An Effective Way of Teaching for the TOEIC Test Preparation Class

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to introduce an effective way of teaching for the author's TOEIC preparation classes at Konan University. This paper reports the post-course TOEIC IP test scores and the general survey results from the students of the author's TOEIC preparation classes at Konan University. The overall results in terms of these research factors would be positive about improving the students' English proficiency and TOEIC skills. From a pedagogical perspective, there were five critical elements regarding the author's teaching method for the TOEIC preparation classes at Konan University: (a) teaching grammar; (b) vocabulary development; (C) paraphrasing and summarizing; (d) listening practice; and (e) introducing case method teaching. Thus, this paper includes an extensive discussion to explain how efficiently these instructional factors contributed to the TOEIC preparation classes at Konan University.
Key Words: TOEIC preparation, TESOL, vocabulary development, communication strategy, case method teaching, ESP, marketing mix

Introduction

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is a standardized exam developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) which is a U.S.-registered non-profit educational testing and assessment organization. Many Japanese college students are motivated to take the TOEIC test because sufficient TOEIC scores will be helpful for college graduates to secure employment in companies. The purpose of this paper is to describe the teaching procedure and method for the author's TOEIC preparation classes at Konan University and assess them in improving the students' English proficiency and TOEIC skills.

Background

General Information of TOEIC Test

There are two types of TOEIC tests currently available: (a) TOEIC Listening and Reading; and (b) TOEIC Speaking and Writing. When used together, an accurate evaluation of proficiency in these four language skills can be achieved. However, only the Listening and Reading test will be discussed in this paper due to the author's TOEIC preparation class focusing on this specific form of the TOEIC test.

The TOEIC Listening and Reading test is designed to evaluate English-language listening and reading skills needed in the global workplace, and used by nearly 14,000 organizations in 150 countries throughout the world with a lot of meaningful business-related reasons such as personnel allocation and overseas recruitment (ETS, 2017). The test is a multiple-choice exam with two sections of 100 questions each with the total score scale from 10 to 990 points and it takes 2 hours to complete.

The first section is the Listening test including four parts: (a) Photographs; (b) Question-Response; (c) Conversations; and (d) Talks. The second section is the Reading test consisting of three parts: (a) Incomplete Sentences; (b) Text Completion; and (c) Reading Comprehension (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Format of TOEIC Listening and Reading Test (2017 Version)

Part	Name of Each Part	Number of Questions	Time Allowed
	Listening Section		
1	Photographs	6	
2	Question-Response	25	45 minutes
3	Conversations	39	
4	Talks	30	
	Reading Section		
5	Incomplete Sentences	30	
6	Text Completion	16	75 minutes
7	Reading Comprehension	54	

The TOEIC Preparation Class at Konan University

The TOEIC preparation class at Konan University meets once a week for 90 minutes and continues from April to July and September to January for a total of approximately 40 hours of teaching a year.

There are two different course levels for the TOEIC preparation class at Konan University: Intermediate TOEIC and Advanced TOEIC. The Intermediate TOEIC course is further divided into three levels: (a) The Pre Stream (PS) section aiming for a TOEIC score of at least 400-450 points; (b) the Main Stream (MS) section aiming for a TOEIC score of at least 450-500 points; and (c) The Top Stream (TS) section aiming for a TOEIC score of at least 500-600 points. Additionally, the Advanced TOEIC course aims for a TOEIC score of at least 600-700 points by the end of the course.

As stated in the principal official guideline for these TOEIC courses, it is required that students will become familiar with the form and content of the TOEIC test, improve their language skills in the areas covered on the test, and learn test-taking strategies that will help increase their test scores by the end of the course. In fact, most of the students of the author's TOEIC classes had little or no experience with the TOEIC test before taking the course.

Main Components of the Intermediate TOEIC Course

Overview

In recent years, Konan University has provided approximately a total of 38 classes for the Intermediate TOEIC course every year, and at least 4 to 10 intermediate TOEIC classes have been offered per day during the academic term. The author has been teaching several classes of the Intermediate TOEIC course at Konan University during recent years (see Table 2). The main components for the author's syllabus for the intermediate TOEIC classes are described below.

