

The Effects Of TOEIC Preparation Courses on Test-Takers' Perceptions and Performance

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ABSTRACT

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Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is a language competency test that most students, particularly university students, are required to acquire and master. Students, on the other hand, frequently have issues administering the TOEIC test. TOEIC preparation courses are thought to be one of the most effective methods for improving students' comprehension. To achieve the quality of TOEIC performance, test takers requires many factors, in which the preparation for the course is important. This paper explored the effects of TOEIC preparation courses on test-takers' perceptions and performance of Non-English major students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs -HCM City Campus (ULSA2) to improve their performance in a TOEIC test. Through the results of the student survey, the scores of pre-test and post-test are rated. The results of a questionnaire survey of 30 3rd year students at University of Labor and Social Affairs -HCM City Campus (ULSA2) show a picture of students' perceptions of the effects of TOEIC preparation courses. Also, it can be demonstrated that ULSA2 students' performance of the TOEIC test improved significantly after practicing the TOEIC approach.

1. Introduction

English is seen as an international language in the context of globalization. As a result, English is one of the most important prerequisites for language learners and employers all over the world. Many tests have been used to evaluate one's capacity to communicate in English. The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), developed by Educational Testing Services (ETS), the largest testing organization in the United States, has had a significant increase in its impact on the

assessment of communicative English since the late 1990s, especially in Japan and Korea, where the TOEIC test was used very early.

For many university students, TOEIC test preparation has grown increasingly vital in recent years. However, university students do not currently have access to well-defined test-taking procedures, particularly for TOEIC reading comprehension preparation. Many institutions have recently added TOEIC programs to their English curricula in order to address students' immediate requirements for high test scores, as an increasing number of corporations claim to evaluate TOEIC scores when hiring new staff. Following this trend, the University of Labor and Social Affairs – HCM Campus (ULSA2) began using TOEIC-oriented English learning and teaching in 2010 and has drawn a large number of students to these TOEIC preparation courses, which fulfill one of the graduation criteria.

Furthermore, Nurpahmi (2015) suggested that listening is a receptive skill that requires learners to capture and absorb the input of English. The other receptive skill is reading, which requires children to comprehend and interpret the written word. Because pupils frequently recognize the written word more easily than the spoken word, listening is likely to be more challenging than reading. Furthermore, pupils can go back and reread a phrase when reading, whereas they only have one chance when listening. When reading, the tempo is set by the reader, whereas when listening, the pace is set by the speaker or recording.

Listening comprehension is a challenge that many students have. It can be demonstrated when they are given English listening exercises. They still struggle to understand the native language's genuine sounds. They must be able to decipher the meaning of each essential term. As a result, kids will require some effective ways to improve their listening comprehension. The TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) is an English language competence test for people whose first language is not English, according to ETS (2008:2). The TOEIC, or Test of English for International Communication, assesses non-native English speakers' ability to communicate in English in the workplace.

This paper is significant in the way it contributes to improving ULSA2 students' test performance in a proficiency test in general and TOEIC test in particular, and to enhancing teacher's methods of teaching TOEIC test in TOEIC preparation courses to help TOEIC test-takers to increase their TOEIC scores. Moreover, findings of the study are expected to help raise teachers' awareness of challenges that students face when taking a TOEIC test. From that, some implications drawn from the results of the study will be a reminder to TOEIC teachers here (at ULSA2) and other educational organizations that they should have a particular adjustment in teaching TOEIC.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted in the literature on TOEIC practice classes in EFL learning environments (Alzebaree, 2021). According to Hsieh (2017), students have positive attitudes toward using TOEIC exam scores for graduation and believe that studying for the exam enhances their language skills and future job prospects. The TOEIC test scores are also viewed by the participants as having high levels of reliability and validity. Pan (2010) looked into how TOEIC usage

influenced students' communicative competency and test-taking. The study indicated that TOEIC material significantly improved students' communicative competency and test-taking abilities.

