

Effectively Teaching TOEFL iBT Preparation Intersession Classes for Lower-Intermediate Level Japanese College Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how we can teach TOEFL iBT preparation intersession classes more effectively for lower-intermediate level Japanese college students. The intersession consists of three 90-minute classes every day for six days, with the TOEFL Practice Online Test administered on the seventh day to determine students' TOEFL score. The author presents various techniques for reading, listening, speaking, and writing to help students develop their four skills and TOEFL strategies.

Keywords: TOEFL, Testing, EFL

本論文では中級準備レベルの大学生に対し、TOEFL iBT講座をどのように効果的に教えることができるかという実践報告である。この集中講座では毎日3コマ（1コマ90分）の授業を6日間実施し、学生は最終日にTOEFL Practice Online（インターネット上での模擬テスト）を受験する。本論文ではさらに学習者のリーディング、リスニング、スピーキング、ライティング能力が高められるような教授法、TOEFL iBTテスト対策などについて述べる。

Introduction

There are many Japanese college students who wish to study in English-speaking countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. In addition to improving their English skills and learning about the target culture, there are many benefits for college students who study abroad. Gesinski, English, and Tyson (2010) point out that study-abroad experiences in college have positive effects on students' learning, self-awareness, and growth. Branskamp and Merrill (2009, p. 101) also made the following statement:

Education abroad has become an increasingly important educational program

(experience) in global learning and development, intercultural competence, intercultural maturity, and intercultural sensitivity of students.

In order to access these benefits from studying abroad, many Japanese college students need to take an English proficiency test such as TOEFL iBT or IELTS to meet the requirements to study at their partner schools. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how we can teach TOEFL iBT preparation intersession classes more effectively for lower-intermediate level Japanese college students. The author presents various techniques for reading, listening, speaking, and writing to help students develop these four skills along with TOEFL strategies.

Konan University EIC (English Intensive Course) Students

In 2006 Konan University established the EIC (English Intensive Course) for freshman students who would like to improve their English and later study abroad in their sophomore or junior year for up to one academic year. The course enrollment started with less than a hundred students. In the year 2019 the enrollment increased to 240. At the beginning of their freshman year all students are expected to take the TOEFL ITP. Their average score is usually around 430, which is a lower-intermediate level.

The EIC curriculum focuses on linguistic competences such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in the freshman year. In the sophomore year, subjects are geared towards more academic skills and content-based learning. Freshman students take four ninety-minute English classes (meeting twice a week for each class) in one academic year instead of taking two ninety-minute English classes a year, which is in the regular freshman curriculum at Konan. In the sophomore year, students take two or three additional English classes and they can also sign up for elective courses such as TOEIC and Career English, according to their needs.

In addition to this curriculum, the EIC offers non-credit-bearing, seven-day TOEFL courses in the summer and spring intersessions. Students attend the intersession course for three ninety-minute classes every day for six days and take the TOEFL practice online test (TPO) on the seventh day.

TOEFL iBT

According to the TOEFL iBT workshop material (ETS, 2019), “The TOEFL iBT test measures the ability to use and understand English at the university level. And it evaluates the ability to combine listening, reading, speaking and writing skills to perform academic tasks.” ETS designed the tasks that are closely related to what students can go through in academic settings in the real world. This means the test assures that the language used in the exam requires the same skills needed in the actual classroom overseas. This is important since the test takers can use their results to identify whether or not their English is adequate enough to perform in the real academic world. If it is, they can use what they have learned to prepare for studying in those academic settings.

The TOEFL iBT test is the first test to include a speaking section where test takers speak into a microphone attached to the headset, and the digital file is recorded in the computer. Grammar is no longer included as a subtest. Rather students’ grammatical proficiency is evaluated in both the speaking and writing sections. Another main feature about the TOEFL iBT is that students are required to make academic communication in these two sections. For example, while students are listening to conversations and lectures, they take notes and give spoken and written responses. This requires integrated skills to succeed in academic settings. Both speaking and writing sections consist of independent (opinions based on test taker’s background) and integrated tasks (based on the information provided by written and/or spoken texts) (Barnes, 2016).