Table 2.

The Intermediate TOEIC Classes in the Author's Charge at Konan University during the Period from 2013 to 2016

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016
Class Name	TS:28 class (n=12)	TS:27 class (n=12)	TS:27 class (n=22)	TS:27 class (n=7)
	MS:31 class (n=33)	MS:30 class (n=18)	MS:29 class (n=17)	MS:29 class (n=14)
	MS:33 class (n=5)	MS:34 class (n=4)	MS:33 class (n=22)	MS:32 class (n=11)
	--------------------	--------------------	MS:34 class (n=8)	MS:33 class (n=5)

Note. N = the total number of undergraduate students who took the class (except absentees).

Teaching Procedures

The coursework for the author's intermediate TOEIC classes is generally designed

for the students to improve their proficiency in the area tested on the TOEIC by answering the practice questions in every class. In the first semester, the students focus on practicing Parts 1, 2, 5, and 6 on the TOEIC test so that the other sections which include Parts 3, 4, and 7 can be concentrated on in the second semester. This sequence of learning on the TOEIC is to make the students gradually move from individual and shorter sentences to connected and longer sentences, which is usually helpful and manageable in terms of their input processing.

Additionally, the author considered ways of making every lecture for the intermediate TOEIC classes linguistically more diverse by incorporating not just only listening and reading but also speaking, writing, grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency exercises based on prediction, skimming, and scanning. For instance, dictation and delayed repetition are often applied for the students when practicing the TOEIC listening section. In addition, to achieve more efficient practice on the TOEIC reading section, the students are repeatedly given retelling and reproduction exercises. These exercises are also mostly based on effective communication strategies such as paraphrasing and summarizing. More details for these exercises are introduced in the latter section of this paper.

The teaching procedure for the author's intermediate TOEIC classes is generally based on the theories presented by several noted applied linguists. According to Nation and Newton (2009), a superior language course should contain four strands which include meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. Moreover, Nation and Newton recommend that approximately 25 percent of the course time should preferably be covered by each strand. Brown (2007) also mentions that many educators recently recognize an English teaching tendency toward integration of four skills which comprise listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This is because such a whole language approach can help learners effectively improve their communicative competence and pursue more comprehensive language proficiency (Brown, 2007, p.284).

Teaching Materials

In the author's intermediate TOEIC classes, the 5th edition of *Longman Preparation Series for the TOEIC Test: Listening and Reading, Intermediate Course* was used as the main text. This book is basically designed for users to improve their test-taking knowledge and language skills such as vocabulary through providing sufficient numbers of similar types of questions asked on real TOEIC tests with several indigenous overviews and warm-up practice pages. Plus, what is exceedingly user-friendly is based

on helping reviewing fundamental English grammar because this book strategically presents clear classification regarding parts of speech particularly in the pages for the TOEIC Parts 5 and 6. Nation (2009) states that intelligibly understanding parts of speech is significantly valuable in terms of vocabulary development and sentence comprehension.

In addition, on a self-supporting basis, the students can utilize *TOEIC Test New Official Drill Book* (Vol. 1 to 6) issued by ETS as supplementary material. This is not only because these books can always be borrowed from the university's library, but also they are truly authentic material based on official TOEIC test items.

Students' Requirements

Throughout a whole semester, the students are required to (a) take two periodical review examinations and four grammar and vocabulary quizzes, (b) submit two writing assignments, (c) make an acceptable attendance rate with satisfactory contribution to each class, and (d) undergo a pre-course (April) TOEIC mock test and a post-course (December) TOEIC Institutional Program (IP) test as the main elements for the grade assessment of the author's intermediate TOEIC classes. To cope well with all these tasks, the students need to continually prepare and review for every class.

