

Students' Perceptions of TOEIC Classes Taught by Native English Teachers

Myeong-Hee Seong¹ and Katie Mae Klemsen²

¹Dept. of Leisure Design, Eulji University, ²Dept. of English Language and Literature, Hanyang University
seong@eulji.ac.kr, katie.klemsen@gmail.com

Abstract

The study investigates Korean university student perceptions of TOEIC courses taught by native English teachers. The research questions were: 1) What are some of the benefits of having a native English teacher for the TOEIC course? 2) What are some of the downfalls? To address these questions, 217 college freshmen participated in the questionnaire survey at the end of the semester, 160 students participated in the experiment, completing an initial TOEIC test to provide a baseline for measuring progress and a final TOEIC test was administered, as to establish learner outcomes. Two TOEIC courses, one taught by a Korean English teacher, and the other taught by a native English teacher followed. The results showed that students' perceptions of TOEIC classes taught by native English speaking teachers showed some differences from the result of what the statistics showed. Research data cannot statistically support the students' perception of Korean English teachers who teach TOEIC courses, either. Several methodological implications are discussed.

Keywords

TOEIC, teaching methods, native language teachers, Korean university

Introduction

Most universities in Korea require students to complete a first-year general English course to develop their English language communication skills. One component of these first-year English courses is TOEIC test-preparation, using texts that develop text-taking skills and focus on discrete points of language. The reason for this emphasis with the TOEIC test would seem that TOEIC score gains are deemed indicative of students' English communicative abilities which may be needed for future employment, while inclusion of the test in the curriculum is considered to motivate students in their language studies (Cunningham, 2002).

Accordingly, in recent years, many universities have enacted policies that reinforce the role of the

TOEIC exam. For example, in 2008, E University, which is located in Gyeonggi-do, decided that all university students must obtain the minimum scores of TOEIC according to their given majors, in order to graduate. Consequently, the role of native English teachers in Korean universities is changing. The role of native English speaking instructors in Korean universities has traditionally been that of facilitating speaking and listening courses. Teachers from the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and South Africa have long fulfilled the role of 'conversation' teachers. Conversation classes focus primarily on pronunciation, intonation and listening skills. Teaching TOEIC courses is a relatively new role for native English teachers in Korean universities, and there remain questions regarding which methodologies are most suitable. While Korean English teachers are familiar with the TOEIC exam, most having taken it themselves, native English teachers are not. Because they have never taken the TOEIC exam, many native English teachers may not possess intimate familiarity with the exam format. Also, there exist doubts in the minds of student to whether or not native English teachers understand English grammar, and this further underscores the need to study and identify effective teaching methods for TOEIC courses facilitated by native English teachers.

As many university English programs are putting more emphasis on TOEIC, identifying students' perception of TOEIC classes taught by native English speakers could aid in the development, implementation and delivery of successful TOEIC courses.

Part 2 of this paper outlines the methodological background for this research. In part 3, the research method was mentioned and in part 4, the student questionnaires, as well as baseline TOEIC scores of the participants were analyzed and discussed. Finally, 'who is more effective in teaching TOEIC, Korean or native speaker?' was implicated.

1 Background

1.1 The Standard TOEIC Test

The TOEIC, or Test of English for International Communication, measures the ability of non-native English-speaking examinees to use English in everyday workplace activities. The Standard TOEIC exam does not measure the examinee's ability to speak or write in the English language, rather it measures listening and reading abilities. However, the TOEIC exam is still widely used post-graduation for the evaluation of potential employees by human resource managers, and as a means of determining the potential for promotion of current employees. Companies may also look to TOEIC scores to determine whether or not a candidate is suitable for management training opportunities.

The TOEIC is a two-hour norm-referenced and fixed response (multiple-choice) test. It is also a proficiency test, therefore measuring English ability in terms of a future criterion (i.e. the workplace). The TOEIC consists of four listening sections with a total of 100 questions (45 minutes) and three reading sections with a total of 100 questions (75 minutes). Candidates receive separate scores for listening and reading, on a scale from 5 to 495 points. These provide a total score on a scale from 10 to 990 points.

1.2 Underlying Theories and Idea

When language teachers introduce certain activities into the classroom, it is desirable that such activities are based upon some form of theories or empirical evidence supported by research findings. Given the nature of language acquisition processes, there is no solid consensus as to what particular theories are universally accepted (2007, Miyamoto).