Concerning the importance of TOEIC practice, another study found that students were classified as intermediate to advance because their mean pre-TOEIC score was 702, ranging from 515 to 945. The post-TOEIC results revealed that 78 percent of the students (28 out of 36) improved significantly from a mean score of 702 to a score of 766, a difference of 64 points. They also stated that English-only lessons assist them in improving and participating more actively as a type of role play and acting (Lee & Jin, 2009). However, the researcher discovers some issues in the EFL classroom, such as EFL students failing to learn TOEIC strategy, having no idea which strategy is the most effective, still lacking of listening skills, and having significant difficulties with the speed listening record because they are unable to catch the actual sound of native speakers. This study looks into whether a TOEIC practice class, which lasted four days and involved 30 ULSA2 students, improved EFL learners' listening skills and TOEIC scores. The following are some examples of research problems:

1. What are students' perceptions about TOEIC preparation classes?
2. To what extent does the TOEIC preparation class influence the test-takers' performance of TOEIC test?

3. Methodology

The researcher made use of two data collection instruments which included questionnaires, pre-/post-test and semi-structured interviews. The researcher utilized 30 third-year non-English-major students in a pre-test/post-test design to study and analyze if the TOEIC preparation courses have any influences on their listening comprehension. The study took place at ULSA2, which is located in District 12, HCM City. It took place between April 2021 and November 2022. The study tools are a 10-question questionnaire about ULSA2 students' perceptions of TOEIC preparation class and the TOEIC test. The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative and quantitative data analysis technique. Based on the researcher indicated earlier, this technique was employed to prove the research questions. The researcher intended to see if there was any significant difference between the TOEIC pre-test and post-test results as a result of this method.

Before the researcher tried to conduct the TOEIC preparation course for students learning treatment, students were getting confused on what the TOEIC terms and is used for at first time because of some logical reasons; firstly students have just heard about the term of TOEIC itself when they were participating in the first session of 10 class meetings in a TOEIC preparation course, secondly students have no ideas about doing the TOEIC test and these students have never had any experiences to take TOEIC test and intensive program. The researcher designed three phases; pre-test, intensive learning process, and post-test. After the TOEIC preparation classes has been conducted intensively at 3rd year students, to find out whether any positive improvements of students listening skill and their language capacity the researcher passed the questionnaire for students at aims of discovering students' perceptions about whether any effectiveness of TOEIC preparation class.

4. Results and Discussion

In order to figure out whether the objectives of the research could be achieved or not, the researcher analyzed the test result of the pre-test and the post-test. The researcher conducted pre-test in order to find out the previous students' ability in listening before TOEIC practice class applied. The pre-test was administrated on April 10th, 2022 in TOEIC preparation course. The post-test was administrated on November 14th, 2022. The researcher conducted the post-test in order to find out their improvement in listening ability and also to make sure that TOEIC strategy can be used to improve the students' listening comprehension. After having observed the pre-test, post-test and applied the TOEIC practice class, the research findings revealed that the TOEIC preparation course had a much larger impact on the students' listening ability and language skills combined. To respond the formulated research questions, it can be interpreted descriptively with the following:

1. What are students' perceptions about TOEIC preparation classes?

Table 1. Students' perceptions about TOEIC preparation classes

No	Statements	Results									
		Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	After attending the TOEIC preparation course, you will be able to grasp the TOEIC test.	12	40	12	43	1	3.3	4	13.3	1	3.3
2	The TOEIC test preparation course is an effective way to prepare for the TOEIC exam.	14	46.7	15	50	0	0	1	3.33	0	0
3	You will become increasingly motivated to learn TOEIC strategy as you advance through the TOEIC preparation course.	11	36.7	16	53.3	3	10	0	0	0	0
4	TOEIC preparation course is very useful for you to practice the TOEIC test.	19	63	11	37	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	I can learn easily listening strategy of the TOEIC proficiency test.	4	13.3	5	16.7	3	10	13	43.3	5	16.7
6	TOEIC preparation course enriches your own language competencies especially listening skill.	10	33	14	47	0	0	6	20	0	0