In terms of the writing assignments, the students write an English summary report with their opinions after reading an article regarding a business case written in English and are given an opportunity to discuss their reports in the class. The author selects an article that is relatively easy to read, introduces realistic business situations, and contains sufficient words and phrases that commonly appear on the TOEIC test. Longheed (2014) indicates that it is extremely beneficial for learners to understand specialized contexts regarding business for the TOEIC test because the items on the TOEIC test are often set within business situations.

In terms of the pre-course TOEIC mock test, the students take a practice TOEIC test in *TOEIC Test Plus Magazine* which is a monthly periodical issued by Lint, Inc. This is not only because these books can easily be accessed at the university's self-study room but also they are highly comparable to the official TOEIC test with respect to their format and difficulty.

Method

Post-Course TOEIC IP Test Score

Due to their purpose as a TOEIC test preparation course, the dominant gauge of the

productiveness for the author's TOEIC classes at Konan University should be based on the results on the TOEIC IP test. In the end-of-semester season every year, the TOEIC IP test is held for all undergraduate and graduate students and administered by the Institute for Language and Culture at Konan University. The analysis below focuses on comparing the results of the post-course (December) TOEIC IP test for the author's intermediate TS TOEIC classes and the Konan University's overall average TOEIC IP test scores which were calculated respectively in December from 2013 through 2016. Additionally, the analysis below also includes a comparison between the results of the post-course (December) TOEIC IP test for the author's intermediate TS TOEIC classes and the overall average TOEIC IP test scores for all the other intermediate TS TOEIC classes at Konan University which were calculated respectively in December from 2013 through 2016.

Post-Course TOEIC IP Test Results

The post-course TOEIC IP test results for the author's TOEIC classes were positive in terms of the mean scores in comparison with the Konan University's overall average TOEIC IP test scores which were computed respectively in December during the period from 2013 to 2016. (see Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 for results) Moreover, except for the result for 2016, the post-course TOEIC IP test results for the author's TOEIC classes were positive in terms of the mean scores in comparison with the overall average TOEIC IP test scores for all the other intermediate TS TOEIC classes at Konan University which were calculated respectively in December from 2013 through 2016. (see Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 for results) In addition, most students of the author's intermediate TOEIC classes for the TS section (n=49, 73%) acquired over 450 points in the post-course TOEIC IP test during the same period. Finally, according to Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6, the relatively smaller points for the standard deviation (less than 100) demonstrate that differences in the students' competency and comprehension toward the TOEIC test were not so substantial.

Table 3.

TOEIC IP Test Result for the Author's Class (the TS Section): Total Scores (December in 2013)

Descriptive Statistics (n=11)					
	Mean	Max	Min	Range	Std. Dev.
TOEIC IP Test	488	620	355	265	71.28

Table 4.

TOEIC IP Test Result for the Author's Class (the TS Section): Total Scores (December in 2014)

Descriptive Statistics (n=10)					
	Mean	Max	Min	Range	Std. Dev.
TOEIC IP Test	467	590	260	330	91.96

Table 5.

TOEIC IP Test Result for the Author's Class (the TS Section): Total Scores (December in 2015)

Descriptive Statistics (n=21)					
	Mean	Max	Min	Range	Std. Dev.
TOEIC IP Test	501	685	360	325	92.44

Table 6.

TOEIC IP Test Result for the Author's Class (the TS Section): Total Scores (December in 2016)

Descriptive Statistics (n=7)					
	Mean	Max	Min	Range	Std. Dev.
TOEIC IP Test	481	570	400	170	67.00

Table 7.

Average TOEIC IP Test Scores at Konan University: Overall Mean (December)

Year	2013 (n=533)	2014 (n=472)	2015 (n=496)	2016 (n= 422)
TOEIC IP Test	443	447	464	461

Note. The total number of examinees included the both undergraduate and graduate students at Konan University. Most of the examinees (approximately 80%) are the students who took the Intermediate TOEIC or the Advanced TOEIC course at Konan University.

Table 8.