Another interesting feature of the TOEFL iBT is the incorporation of the e-rater and the SpeechRater. Beginning of 2010, both integrated and independent written tasks were assessed by an e-rater and a human rater. Haberman (2011) states, “double scoring is needed to estimate rater reliability and to study other issues concerning rater behavior” (p. 12). According to the workshop material (ETS, 2019), “combing human judgement for content and automated scoring for linguistic features, ensures high quality scores.”

SpeechRater was developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) to score non-native speakers’ spontaneous speech and it evaluates open-ended speech, which is different from earlier systems of short predictable answers (Bernstein, 1999;

Bernstein, Van Moere, & Cheng, 2010). Until the summer of 2019, this automated speech engine was used only by TOEFL Practice Online (TPO), which was the retired version of the actual TOEFL test. The TPO, while an unofficial TOEFL test, is an authentic way to identify English proficiency, and is widely used for TOEFL preparation classes throughout the world. Since August 2019, ETS started using the SpeechRater for the speaking section, and in *Introducing a Better TOEFL iBT Test Experience*, (ETS, 2019) indicates the following in Enhanced Speaking Scoring:

Adding AI technology to provide the best in measurement

- ETS's SpeechRater service uses artificial intelligence (AI) technology to assess and provide feedback on pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary and grammar.
- The combination of AI and human raters' evaluation of content, meaning and language use provides unmatched accuracy and reliability.
- Since August 1, 2019, all TOEFL iBT Speaking responses are rated by both a human rater and the SpeechRater service.
- Speaking section score now based on more ratings (8) than before (6).
- 4 human ratings + 4 SpeechRater ratings.
- No other major English proficiency test combines the benefits of AI and human scoring for speaking and writing.

TOEFL preparation classes

Barnes (2016) observed differences between general English classes and TOEFL iBT preparation classes. He found that in TOEFL preparation classes teachers spent more time on teacher-centered activities—such as teacher instruction and explanation—than general English classes. Furthermore, there were fewer opportunities for students to interact with each other in class. As a result, the test preparation courses focused on “skills needed for the test and not the process of acquiring language skills or the pedagogy employed to support this process” (p. 170).

Mao and Cheng (2015) expressed a concern that most test preparation classes merely expose students to items and tasks covered in the final exam, rather than tasks required in a real academic context. In a sense, they are studying for the test rather than studying to master the English language. Therefore, most of them will

find it difficult to communicate in English even though they have met the proficiency requirements.

Mao and Cheng (2015) further investigated Chinese students who were successfully admitted to Canadian institutions about their previous experiences with test preparation courses. Regarding the quality of preparation courses, students valued the teachers' overseas educational background because they had their own practical experiences of academic contexts that the students would hope to have. Another important thing was the teachers' own experiences about the TOEFL, as this provided students with helpful suggestions. Students were satisfied with the test preparation institute since the school provided authentic TOEFL materials directly from ETS.

All the students indicated that the institution was the most time-saving as they were able to become familiar with the test and gain the score within a set amount of time. One of the students said the following:

I did a cost calculation. If I had not taken the TOEFL iBT test preparation course and if I had not gotten a satisfactory score, I would have probably had to wait till next year to apply [for the academic program], and the cost would be far more than the time and money I would spend now. In this case, I think it [taking test preparation courses] is worthwhile (Mao & Cheng, 2015, p. 69).

Students pointed out that being in the preparation class allowed them to create a community where they could share their own experiences and goals as well as exchange ideas among peers. They could also obtain useful resources recommended by peers and teachers. Moreover, being in the preparation class enabled them to gain "inspiration, encouragement and psychological support from peers and teachers" (Mao & Cheng, 2015, p. 72). Teachers often shared how they personally put forth an effort to succeed in the TOEFL, as well as how their former students were able to succeed. These narratives are very encouraging to students who have similar backgrounds and goals, and as a result they are more likely to work harder (Mao & Cheng, 2015).

Liu (2014) conducted a survey to 14,000 TOEFL test takers in mainland China to see what kinds of strategies they used for preparation. Two of the most popular general strategies used were listening to English programs and watching movies

in English. 31% of the respondents indicated they listened to programs twice a week and 25% of them said they studied this way almost every day. 42% of the respondents stated they watched movies in English twice a week and 25% reported that they did so almost every day. The strategy they used least was speaking to a native speaker, since it was not a convenient way to practice by themselves.

