

# 目的主導型指導による学生のTOEICスコア向上を目指して

## Improving Student TOEIC Scores via Purpose-Driven Instruction

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世界市場で競争できる力を身に付けた卒業生を輩出するよう、日本の大学にはより一層のプレッシャーがかかっている。その方法の一つとして英語力を高めることが重視されており、大学は、学生が卒業後の就職先を見つけられるようにTOEICやその他の標準テストのスコアを向上させることが求められている。

本稿では、「TOEIC頻出語彙リスト」を使用した効果的なTOEIC対策としてSUACの教員が行った長期的指導の第一段階について報告する。現段階での結果は、統制群と実験群の間に有意差は見られなかった。しかしながら、本研究の最終的な目的は、TOEICスコアを効率的かつ効果的に引き上げる方法を確立することであり、長期的指導の第二段階においては、これまでの結果をふまえて方法を改善することによって実験群のスコアは向上するものと考えている。

Japanese universities are facing increasing pressure to produce graduates that will be able to compete in the global market. Many believe that one of the best ways to do this is by improving English, and universities that can help raise scores on TOEIC and other standardized English tests will better be able to help students find jobs after graduation. The research in this paper describes the first step in a long-term effort by Shizuoka University of Art and Culture English teachers to help students efficiently prepare for the TOEIC by studying from a TOEIC high-frequency vocabulary list. Preliminary results did not show a significant difference in scores between the control and experimental groups. However, it is believed that changes to the methodology in phase two of the research may help improve scores in the experimental group.

### 1.1 Introduction

As the TOEIC becomes increasingly accepted as the de facto measure of English proficiency in the private sector in Japan, universities are facing greater competitive pressure to produce graduates with higher scores and to tout these gains in their marketing materials. Many aspects of language proficiency, such as becoming more internationally-minded, building confidence, and even improving communicative competence can be difficult to evaluate. As a result, monitoring changes in student scores on the TOEIC, a test that directly measures only listening and reading skills, is often the default way that university administrators determine if an English program is successful or not. Shizuoka University of Art and Culture (hereinafter SUAC) is no exception to this trend. The authors of this paper, like many native English university teachers in Japan, are interested in developing a methodology for efficient vocabulary building that will ultimately help students raise their TOEIC scores.

As of April 2015 here at SUAC, all incoming freshmen now take the TOEIC on the day of their

entrance ceremony. Additionally, all students enrolled in fall-semester core English courses must take the TOEIC again in late December as a course requirement. These conditions provide us with the opportunity to see if we can effect improvement in student TOEIC scores from April to December.

### 1.2 Background

The research outlined in this paper has been conducted with two sections of the English-medium English Composition course (Japanese course title: 英語表現法) at SUAC. For the five years up until 2014, English Composition was a faculty-wide course. It has traditionally been a very well-attended course, mostly by first-year students, with an average of 77 students and is divided into two sections. From 2015, with the implementation of a new curriculum, English Composition became available to students in the Department of International Culture. It is also a required course for students hoping to earn an English teaching license. The two sections of the course follow an identical syllabus and are taught in adjacent classrooms by native English-speaking

teachers at the same time (Monday 3rd period) in the fall semester. Although the course focuses on writing, about 80% of first-year students are also taking core English courses and aware that they must take the TOEIC in December. It is hoped that this should provide motivation for them to study the vocabulary presented in class. These conditions make the course ideal for conducting research and the two sections provide us with perfect experimental and control groups.

Many native English-speaking teachers would prefer to teach holistically, rather than having to worry about raising students' standardized test scores. However, the reality of tertiary English education in Japan is that universities frequently use the TOEIC (or TOEFL, IELTS or some other standardized test) scores as part of their marketing efforts. In addition, employers sometimes ask students to provide their TOEIC scores as part of their hiring process. Whether or not this is good for English education in Japan is a separate issue and beyond the scope of this paper. However, the reality is that TOEIC scores can play a significant role in Japanese students' lives, and it is hoped that these research findings can be used to develop more effective methodologies for efficient vocabulary acquisition in English courses. It is further hoped that more efficient vocabulary acquisition can help students improve their TOEIC scores, which can then be used as another weapon in their arsenal as they search for jobs after graduation.