Average TOEIC IP Test Scores for All the Other Intermediate TOEIC Classes (the TS Section) at Konan University: Overall Mean (December)

Year	2013 (n=123)	2014 -------	2015 (n=129)	2016 (n=99)
TOEIC IP Test	471	456	497	482

Note. The data in terms of the total number of examinees in 2014 was unavailable.

Student Survey Results

At the end of the year, a survey is implemented to possibly recognize whether the class met the needs of the students specifically in terms of improvement of their knowledge and competence toward the TOEIC test. The survey also includes the students' comments explaining how the class was meaningful for their TOEIC study. The survey results below were all together collected from the students for the author's intermediate TOEIC classes at Konan University during the period from 2013 to 2016.

Overall, the survey results were positive. Most students (n=135, 72 %) of the author's intermediate TOEIC classes felt that the lecture was able to deepen their comprehension and to improve their proficiency for the TOEIC test. Some representative comments from the students were as follows:

- *I was able to acquire effective vocabulary development for the TOEIC.*
- *I could efficiently learn grammar and parts of speech particularly necessary for the TOEIC reading section.*
- *I was able to improve my listening expertise through dictation so that understanding critical content words became easier than before.*
- *I could get used to predict the meaning of unknown words and improve my reading speed and skills such as skimming and scanning.*
- *My teacher's explanation was always clear and careful.*
- *I became familiar with the TOEIC test format and acquired the test-taking skills including time management and reading questions first on the TOEIC listening section.*
- *I could have a strong interest toward learning English by studying the TOEIC.*
- *I could improve my TOEIC proficiency through speaking English by using paraphrasing and summarizing.*

Discussion

As noted above, there was positive data regarding both the post-course TOEIC IP test results and the survey results for the author's TOEIC classes at Konan University. In an integrated manner, these results would be constructive in terms of improving the students' competence through every class focusing on the TOEIC study. The following is an extensive discussion on the several critical elements regarding the author's teaching method for the TOEIC classes at Konan University.

Teaching Grammar

As mentioned previously, intelligibly understanding parts of speech is meaningful for the students especially through the TOEIC Parts 5 and 6. Thus, the author's focus is based on clearly teaching both the grammatical characteristics and the communicative features for the parts of speech that continually appear on the TOEIC test questions: nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, infinitives, gerunds, participles, verbal adjectives, comparative adjectives, superlative adjectives, determiners, modal auxiliaries, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, relative pronouns, and so on. Moreover, as one of the trouble-free test-taking techniques to classify the parts of speech and guess the meaning of the vocabulary, the students would be better off memorizing all the main suffixes such as *-tion, -able, -ly, and -ing*. This is because these suffixes specifically represent nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs which usually carry most of the content for a sentence and in fact contain numerous words. In contrast, all the other function words such as modal auxiliaries, prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns are basically limited in terms of the amount of the lexical distribution so that the students can relatively easily memorize and handle them even in the TOEIC contexts without focusing on suffixes.

In addition to teaching the parts of speech, the author informs the students about several notable phrase structure rules especially for noun phrases such as *the renowned philanthropic organization* and *the corporate food service*. This is simply because the TOEIC Parts 5 and 6 often contain such relatively extended noun phrases which are usually difficult for the students to comprehend grammatically or even communicatively. Murcia and Freeman (1999) indicates that there are drastic phrase-level grammatical differences especially among Japanese and English, and the internal structure of these noun phrases are one of the highly problematic examples for learners. Sasaki (2010) mentions that understanding the noun phrases means skillfully following the complex syntactic construction based on several grammatical components such as the determinatives, the modifications, the head nouns, and so on.

Vocabulary Development

In the author's TOEIC classes, the students execute an elaborate method such as creating a word web to effectively increase their vocabulary. This is because, as Lougheed (2014) also mentions, high level vocabulary development increases both the learners' speed reading capability and listening comprehension which are both crucial for success on the TOEIC test. According to Anderson (2014), the word web is a technique that helps learners productively increase their vocabulary by expanding

several different related words for one specific target word: word family (derived words), synonyms, antonyms, and collocations (including noun phrases). The students would be better off utilizing word webs for most of the critical words especially on the TOEIC reading section which usually covers more difficult vocabulary compared to the TOEIC listening section. The advantage of utilizing the word web is that the greatest amount of new vocabulary can meaningfully be learned during the limited hours of every class.

