

Strategic Learning Instructions to Enhance English Test Performance

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Abstract

This study investigates how differently the learners progress on the TOEIC when different number of mock-tests and strategic learning instructions are provided by analyzing their pre- and post-TOEIC scores. The subjects were 180 first-year medical students from 2007 to 2010.

Keywords

Strategic learning instruction, listening and reading comprehension, performance on standardized test

Introduction

Medical students are a group of highly motivated, goal-oriented, and hard working learners who are academically self-driven. Even for such outstanding group of learners, letting them to self-study for the standardized test without strategic learning instructions may not result in efficient learning let alone enhancement. Learners may achieve better progress when similar tests are administered and practiced with pattern drills. Through such procedure, learners come to familiarize with types of questions and tactics of problem solving. As most standardized English test generally comprises listening and reading comprehension, this study is focused on the two skills of the language.

1 Literature Review

1.1 Listening Comprehension in English

Learning strategies are defined by Oxford(1990) as specific behaviors or thought processes that learners use to improve their target language and these are factors that contribute to the development of learner's communication abilities. Six groups of strategies have been proposed to apply to language skills. These are further divided into two categories of direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are: (1)cognitive strategies that are highly helpful for understanding and recalling the language material, (2)memory-related strategies that enable learners to connect one language item or concept

with another, and (3)compensation strategies that help learners to overcome knowledge gaps and continue to communicate naturally. Indirect strategies are (1)metacognitive strategies that aid learners in regulating and managing the learning process overall, (2)affective strategies that help learners to develop the self-confidence and perseverance necessary for learners to involve actively in language learning, and (3)social strategies which aid in increasing interaction and understanding the target culture.

1.2 Reading Comprehension in English

Reading entails an interaction between language and thought, according to Goodman(1971). A reader refers to a transaction with a text and a text refers to a transaction with a reader. Meaning is what results from the transaction and is constructed through the transaction between reader and text. In Chin's(2008) study of EFL readers' metacognitive awareness and learning strategies, proficient readers were better able to integrate text information with their background knowledge, and identify and fix miscomprehension than the less-proficient readers.

2 Methods

The subjects were 4 different 1st-year medical students at E. University(N=180: 43 in 2007, 49 in 2008, 46 in 2009, 42 in 2010). Most of them achieved top scores on English of Korean College Scholastic Ability Test.

The control group consisted of 43 students who were simply requested to study on their own for the TOEIC in 2007. Experimental groups were the ones following years of 2008 in which only 1 pre-test was given, 2009 one pre-test with 2 other mock-tests, and 2010 one pre-test with 3 mock-tests. After the pre-test, subjects were exposed to listening materials for pattern study. Also strategic instructions were given to improve listening ability and to get familiarized with patterns of the test.

3 Results

The results of listening comprehension increased each year showing 361.7 in 2007, 393.2(up 29.1) in 2008, 406.1(up 44.7) in 2009 and 407.7(up 53.1) in 2010. The results of reading comprehension also increased though not as drastically as L/C showing 391.4 in 2007, 400.1(up 8.1) in 2008, 401.6(up 9.4) in 2009, and 400.4(up 12.6) in 2010. The subjects' post-TOEIC scores increased significantly in 2008 by 40.2 points(753.1→793.3) compared to the control group when they were administered pre-test and mock-test with strategic learning instructions after the test. More improvement was achieved as more mock-tests with strategic learning instructions were given.

4 Conclusion

This study was based on the collective data during the past 4 years on 4 different first-year medical students. The purpose of the research aimed at investigating whether intensified strategic learning instructions affected on the learners' post-standardized English test scores. If so, another question arose "Does the number of mock-tests with the same number of strategic instructions affect them any differently?" Both listening and reading comprehension scores were compared among the 4 different groups.

The results show that the more mock-test administered with strategic instructions, the higher scores achieved on the post-TOEIC especially in listening comprehension. Their cognitive strategies to recall the material they listened as well as memory-related strategies to answer the questions on the test contributed to enhanced performance on the post-test. As reported by Anderson's study(1991), medical students resulted in higher score increase when they were instructed to use more strategies in reading as well.

There are some limitations such as higher scores may not necessarily be equated with better enhancement in language competence as the test does not include speaking and writing. However, as questions on listening material are directly related to what is actually conversed in a real situation, high-scored subjects can be regarded as proficient in understanding spoken English.

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