7	After following the TOEIC preparation course, I am able to overcome the problems in Listening section.	11	37	16	53	0	0	3	10	0	0
8	Following the TOEIC preparation course positively encourages you to practice listening skill through TOEIC simulation test.	13	43	17	57	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	TOEIC practice class allows you to enrich your self-confidence at doing TOEIC test.	15	50	12	40	0	0	3	10	0	0
10	TOEIC preparation course significantly helps you to prepare your school graduation.	16	53	14	47	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1 shows ULSA2 students' perceptions about TOEIC preparation classes. Having observed the results of questionnaire, 30 of them (100%) agreed with the statements (Q.4, Q.8, Q.10) that TOEIC preparation class is very useful for them to practice the TOEIC test, to positively encourage them to practice listening skill through TOEIC simulation test, and to enrich their self-confidence at doing the test; 29 of ULSA2 students (97%) pointed out that TOEIC preparation class effectively is able to assist them to practice and prepare the TOEIC test, 3.33 % of them had already requested that 10 class meeting TOEIC preparation class is not enough time for them to learn TOEIC strategy (Q.2); Most of ULSA2 students (90%) entirely agreed with the points that TOEIC preparation course can make them get increasingly motivated to learn TOEIC strategy (Q.3), allow them enrich self-confidence at doing the test (Q.9) and the course helps them overcome the problems in Listening section (Q.7); there were about 83% EFL students agreed that after they followed the TOEIC preparation courses, they were able to understand the TOEIC proficiency test (Q.1); Also, 24 of ULSA2 students (80%) argued that TOEIC preparation course enriches your own language competencies especially listening skill and 20% of them were still having big problems how to understand effectively the listening strategy of TOEIC test (Q.6). However, 18 of participants (60%) refused the view that TOEIC preparation course can assist them to learn easily the listening strategy of the TOEIC proficiency test (Q.5).

2. To what extent does the TOEIC preparation class influence the test-takers' performance of TOEIC test

To respond comprehensively the second research question, the researcher conducted Pre-test, learning treatments and Post-TOEIC test. This three phases have already revealed the research findings as described with the following;

Table 2. Students' improvement after enrolling the TOEIC preparation class

	Pre-test		Post-Test		Improvement
	N	Percent	N	Percent	
TOEIC scores in total (> 450)	8	26.7%	25	83,3%	56.6%

Listening score (> 250)	5	16.7 %	15	50%	33.3%
Reading score (> 250)	9	30 %	20	66.7 %	43%

Table 2 conceals the TOEIC pre-test and post-test results that of 30 students of ULSA2. After the researcher conducted pre and post-test given in the TOEIC-oriented format, the findings has captured that most of students had made the significant improvement of TOEIC test results. 17 of 30 ULSA2 student (56.6%) were getting much better in the test. Particularly, from the result of post-test, it can be descriptively explained that 50% of 30 participants in the Listening Section and about 67% of them in the Reading Section the higher score of TOEIC test rather than pre-test and. The average of reading score achieved by them was only 30% of 30 EFL students get lower score in pre-test before they were given some beneficial treatments of 10 class meeting TOEIC preparation class. After given the learning treatments, they were getting better results of TOEIC score at reading about 102% and it increased about 67% of them made greater score of TOEIC test in the post test.

Findings from the interviews

With regard to the first research question, the findings show that a large number of students at the University of Labor and Social Affairs did have positive attitudes towards the TOEIC preparation course. However, after following the preparation course, there have still been some of negative reviews in terms of understanding of the test, students' confidence about TOEIC test, listening strategy. When asked about the students' negative reviews, ULSA2 students (N=6) at the University of Labor and Social Affairs provided the following reasons:

(1) Lack of practice

The lack of additional practice tasks in the TOEIC preparation course is most likely the reason why students continue to struggle with the TOEIC test.

Student No.1 said: *“There aren't enough practice exercises in the course”*.