In addition, the author believes that focusing on the high frequency TOEIC words is particularly beneficial for the students when utilizing word webs. According to Lougheed (2012), the TOEIC test mainly covers a lot of words used in a variety of business contexts such as negotiating business issues, making business agreement, marketing, scheduling conferences, handling information technology, writing business e-mail, managing human resources, financing, and accounting. ETS (2015) indicates that the TOEIC test contains plenty of words used not only in business contexts but also in more general contexts such as travel, dining, shopping, entertainment, and other everyday circumstances.

Finally, the students can have an opportunity to utilize various types of dictionaries when they create the word web. For instance, using an English-Japanese dictionary such as *Genius English-Japanese Dictionary* is generally convenient to find word families and derived words, and a thesaurus such as *Oxford Thesaurus of English* and an English-English dictionary such as *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* cover sufficient information regarding synonyms and antonyms. Moreover, using *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* and online free dictionaries such as *Eijiro on the Web* are helpful to efficiently discover collocations and noun phrases. Nation (2008) indicates that using dictionaries is critically meaningful for vocabulary development and also helps learners effectively find a lot of related words.

Paraphrasing and Summarizing

To further reinforce vocabulary development and level of fluency regarding both input and output of English, the students would be better off regularly practicing paraphrasing and summarizing and actively using a variety of newly learned words. Tanaka (2006) indicates that paraphrasing used as both a learning tool and as a communication strategy is especially meaningful for second language acquisition and provides intermediate level students with a fruitful way of developing their ability to handle English effectively. Concretely, below is the representative model regarding the author's teaching procedure using paraphrasing and summarizing when practicing Part 7

on the TOEIC reading section:

1. The students try to read the passage as quick as possible by using skimming, scanning, and prediction in order to answer the questions.
2. The students quickly summarize the passage in Japanese.
3. The students read aloud every other line on the passage while carefully double-checking the content occasionally by translating it into Japanese and checking their answers for the questions.
4. The students apply the word web strategy toward several critical high frequency TOEIC words from the passage to increase their knowledge of vocabulary and phrases essential for all the TOEIC related fields including business.
5. The students attempt to reproduce and retell the passage in English by paraphrasing and summarizing with their newly learned words and phrases.

Listening Practice

To efficiently improve listening capability, the students should perform listening practice combined with speaking practice. Nation and Newton (2009) state that listening and speaking are strongly connected so that delayed repetition as one of the meaningful exercises can help learners effectively improve their listening capability through absorbing spoken output. In the author's TOEIC classes, the students are constantly given instructions regarding English pronunciation when they perform speaking practice. According to Takeuchi (2015), pronunciation is indispensable for improvement of listening and that there are several essential tips for good English pronunciation especially for Japanese people: implementing staccato-like abdominal breathing, keeping an upright epiglottis, mastering correct forms for consonants and vowels, checking phonetic alphabets, making proper accents and rhythm, using intonation skillfully, paying attention to linking, prominence, assimilation, shortened forms, elision, and so on. Below is the representative model regarding the author's teaching procedure utilizing speaking practice when practicing Parts 1 and 2 on the TOEIC listening section:

1. The students listen to the short statement and answer the questions.
2. The students listen to the same content again and repeat what they just listened to out loud.
3. The students repeat the short statement with checking the transcript written on the blackboard, and check their answers to the questions.
4. The students are given several English pronunciation tips regarding accents, rhythm, intonation, linking, and so on.

5. The students execute speaking practice based on the listening content through presentations or role-playing in pairs or groups.

