in 2007 at the Career Support Center of Kyushu University.

### **Organization of the 2007 classes and my classes.**

This course was 10 weeks in length and it met once a week. The course was an extra-curricular class and was taken as an extension course, totally separate of their degree programs.

The schedule of the classes was as follows: Monday through Friday from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM, Saturday 2:00 PM to 4:00PM and 6:30 PM to 8:30. As was stated at the beginning of this report, this author would like to reiterate that classes were divided on the basis of student-chosen score goals. There were courses for students who wished to attain scores of 600, 700 and 800. There was also a “career development course”. Students were not divided based on their current TOEIC scores nor their English proficiency, but were divided based on the student’s personal goals or wishes. There were five instructors in total; three Japanese natives and two native English speakers.

The author taught two 700-point classes on Friday and Saturday with 20 students each. In the Friday class there were native Japanese students only while in the Saturday class there were about 85% native Japanese students and 15% Chinese native students. The students were from all departments at the university, both undergraduate and graduate. In my class, students ranged in age from a sophomore undergraduate to a third year doctoral student.

### **The relationship between students’ purpose for taking the class, attendance and homework completion**

During my first class all students were surveyed as to their purpose for taking the TOEIC preparation class. The following are the results of those surveys:

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. To improve my overall English proficiency | 50% |
| 2. To improve my TOEIC score                 | 40% |
| 3. Because my friend is taking the course    | 10% |

After observing my students in class, a distinct correlation between a student’s purpose for taking the class, attendance, and homework completion rate was apparent. Students whose purpose was to improve their TOEIC scores showed very good attendance and completed their homework assignments. Students had to complete model tests for homework every week. This assignment takes between two and three hours to complete. Students who wanted to improve their TOEIC scores completed these assignments and came to class regularly.

On the other hand, students who wanted to improve their overall English proficiency or wanted to take the class because their friends were taking the class were quite the opposite and didn’t complete the homework assignments nor did they have as good attendance as the former group. Several students



expected my class to be more conversationally oriented because the instructor was a foreigner and a native speaker. This expectation no doubt influenced their choice of class and teacher in the program. It also seems that the Chinese students who took my course felt more at ease with a native English speaker, and this was a factor in them choosing my course. It was under these circumstances that I found that the students who wished to improve their TOEIC scores did in fact achieve better TOEIC scores via homework completion and regular attendance:

### **A comparison of the Friday and Saturday classes**

Here is a comparison of the Friday and Saturday classes the author taught:

**Table 5.1 A comparison of the Friday and Saturday classes**

<b>Friday Class</b>	<b>Saturday Class</b>
More students whose purpose was to improve their TOEIC score	More students whose purpose was to improve their overall English ability
High rate of attendance	Low rate of attendance
Easy commute to the class	Long or difficult commute to class
Scores improved 88.8 points on avg.	Scores improved 44.3 points on avg.

The Friday class had a high attendance rate and their purpose was more focused on improving their TOEIC scores while the Saturday class had lower attendance, comparatively, and was more focused on improving their overall English ability. If the average TOEIC scores of students are compared from their pre-class scores to their post-class scores, the Friday class improved 88.8 points on average and the Saturday class improved 44.3 points on average. So, it is easy to infer that the students whose desire to improve their TOEIC scores had a more distinct and clear goal and were able to attain that goal, despite the short length of the course.

Concerning attendance, the student purpose for taking the course was not the only factor that affected the rate of attendance. Commuting conditions also influenced their rate of attendance. Kyushu University has six main campuses. The majority of the Friday class students were students at the Hakozaki campus, where the course was held. Obviously it was not difficult for them to commute. On the other hand, there were far more students from the Ito campus in the Saturday class. They were usually commuting via car or motorcycle. From student comments, excuses and personal conversations the author found that their attendance was greatly influenced by both weather and traffic conditions.

### **Reasons for the large gap between the TOEIC scores of the Friday and Saturday classes**

Let's now look at the reasons for the far greater improvement in the Friday class scores when compared to the Saturday class scores. The first thing we need to think about is that student motivation greatly influences success in learning. It can be deduced from these results that having a distinct purpose for learning is of primary importance. So when the course is advertised by the Career Support Center, it must be emphasized that the course is specifically for raising your TOEIC score and not for

improving general English ability. Further, classes should be divided based on the student's current TOEIC score and not on their personal goals.

## **Recommendations to make TOEIC classes more effective**

Here are my suggestions to make the TOEIC courses better: First, when this course is advertised, students must clearly understand that the purpose of the TOEIC class is to improve TOEIC scores and not to improve overall English ability. The purpose of the course and the students must match. Secondly, the course needs to be shortened. Some instructors were of the opinion that ten weeks was too long for a test preparation course. By reducing the course term from ten weeks to six weeks, both teachers and students can focus on the knowledge and techniques needed for taking the TOEIC test. Thirdly, the number of locations for the classes needs to be increased. As mentioned before, there are six main campuses of Kyushu University. The Hakozaki campus, which was the only venue in the 2007 program, is not a geographically central location in Fukuoka. In fact, the Ito and Hakozaki campuses are the two most distant campuses. If the course is held only at Hakozaki, commuting is far more difficult for the Ito campus students.

## **Changes made for the 2008 TOEIC course**

Based on the aforementioned conditions, we attempted to make the following adjustments for the 2008 TOEIC course.

1. The fall courses were reduced from ten weeks to six weeks. The venues were both the Hakozaki and Ito campuses. Class length remained the same (120 minutes).
2. During the summer break, 2 two-day summer courses were held at the Ropponmatsu campus (6 hours a day)

## **Conclusion**

The information gathered from my students and reported in this paper was gathered through the use of surveys and casual interviews, conversations, and observations. I based my recommendations for the next TOEIC course based on this information, the attendance rates, and pre and post-course TOEIC scores. The main points to consider were clarification of the purpose of the course, reducing the term of the course, and offering the courses at a variety of campuses. We instructors emphasized to the Career Support Center the importance of explaining the purpose of the course to the students and requested that they guide the students accordingly. I would like to report on the results of the 2008 course at a future date.

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#### Websites

- Breaking News English <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/podcast.html>
- ELLLO (English Listening Lesson Library Online) <http://www.elllo.org/>

#### Free blog sites

- edublogs <http://edublogs.org/>
- eBlogger <https://www.blogger.com/start>