Some of the most frequently used specific strategies for the TOEFL iBT were “taking notes while listening (87%), identifying main ideas while listening (85%), identifying topic sentences, main points, and key statements in reading (82%), skipping unfamiliar words in reading (82%), and improving fluency in speaking (82%)” (Liu, 2014, p. 5). The least popular strategy was taking notes while reading (40%). About half of them said that they used the TPO.

When Liu (2014) compared their strategies with actual TOEFL performance, he found that writing e-mails, letters, and diaries in English and practicing spoken English at English salons were often positive predictors in total and skill scores. Reading English books and magazines contributed to the improvement of all total and subscale scores except speaking. Listening to English programs and watching movies in English were associated with gaining listening scores. Reading English aloud and practicing spoken English with native speakers helped them improve their reading, listening, and speaking. In examining test-specific strategies, Liu found that “the relationship tended to be domain specific” (p. 9). In other words, the strategies focused on reading were most likely associated with reading improvement. The strategies focused on listening associated positively in listening performance. An exception was that strategies for improving speaking scores appeared to improve both speaking and listening scores.

TOEFL iBT Intersession classes at Konan University

In our freshman EIC curriculum, we mainly focus on the four core skills for general English proficiency; however, some of our students need a TOEFL score in order to apply for our academic study-abroad programs. For this reason, we created the TOEFL iBT intersession during the summer vacation of 2006. Since 2007 we also created a spring intersession. For the first five years, the average enrollment for those two intersessions was around twenty or so. Since most

participants in the intersession are freshman, their English level generally makes it very difficult for them to take this class. However, since many want to challenge themselves to get a score that will qualify them for study abroad, we decided to use very authentic materials such as *Official TOEFL iBT Tests* and *The Official Guide to the TOEFL Test* to meet their needs.

Teaching reading section

The reading section of the TOEFL iBT consists of three to four passages, and the content of each passage comes directly from general education texts for American college freshman. The length of each passage is 700 words followed by 12 to 14 questions, and students have twenty minutes to answer all of the questions (After August 1, 2019, there are ten questions and eighteen minutes for each passage). In order to successfully complete the questions, students need to use a skimming skill to gain a general idea of the passage, then follow up with a scanning skill to find specific information.

Reading the whole passage prior to answering the questions does not seem to be effective since most students are not able to finish within the time limit. According to Sawaki's (2017) studies, many Japanese students spend too much time on the initial reading passage in order to understand everything in detail. As a result, they are not able to identify main ideas, locate specific information, and important details. Sawaki (2017) concludes by saying that "Thus, it was deemed important to include reading exercises that help learners foster reading skills and strategies that are more applicable to selective reading of academic text for main ideas and important details within a limited time, something they would encounter in the TOEFL test as well as in academia" (p. 7).

The author usually asks the students to skim the passage by reading the title and first sentence of each paragraph in order to get a main idea. This strategy takes only one minute, and then the author suggests students to go directly to the questions. Most questions are within the stated paragraph. Therefore, they need to use scanning skills to find the information they need. This way, by the time the intersession is over, most students are able to finish the reading section within 20 minutes for each passage.

Williams (1984) suggests that a while-reading activity begins with global understanding of the text first and then works on paragraphs, sentences, and words. Many other reading experts also suggest this top-down approach (Urquhart & Weir, 1998; Grab & Stroller, 2002; Alderson, 2000; Anderson, 2003) is effective in reading.

After finishing the exercise, the author goes over some difficult vocabulary items in the question and answer choices briefly in Japanese. Then students work in pairs to compare their answers. Following the pair work, the author shows them each paragraph on the screen and points out the key sentence which leads to the correct answer. This allows students to pinpoint the area they need to read again. Duke and Pearson (2002) suggest that in order to be effective readers, students need to go beyond reading texts only for class and begin reading with a clear purpose in mind. Samuels (2002) also suggests repeated reading for building reading fluency. He says that this method helps readers to gain reading speed, increase word recognition and improve oral reading expression and comprehension.