According to Miyamoto (2007), as far as listening is concerned, the claims often made by high-intermediate to low-advanced English language learners are that they can grasp the global meaning of the listening texts, but cannot grasp the details of the message, which results in misunderstanding. In other words, misunderstanding or non-understanding of words in speech, whether through faulty identification of word boundaries or insufficient knowledge of word meaning, is the major source of confusion in language comprehension. Recognizing speech requires for a listener to have the knowledge of prototypical sounds and sensitization to the sound variations of those prototypes that are brought about through co-articulation process of assimilation, reduction and elision (Rost, 2002). Therefore, in order to manage speech in real time, it is crucial that the listener quickly separated the speech into a

small number of constituents that can be worked within short-term memory.

Furthermore, enhancing the speed of information processing may result in increasing fluency or automatization in listening. Cognitive psychologists working in an information processing model of human learning and performance see second language acquisition as the building up of knowledge systems that can eventually be called on automatically of understanding. Although learners have to pay attention to any aspect of the language that they are trying to understand or produce, gradually learners become able to utilize certain parts of their knowledge so quickly and automatically that they are not even aware that they are doing it through practice and experience (Lightbown and Spada, 1999; McLaughlin, 1987).

2 Method

2.1 Research Questions & Questionnaire

A structured student questionnaire is employed to survey the students' current ideas and notions of TOEIC test preparation methods, as well as what they thought the greatest benefits and biggest downfalls of having a native English teacher facilitate a TOEIC course to be. The questionnaire was conducted anonymously in Korean, the native language of the students. A structured format is used so that each student has the opportunity to respond to the same questions, thus resulting in more accurate and relevant data collection. The questionnaire is distributed to each group of students, and written in Korean language. Students are asked to respond in Korean language. Questionnaire questions are as followed:

Question 1) What are some of the benefits to having a native English teacher for your TOEIC course?

Question 2) What are some of the downfalls to having a native English teacher for your TOEIC course?

2.2 Participants

For the questionnaire conducted at the end of the semester, 217 students were essentially chosen based upon their enrollment into one of the TOEIC courses taught by native and Korean English teachers. This is an example of a self-weighting sample, also known as an EPSEM (Equal Probability of Selection Method) sample, in which every individual, or object, in the population of interest has an equal opportunity of being selected for the sample. For the experiment, the students in this sample belong to one of Early Childhood Education, Public Relations, Addict Rehabilitation and Health and Safety majors (Table 1). They are

between the ages of 19 and 26.

Table 1: Control and Experimental Groups

<i>Group</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Total</i>
Control	- Early Childhood Education	41	80
	- Public Relations	39	
Experimental	- Addiction & Rehabilitation	42	80
	- Health & Safety	38	
Total			160

2.3 Procedure

2.3.1 Questionnaire

Two hundred and seventeen freshmen participated in the questionnaire at the end of the spring semester in 2010. In addition, students were asked what they feel the benefits and drawbacks of having a native English teacher who facilitate a TOEIC course are.

2.3.2 Experiment

For the experiment, a control group and an experimental group were established. The control group, consisting of 80 freshman students, received a TOEIC course, which was taught for 2 hours a week, for 15 weeks. A Korean English teacher who has taught TOEIC for approximately 10 years instructed the course. The experimental group, also consisting of 80 freshman students, received a TOEIC course during the same period, instructed by a female North American native English teacher with 3 years TOEIC teaching experience. Each of the 160 participants in both the control and experimental groups completed a TOEIC exam. The purpose of these groups was to measure any relative changes in TOEIC exam score in either the control or experimental group. The control and experimental groups will not be assessed as to which has the overall highest score, pre-test or post-test. Rather, they will be assessed individually to determine which group exhibits the greatest rate of improvement, relative to itself, in the listening and reading sections, as well as the overall score. This is done to determine if learning TOEIC from a native English teacher has a relatively more positive, neutral or a relatively more negative effect on the listening and reading section scores. This method tests the students' perceptions of TOEIC courses taught by native English teachers to gauge them as correct or errant.

The skills explored in the course by the experimental and control group instructors were intensive listening through shadowing, dictation, comprehension check, reproduction, and summarization/paraphrasing applied Miyamoto

(2007). To increase vocabulary, a vocabulary quiz was performed at each class. The words selected for the quiz were chosen from business news transcripts used for listening training. In order to check the advancement of the students' vocabulary level, pretest and posttest on the business vocabulary were performed. As speaking training (and as listening training as well), shadowing, reproduction with note taking (individual, pair or group work), and the outline exercise (presenting the summary of the reading at home to the class) were incorporated. Moreover, in order for the students to quickly cope with the questions on the TOEIC® test, timed reading exercises, and chunk-based reading exercises were also conducted at each classroom time.