To skillfully handle listening including longer passages such as conversations and talks, the students can have an opportunity to utilize dictation. Nation and Newton (2009) indicate that dictation formed by listening input and written output contributes to not only efficient listening practice but also proper language learning by making listeners focus on specific language features especially in terms of content words and stressed words on listening passages. It is also common that listeners can improve their listening comprehension by focusing on recognizing such content words and stressed words. Below is the representative model regarding the author's teaching procedure utilizing dictation and speaking practice when practicing Parts 3 and 4 on the TOEIC listening section:

1. The students prepare for note-taking to catch the important content words and stressed words on the listening passage.
2. The students read the questions for the listening passage first.
3. The students listen to relatively longer conversations or talks and answer the questions.
4. The students discuss in pairs or groups to predict the whole content they just listened to.
5. The students are given the transcript with several content words missing.
6. The students listen to the same content again and try to fill in the missing parts.
7. The students double-check the missing words, check their answers for the questions, and repeat on every other line of the listening passage.
8. The students are given several pronunciation tips regarding accents, rhythm, intonation, linking, and so on.
9. The students read the whole completed transcript while listening to the same content so that they can further improve and accelerate their input processing in English.
10. The students implement speaking practice on the whole listening passage through role-playing or presentations in pairs or groups while seeing the transcript.

Introducing Case Method Teaching

As mentioned previously, at the end of each semester for the author's TOEIC classes, the students are given the assignments regarding some business cases. This is because the students can meaningfully improve not only their language skills for business related fields but also their test-taking competence toward the TOEIC through such case

methods. According to Kawano (2013), Harvard Business School (HBS) originally started a discussion-based class using case methods regarding actual company management and international business issues, and subsequently many other business schools including Keio Business School (KBS) in Japan actively adopted similar types of courses utilizing case methods for their Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs. Below is the representative model regarding the author's teaching procedure introducing case methods for the TOEIC classes:

1. The students are given short business case articles from sources such as *The Financial Times* which cover vocabulary similar to the TOEIC level and contain fruitful business issues: corporate background, product development, pricing, finance, international commerce, marketing, purchasing, management, and so on.
2. The students read each business case article, write an English summary report by applying their paraphrasing skills, and prepare to discuss what they wrote about in class.
3. The students discuss the business case in English in class by exchanging their summaries and thoughts toward the content.
4. The students are given an opportunity to re-evaluate their views on the business case with several foundational investigative means of business such as the marketing mix, Porter's five-forces analysis, and Porter's generic competitive strategies.

The author considers this to be beneficial for the students to deepen their technical knowledge toward fundamental business administration and marketing for their TOEIC study. For instance, according to Philip (2010), the marketing mix which generally contains four business-related elements (product, price, promotion, and place) is a useful and principal concept for understanding corporate situations and business activities. Additionally, to recognize conditions for markets and industries, Micheal (2006) recommends the five-forces analysis: threat of new entrants, bargaining power of customers, bargaining power of suppliers, threat of substitute products and services, and rivalry among existing firms. Furthermore, Micheal mentions that there are three generic competitive strategies for a lot of successful companies to follow: cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, and focus strategy.

The students can have an opportunity to apply these essential business concepts especially when they encountered several passages with sufficient business issues in Part 7 of the TOEIC. It would be highly advantageous for them to practice summarizing the passage in this section by incorporating the marketing mix, Porter's five-forces analysis, and Porter's generic competitive strategies. As a result, they can be expected to

further improve their reading competence and comprehension toward any high-level business-related passage on the TOEIC test.

Conclusion

Positive results were acquired on both the post-course TOEIC IP test and the course evaluations for the author's TOEIC classes at Konan University. This is likely because there were five critical factors regarding the author's teaching method: teaching grammar, vocabulary development, paraphrasing and summarizing, listening practice, and introducing case method teaching. The author believes that studying the TOEIC should partially be based on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) because the TOEIC covers special vocabulary and concepts especially in terms of business. According to Evans and John (1998), there is a linguistic classification called English for Business Purposes (EBP) which is currently a field of great development in ESP. Moving forward, the author will focus on ways of incorporating the concepts of EBP in the TOEIC classes and continue to try to further improve the students' TOEIC scores.

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