In most TOEFL preparation classes, teachers may simply ask students to answer the questions, then give an extra explanation for the answer along with an extensive vocabulary explanation. Regarding implications for teaching, Eskey (2002) states what often happens in ESL/EFL reading classrooms is that teachers ask students to answer either written or oral comprehension questions concerning a reading passage. These activities merely test how well students understand a given passage, but do not actually teach students how to improve their overall reading comprehension. This teacher-centered approach deprives an opportunity for students to learn to improve their reading and discover the most appropriate answer by themselves. As Barnes (2016) indicates, “most of the TOEFL IBT preparation courses observed spent the majority of class on teacher instruction or explanations” (p. 170).

Concerning vocabulary comprehension, since the TOEFL text comes directly from general education textbooks, many of our students struggle with grasping the entire passage. Harmer (2001) addresses the concern that although teachers encourage students to read for the general meaning of a passage, many students would like to find out what each word means. There is a certain discrepancy

between a teacher's desire for the students to develop reading for general understanding and students' desire to understand the meaning of every word. How do you handle this case? Harmer suggests one way to compromise is for the teacher to encourage students to read for general understanding during the first and second reading. Then the teacher gives students opportunities to ask questions about vocabulary they do not know or allows them to look up words in a dictionary. In the author's intersession classes, he simply explains the vocabulary both in the passage and in the question and answer choices which may hinder students' ability to answer the questions related to the passage.

In addition to the TOEFL iBT bound exercises, students have a chance to work on a timed-reading activity where they are given a 500-word passage to read and answer comprehension questions. The context of the passage is geared towards intermediate level ESL/EFL learners so that most students should be able to read without any difficulty in vocabulary. They are always challenged to read a little faster than their normal speed and finish up reading in 200 words per minute. Only 10 to 20% of the students can meet this challenge; however, most students are able to read a little faster than the initial timed-reading by the end of the intersession. Regarding increasing reading rate, Anderson (2003) defines ESL/EFL fluent readers' reading rate as 200 words-per-minute with a 70% comprehension rate. In order to increase their reading rate, learners should decrease their reliance on the dictionary. Instead they can approach reading using various skills such as scanning, skimming, predicting and finding main ideas. Anderson also suggests that the teaching of reading comprehension consists of activating prior knowledge, cultivating vocabulary, teaching comprehension, increasing reading rate, verifying strategies and evaluating progress.

Teaching listening section

Ur (1983), Rivers and Temperley (1978) distinguish between two major types of listening skills: 1) listening for perception (micro-skills) and 2) listening for comprehension (macro-skills). The former type mainly focuses on perception of components rather than comprehension. For example, the main object of these exercises might be to practice identifying correct sounds and intonations. The main object of the latter type is to help students prepare for real-life listening. Ur, Rivers and Temperley point out that listening comprehension exercises (of either

type) can focus on the word level, the sentence level, or the discourse level.

Richards (1985) makes a long list of listening comprehension skills which would belong to the second type of skills as described by Ur, Rivers and Temperley. He divides skills into two major groups: conversational listening and academic listening (listening to lectures). Partial lists of skills for the two groups include the following:

Conversational listening

- a . ability to recognize the stress patterns of words
- b . ability to recognize reduced forms of words
- c . ability to guess the meanings of words from the contexts in which they occur
- d . ability to recognize grammatical word classes (parts of speech)
- e . ability to infer links and connections between events

Academic listening (listening to lectures)

- a . ability to identify purpose and scope of lecture
- b . ability to recognize key lexical items related to subject/topic
- c . ability to detect attitude of speaker toward subject matter
- d . ability to follow lecture despite differences in accent and speed
- e . ability to recognize function of nonverbal cues as markers of emphasis and attitude (pp. 198-199).

TOEFL iBT listening consists of conversations in campus situations and lectures. Before students listen, the author usually shows the script of a sample conversation on the screen and asks students what some key sentences are and how they take notes. The author also gives out a handout of sample abbreviations that students can use during the listening. Then the author points out to the students that the first question of the conversation is usually asking, "Why does the student go to see the professor?" if it is at the professor's office or "What is the main point of the lecture?" if it is a lecture.

Wilcox and Greathouse (1978) state there are several language components involved in listening comprehension. Because these components are all interrelated, a problem with one element may affect the student's comprehension of the overall message. For this reason, many students complain that they don't know what the speaker is talking about, or that they don't have any idea what he or she is saying

even though they understand many discrete elements.