In the course, skill areas covered were listening (40%), speaking (20%), writing (10%), vocabulary (10%), and reading (20%). However, given the nature of the skill training, there was some overlap; such training as shadowing, reproduction, and the outline exercise can be viewed as listening, as well as speaking training. Furthermore, as shadowing requires students to pay attention to the words of the heard sentences, it can lead to the incidental learning of vocabulary. With regard to grammar, the students had previously learned the basic grammar items that commonly appear on the TOEIC® test. This was taught by consciousness-raising through various skill training.

3 Analyses and Discussion

3.1 Students Questionnaire

A structured student questionnaire was employed at the end of the spring semester 2010 to survey the students' perceptions of TOEIC test preparation methods, as well as what they thought the greatest benefits and biggest downfalls of having a native English teacher facilitate a TOEIC course to be. Two hundred and seventeen questionnaires were completed, from 6 TOEIC classes, taught by four different native English teachers at E university. The results are as follows: One hundred and seventy six students (81.11%) responded that the benefits in a TOEIC course being taught by a native English teacher are: might improve students' listening abilities more than in Korean English teacher course; greater exposure to English; reduced levels anxiety during the TOEIC listening section.

One hundred and ninety one out of two hundred and seventeen (88.01%) responded that the downfalls in TOEIC course being taught by native English teacher are: difficulty in understanding what teacher says in class; they cannot or won't ask questions because they can't express themselves; grammar explanation is not systematic with a native

English teacher

For most respondents, the primary benefit to having a native English teacher was a perceived increase in overall listening proficiency. Seventy-one percent of students (155) answered that their listening comprehension would be much better if taught by a native English teacher. A deduction can be made that an overall increasing in listening comprehension will lead to a higher score in the listening section of the TOEIC exam. Student responses support this deduction.

There is an undeniable connection between higher levels of listening comprehension and higher listening section TOEIC scores. After understanding TOEIC format and exam style, the single biggest factor that contributes to positive TOEIC score change is an increase in student ability in the relative exam section. For example, if a student wishes to increase his or her listening section score, then the student should increase his or her to understand and synthesize spoken English. The research population in this study believes that learning TOEIC from a native English teacher will have a positive impact on their listening comprehension score.

Some respondents stated that they would feel less anxiety on the day they took a TOEIC exam if they studied TOEIC with a native English teacher. It was explained in some questionnaires that this was because they would have had more contact hours listening to native speakers and therefore feel more comfortable hearing English. It might be inferred here that Korean language is used as the primary means for instruction in TOEIC courses taught by Korean English teachers, therefore reducing the number of English language exposure hours a student receives. However, some respondents stated that they are less attentive with native English teachers, because they have difficulty in understanding the content which was delivered by native English teachers.

3.2 Pre-Test and Post Test

The pre-test was conducted during the first week of the 15-week semester, marking the beginning of the incubation period. The post-test was conducted at the end of semester. The scores between the two groups do not show a significant statistical difference (Table 2, Table 3) except listening score in Control Group.

Table 2. Listening Score

Test	Experimental			Control			F-Value
	#	Average	Std.	#	Average	Std.	
Pre	63	211.53	51.5	64	213.	53.3	0.85

-test		23	4538		3333	0149	771
Post	63	217.85	72.6	64	236.	81.3	0.17
-test		71	686		875	1007	064
F-Value		.81872			*0.0		
Difference		3			0563		
		6.3248			23.5		
		85			4167		

*P<0.05

Table 3. Reading Score

Test	Experimental			Control			F-Value
	#	Average	Std.	#	Average	Std.	
Pre	63	166.07	62.3	64	168.	70.5	0.76
-test		9	077		593	4181	9134
Post	63	157.93	72.6	64	163.	71.3	0.65
-test		6	686		281	6624	6545
F-Value		.17413			.451		
Difference		7			495		
		-7.1428			-5.3		
		6			125		

The total TOEIC score differences between the control and experimental groups do not demonstrate a significant difference as well. However, long-term results could vary.

4 Conclusion

Recently, an increasing number of universities seem to be requesting English teachers to improve their students' TOEIC scores. This may be the cause or the effect of the fact that more and more Korean people are taking TOEIC every year.

In this study, there is no significant difference between the control and experimental groups. In the short term, native teachers are not more effective than Korean teachers for the listening section. Korean teachers are not more effective in teaching the reading section. Student perception regarding the listening section and native teacher efficacy is different. Student perception regarding the downfalls of a native teacher for a TOEIC course is not statistically proven. That implies that there is no innate superiority, for native or Korean English teachers, rather qualified and unqualified. In other word, a greater number of hours, not exceeding that of the incubation period are not sufficient enough to raise the TOEIC score. Finally students want to learn grammar from a Korean teacher and listening from a NES teacher. However, according to this study, teaching abilities depends on each teacher, regardless of the teacher's native language. Direct test preparation seems to impact students' scores in the short term.