Student No.2 added: *“We need more practice to get used to the content and format of the test”*.

Student No.3 admitted: *“There are few would be special program monthly initiated by school that facilitate students to practice and learn more about TOEIC strategy”*.

(2) Lack of TOEIC materials and books

According to student responses, one of the reasons students find it difficult to study the TOEIC proficiency test's listening strategy is a shortage of TOEIC sources.

One of participants said: *“We don't get enough TOEIC books from our TOEIC teachers”*

Another one added: *“The TOEIC preparation course provides us with lots of strategies to do the TOEIC test, but we hardly find TOEIC materials in the library to practice TOEIC test”*

(3) Lack of course attendance

According to some of participants, inadequate class attendance is the reason why they do not understand the

structure as well as the level of confidence when taking the test.

One has an idea: *“We are attending the internship program, so we can't show up the class meeting regularly”*

When asked the reasons why most of students had made the significant improvement of TOEIC test results, some of them said that they were getting more interested in learning TOEIC strategy in TOEIC preparation course that facilitate them to learn intensively in 10-class meeting sessions along. Most of them stated that TOEIC preparation class gave them much influential treatments of learning the useful strategy of TOEIC test that made the students easier to understand some typical questions of TOEIC test, learn some useful tips of TOEIC test, be more confident to practice TOEIC, and feel encouraged to improve their language ability.

One of students interviewed answered: *“After 10 - class meeting in the preparation course, we progressively become accustomed to the TOEIC test's format and strategies”*

5. Limitations and Recommendations

Based on their findings, the researchers have made the following recommendations. First, the study's sample size is tiny (30 participants). If more population is included in the study, it will be more trustworthy. Second, this study only found out the learners' perceptions of TOEIC preparation course. The findings of this study will be more persuasive and objective if there are TOEIC teachers' thoughts on their students' learning activities and the course itself. As a result, similar studies should be conducted to learn more about instructors' perspectives on the courses. Because of the negative feedback from students, TOEIC teachers and educational organizers should consider providing more TOEIC resources and more flexible TOEIC preparation courses so that students can easily participate. To make it easier for students to enroll in TOEIC preparation courses, they should be offered both online and offline.

6. Conclusions

The statistic results from the data, the interview from the TOEIC students acquired have answered the research questions above. Firstly, the results acquired from the questionnaire show that students have high level of attitudes towards the TOEIC preparation course. Secondly, the results of their pre-test and post-test also present students' improvements after enrolling the TOEIC preparation course. Finally, based on ULSA2 students' comments from the follow-up interview, the answer to some negative reviews was found. A review from the research findings revealed that there was an increase of the students' scores in each section after being given the treatment. Overall TOEIC score has been achieved improvements after ULSA2 students participated the TOEIC preparation course. It's said that such courses encourage their interests in learning and understanding TOEIC useful strategy delivered in the 10 class meeting treatments given by the researcher as practitioner, most of them were motivated to learn English language through learning and practicing TOEIC helpful tricks, the treatments enrich them some more knowledge of preparing the TOEIC test, and most of EFL students appreciated the program and expected to follow the TOEIC practice class again in the next term. From the result of post-test, it can be descriptively elaborated that 57% of 30 ULSA2 students mostly achieved the higher score of TOEIC test rather than pre-test. It can be concluded that the implementation of TOEIC practice class can significantly improve the students' listening comprehension. According to the

result of this research, it states that there is significant improvement of practicing TOEIC preparation course on the students' performance in the test. That is why the use of TOEIC preparation course in academic purpose especially in listening should not be neglected. To create a comfortable environment in teaching, the researcher suggests that the teacher be selective in applying appropriate techniques in listening as the students need to be ready in doing listening test and the readiness can be obtained when they feel comfortable. The students also should not be busy with their own business during the learning process when they are not familiar or do not like with the material or the technique used. In contrary, they should be able to adapt with the new techniques and materials used as fast as possible to reach better learning achievement and EFL learning and teaching purposes.

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