In the phonological component, many students struggle because—in addition to rapid speech—native speakers use elisions, reductions and contractions (Wilcox & Greathouse, 1978). Stanley (1978) points out that ESL students' lack of comprehension of everyday speech often arises from “meeting familiar vocabulary and structures presented as unfamiliar sound systems” (p. 286). The phenomena of assimilation, vowel reduction, elision, consonant deletion, etc. causes comprehension difficulties. Furthermore, such phenomena occur frequently in normal everyday speech. Concerning reduction, Nakamura (1984) states that, for example, “give me” and “want to” may be often heard as “gimme” and “wanna”. Students need to get used to these characteristics of informal speech as well as be familiar with the less frequently used characteristics of formal speech.

The syntax component (grammar structure) of language also makes it difficult for the student to interpret (Wilcox & Greathouse, 1978). For example, in a sentence such as “Cholesterol built up in the walls of arteries causes arteriosclerosis,” the student might misinterpret “built up” as a main verb and get even more confused as he or she listens to the word “causes”.

Script and schema theory suggests that we have organized prior knowledge about many particular situations in everyday life. When we lack prior information, comprehension becomes difficult. Non-native speakers especially have culturally different scripts which create more problems when they listen to the target language (Richards 1983).

The lexical component (vocabulary) causes another problem. If the student does not know the words “widespread” and “epidemic”, he or she will completely miss the most important information from the following sentence: “Heart disease is so widespread that we can almost talk of an epidemic” (Wilcox & Greathouse, 1978).

Miller (2005) introduces different types of meaning in a model of listening. These include phonological knowledge, syntactic knowledge, semantic knowledge—which is “the relations between the words in a sentence” (p. 38), pragmatic knowledge, which refers to “the meaning and use of language in specific situations” (p. 41). Finally, Miller includes kinesics knowledge which is a non-verbal communication

such as facial expression, eye contact and body movement. Miller says that understanding each of the five types of knowledge is essential for successful comprehension.

The Listening section of the TOEFL iBT is very challenging to our students since it involves four components and a model of listening mentioned above. While listening to conversations, students often encounter reductions such as “gotta run”, and “kinda (kind of)”. They will also hear unfamiliar colloquial expressions such as “fuss”, “not a big deal”, “figure out”, and “start from scratch”. Moreover, in conversations and lectures, there is a pragmatic understanding where students are tested to see whether they can “recognize how word/sentence stress and intonation help convey meaning” and “recognize the speaker’s, attitude, degree of certainty, and/or specific purpose or motivation” (ETS, 2012, p. 25). The following is an example of this type of question.

Example: Why does the professor mention the XYZ Affair and the Jay Treaty?

Answer: To encourage the student to learn the relationship between events (p. 23).

In the lecture of the TOEFL iBT, our students especially find it difficult to understand everything in detail since the lecture contains a lot of vocabulary items they don’t know. For example, the following unknown vocabulary terms may frequently occur in a chemistry lecture: “substance”, “spectral signature”, “wavelength”, “curator”, “infrared”, “invasive”, “dissolve”, “flecks”.

After the first listening, the author explains some difficult vocabulary in the question and answer choices before showing the transcript on the screen. The student’s book also contains the same page. The author shows the students the areas of the script they have marked, and asks them to do the same in order to find the answers as they read along. In addition, the author explains the unfamiliar vocabulary in the marked areas. After that, the students read the marked script areas to find the answers by themselves before comparing their answers in pairs. Finally, students listen to the conversation or lecture a second time, and the author elicits answers from the students. Here is an example of one marked transcript area for a conversation between the professor and a student in *Official TOEFL iBT Tests Volume 1*:

Student

Yeah, in high school, Film Appreciation.

Professor

Hmm, I wouldn't think that'd be enough. Did you concentrate mainly on form, or content (p. 369) ?

Question: What is the professor's attitude toward the student's high school film course?

Answer choices:

- A. He does not consider it satisfactory preparation for the class he teaches.
- B. He does not think that literary works should be discussed in film classes.
- C. He believes that this type of course often confuses inexperienced students.
- D. He feels that the approach taken in this course is the best way to learn about film (p. 109).

Sometimes difficult vocabulary items such as "literary works" and "Film Appreciation" are explained before the students go over the transcript. There are some advantages for using this technique as follows:

1. By understanding vocabulary items related to questions, students can "eliminate" the lexical component problem of listening comprehension.
2. By reading the transcript, they will be able to recognize a phonological component of listening.
3. They can only focus on some parts of the transcript which allows them to reduce the burden of dealing with the entire transcript.
4. This exercise is active since students need to read the script and figure out the appropriate answers by themselves rather than sitting passively in class and listening to the teacher's explanation.

This post-listening phase is important since "it is an opportunity to check students' understanding of a text, and where errors in understanding have occurred, to explore what caused them and what follow-up is appropriate" (Richards & Burns, 2012, p. 111).

Teaching speaking section

Yu and others (2017) state that "the TOEFL iBT represents a significant development and innovation in assessing speaking ability in academic contexts" (p.

1). Currently the speaking section has one independent speaking task where a student is asked to give an opinion about a familiar topic. Then, there are three integrated tasks in which two of them consist of reading the passage and listening to the conversation or the lecture related to the passage and a student combines and analyzes information from two different sources (ETS 2012). One last integrated speaking task is to listen to a lecture and summarize what was covered.

Ockey, Koyama, Setoguchi and Sun (2015) investigated how the TOEFL iBT speaking section associated with performance on oral language tasks in Japanese college academic speaking classes. They chose 226 Japanese college students majoring in foreign language studies. These students were trained to do different academic college speaking tasks, and later took the TOEFL iBT speaking test to see correlations between their TOEFL iBT speaking scores and components of university oral task scores. Based on correlational analyses, they found that group oral discussion, picture and graph description and oral presentation tasks are highly related to the TOEFL iBT scores. However, the TOEFL iBT speaking tasks are significantly different from college oral performances because the test combines both reading and listening stimulus to respond to questions. This means the TOEFL iBT includes both reading and listening proficiency while the university tasks focus more on speaking, with some listening required for group discussions. In addition, interactional competence and descriptive skill were less related to the TOEFL iBT and “it would not be expected to capture orally the information presented by others by asking clarification or follow-up questions” (p. 55). However, overall the TOEFL iBT speaking tasks assess Japanese college students’ ability to speak in academic settings.

Since the TOEFL iBT tasks are very different from ordinary speaking exercises, the author not only explains the characteristics of each task, but also shows the *Inside the TOEFL Test*, video clips developed by ETS. This series dealt with task 1 & 2 independent tasks, 3 & 5, integrated tasks for campus situations and 4 & 6, integrated academic lectures (As of August 2019, the test format changed, and the ETS updated the new version). For example, for the task 1 & 2, the narrator explains how questions are structured, talks about how to approach questions, describes the scoring criteria, gives a sample response and also skill-building tips. Each clip lasts about seven to eight minutes and they are very useful for our students.

Moreover, before getting into those tasks the author usually shows discussion questions on the screen and has students work in pairs for 10 to 15 minutes as a warmup. One example of the discussion questions goes like this:

1. Do/Did you like your high school/college? If yes, what do/did you like about it? If no, what don't/didn't you like about it?
2. How many hours do/did you study every day in high school or college?
3. What was the most difficult class you've ever had? Why was it difficult for you?
4. Have you ever had a teacher that you really disliked? What did he/she teach? Why did you dislike him/her?
5. Have you ever had a teacher that you really liked? What did he/she teach? Why did you like him/her so much?

In addition to the *Inside the TOEFL Test*, the author gives more tips for the students, such as they do not have to complete the answer within a limited time. They are scored according to delivery (clear and fluid speech, good pronunciation, natural pace and good intonation), language use (use of grammar and vocabulary to express your ideas) and topic development (how fully you answer, how clearly you express your ideas, and how you connect your ideas).

For independent tasks, students have 15 seconds to prepare for the prompt and 45 seconds to answer each task. The author suggests students use their 15 seconds of preparation to write an outline of what they are going to talk about. Although their answers will vary, all students respond to the question in unison so as to maximize individual participation. After 45 seconds, students work in pairs and take turns reporting to the partner. This allows extra practice, and they can learn more from their responses to each other.

For integrated tasks, the author explains difficult vocabulary in the reading passage and the listening transcript, then has the students read the script after they complete each task. Then the author shows important points of the task in the text which shows condensed sample responses so that our students understand what major ideas need to be included in their response. Finally, the students repeat the same task, but this time they work in pairs and one student responds to the other partner. Then they take turns and respond to the partner. Whenever the

author listens to their paired responses, they feel more confident about themselves as they already read the script and the sample response. Without this exercise, just completing each task is not enough as some of them find it very difficult to understand listening tasks.

Teaching writing section

The first task of the writing section is integrated writing, where students read a passage and listen to the lecture related to it. The task is to summarize the points in the lecture and explain how the lecture responds to the points made in the reading passage. In the *Inside the TOEFL Test* video clip, the narrator gives helpful tips of how students can approach this task. However, in reality our students tend to struggle with understanding the lecture and end up summarizing what is stated in the reading passage. In the last day of the TOEFL Practice online test, some students only score a 1 out of 5 in the integrated task. *TOEFL Workshop manual* (ETS, 2012) states, “Integrated writing can be especially challenging for students, for they need to understand both listening and reading passage, and then establish the relationship between the two” (p.40).

Alfrefae, Mudkanna, Almansoob and Alfraee (2019) studied how listening affects students’ performance in writing, and compared listening with other skills. Participants were senior level college students in Yemen. The average score of the integrated test was 8.75, whereas the average on the independent test was 14.22. They found that students’ poor performance in integrated writing was not due to their reading, but rather their listening comprehension. This finding has also applied to my students for the past 10 years of the TPO results. Our students really need to improve their listening comprehension skills in order to improve their integrated writing scores.

After completing the integrated writing exercise, students print out their responses and turn it in to later be proofed by the author. Then the author asks the students to take a look at the text where they can see the point made in the reading and the counterpoint made in the lecture as a table. The author shows this page on the screen and explains difficult vocabulary items as an example of the page 68 in the *Official TOEFL iBT Tests Volume I*, words such as “dinosaur fossils”, “polar regions”, “endotherms”, “migrated”, “hibernated”, “evolved”,

“alternating” and “Haversian canals”. Then the students go over the points to see what they are expected to respond. This text says, “Your response is scored using the Integrated Writing Rubric (see Appendix A). A response that receives a score of 5 clearly conveys all three of the main points in the table using accurate sentence structure and vocabulary” (p. 68).

Regarding the Independent Writing section, we unfortunately do not have enough time to teach elements of paragraph writing during the intersession. Instead, we focus on teaching strategies that will help students gain experience writing independent essays within 30 minutes. And, as a follow-up, all EIC students take a writing class in the fall semester where they can learn more about the elements of paragraph writing.

During the task, which is the same as the integrated writing task, the author shows the stopwatch on the screen so that students can keep track of the time. After completing the task, they print out their response and turn it in in order for the author to proof and return to them the next day. After two or three exercises of this independent task, the author introduces Criterion (automated writing evaluation). Criterion is a web-based essay-scoring and evaluation system developed by Educational Testing Service. “It delivers immediate score reporting and diagnostic feedback that students can use to revise and resubmit their essays” (ETS, n.d.). According to the user’s manual called *Criterion Quick Start Guide*, online diagnostic feedback includes elements of grammar, usage, mechanics, style, organization and development. (*Criterion Quick Start Guide*, 2016). Criterion offers a wide range of topics targeted to levels from fourth grade to college GRE and TOEFL. Students’ essays are evaluated holistically and given a score from 1 to 6, which is equivalent to the PBT TOEFL Test of Written English (TWE).

In all the EIC writing classes of the fall semester, students have a chance to get exposed to Criterion and use this automated essay as homework assignments. In the author’s class, students are expected to turn in eight Criterion essays as homework. In the intersession class, the average Criterion score is around 3 and they write somewhere between 150 and 200 word-essays in 30 minutes. In the author’s writing class, toward the end of the semester, students work on in-class essays within 30 minutes. In January 2020, all seventeen students wrote a Criterion essay. Six of those students scored a 5, eight students scored a 4, and one student

received the score of 3. This shows that most of the students can improve their independent essay in one semester. Moreover, those six students who scored a 5 can now write over 300-word essays in thirty minutes.

Additional resources

In the beginning of the intersession, the author gives out a handout containing additional resources regarding developing the four skills and information about the TOEFL iBT. In reading, the author recommends extensive reading and many books are available in the office such as *DK biography*, *Disney Publishing*, *Reader's Digest* and *National Geographic*. Students are also encouraged to use an English learner's dictionary in order to help them come up with appropriate English vocabulary spontaneously in speaking and writing. As for listening, *TED Talks* are highly recommended because students are able to watch on YouTube with English subtitles. They can also have access to *VOA news* and other apps for *English Central* and *AFN 360 Internet radio* (U.S. armed forces radio programs) as well as various podcasts. Regarding the TOEFL iBT, CIEE, the Japanese TOEFL vendor in Japan, provides extensive information about the TOEFL. On their website, more than 10 Konan students' essays about TOEFL iBT test taking experiences are introduced in the web magazine. Concerning actual TOEFL practice, currently anybody can sign up for the online TOEFL iBT course for free. More details are found in Google: goo.gl/NonjcP. This is a six-week program and students' speaking and writing performance will be evaluated by SpeechRater and E-rater.

TPO and survey results

Students usually take the TOEFL Practice Online test (TPO) at the last day of the intersession. In order for students to take this test smoothly, the author gives them a handout and explains procedures of the test, as well as some dos and don'ts to remember during the exam. One of the biggest issues about the TPO is that previously about half of the students couldn't get the speaking score because their voices weren't clear enough for the SpeechRater to recognize. Because of that it was extremely difficult to find out all the students' total score in the intersession. Since the summer of 2019, this problem has been greatly reduced. In general, the average score for the intersession is somewhere between 45 and 50.

Surveys have been conducted in every intersession since 2006. Some teaching techniques have been changed as more updated information becomes available from ETS and CIEE Japan. However, the basic teaching principles are the same. Most students found that the class was somewhat difficult for their level due to the authentic materials we use. However, they liked the textbook because the exercises came directly from the actual tests, so they could see what the TOEFL iBT was really like. Most of the students felt that the pacing of the class was right, although some thought it was a little fast because they needed more time to understand, or wanted the teacher to explain things in more detail. Answers varied with regards to what skills students felt needed more or less instructional time in class, making it extremely difficult for the teacher to meet the needs of all the students. Another interesting piece of feedback was some students found they had similar backgrounds and goals as some of their other classmates, and they gained encouragement and psychological support from each other as well as from their teacher. On the whole, students were very satisfied with the intersession because the course helped them understand about the TOEFL iBT and helped them prepare for the test as well as their academic studies in the future.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how we can teach TOEFL iBT preparation intersession classes more effectively for lower-intermediate level Japanese college students. Overall, the intersession has been very beneficial to our students preparing for the TOEFL iBT test. Students who had taken the TOEFL iBT test prior to the intersession found that the course helped to increase their scores dramatically. One student took the TOEFL iBT just before the intersession and his score was 37, and at the end of the intersession his score on the TPO became 57. His actual score was 58 when he took the test a few weeks later. Another student's TOEFL score was 48 prior to the intersession, but after the intersession her score improved to 67. Another student got a 47 before the intersession and obtained a 63 after the intersession. We have had many of these examples in the past ten years.

After completing their study abroad, almost all of the students indicated their classes overseas were very similar to what they had experienced in the TOEFL intersession classes. Listening materials such as lectures closely resembled with

actual academic classes they took. Some students also mentioned that they actually encountered campus situations similar to those discussed in conversations from the TOEFL.

Cho and Bridgeman (2012) investigated the correlation between the TOEFL iBT scores and the academic performance of more than two thousand undergraduate and graduate students' GPA. They found the TOEFL iBT is a good predictor for international students' academic performance. In conclusion, this study proves that teaching TOEFL iBT not only enables students to improve their test scores, but also to perform better in academic settings overseas. Although teaching TOEFL iBT is very challenging to lower-intermediate level Japanese college students, this intersession is worthwhile for our students to develop their English skills and better prepare for academic classes overseas in the future.

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