### 1.3 Literature review

With the paradigm shift from grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods to the communicative approach in second and foreign language teaching over the past 40 years, the once common assumption that vocabulary instruction is not necessary has slowly been replaced by greater recognition of its importance. Indeed, many now seem to believe that it can be especially useful for lower-proficiency learners (National Reading Panel 2000, Nation 2005). Curtis (2006) recommends direct instruction to introduce word meanings for lower-proficiency second and foreign language learners. However, there are still some researchers who have argued that direct vocabulary instruction is not helpful (Nagy 1997).

Details about the research design will be explained in the following Methodology section but for the sake of clarity we should note here

that our experimental group of students were given a selected list of high-frequency TOEIC words created by Kiyomi Chujo, who established a corpus-based list of 240 high-frequency words that are likely to appear on the TOEIC (Chujo 2003). This list served as the basis for the vocabulary presented to students. The list was sorted into ten units of English with a Japanese translation and students were tested on the vocabulary on a weekly basis. This technique is supported by evidence from Hunt and Beglar (2005) who suggested that acquiring decontextualized lexis is one of "the most crucial explicit lexical instruction and learning strategies." Testing students on their ability to purposefully memorize the vocabulary before taking the TOEIC at the end of the ten weeks is supported by the research of Nation (2005), who indicated that teaching vocabulary should focus on useful items and form-focused instruction as "a means to an end."

Krashen (1989) hypothesized that vocabulary can be learned incidentally, without conscious effort. The idea is that learning vocabulary in context means it will likely be remembered better and longer provided the vocabulary is met repeatedly. This may, in fact, be true for higher-proficiency learners. However, as we are attempting to demonstrate relatively quick short-term improvement on TOEIC test scores in a group of not necessarily higher-proficiency learners, presenting all new vocabulary in context given our methodological parameters is not practical. Indeed, our student research subjects in the fall semester of 2014 had an average TOEIC score of between 450 - 470 and may not be described as higher-proficiency learners. Carter (1987) has pointed out that, particularly for lower-level learners, large quantities of vocabulary can be learned efficiently by rote learning and repetition.

### 2.1 Hypothesis

This study was conducted with the expectation that an experimental group, given weekly quizzes on words from a list of frequent TOEIC vocabulary before the actual TOEIC, would show higher average scores than a control group who received no exposure to the frequent TOEIC vocabulary and no weekly quizzes. It is hypothesized that preparation for the TOEIC will serve as a short-term instrumental motivator for students in the experimental group and push them to study the vocabulary presented on the weekly quizzes, thus

resulting in better TOEIC scores than the control group.

## 2.2 Methodology

In the 2014 academic year, year one of our project, one section of 42 students (N=42) served as the experimental group, while the other section of 43 students (N=43) was the control group. Students were randomly assigned to one of the groups based on their scores on the TOEIC Bridge test which was taken by all incoming freshmen in April 2014 (As of April 2015, all incoming freshmen are required to take the full TOEIC exam on the day of their entrance ceremony). The average TOEIC Bridge score of the experimental group was 147 while the average score of the control group was 148. Five of the 43 students assigned to the control group either dropped the class mid-semester or did not take the TOEIC in December and were excluded from the final results, leaving a final total of 38 students (N=38) in the control group. In the experimental group, only one student was excluded from the results for not having taken the TOEIC in December, leaving a total of 41 students (N=41).

The experimental group received a list of approximately 200 high-frequency TOEIC words (in English and Japanese), separated into ten units of twenty words each (see Figure1). For ten weeks, students in the experimental group were given brief explicit instruction and took weekly quizzes on ten of the twenty words in each unit of the vocabulary list. This took roughly the first fifteen minutes of each lesson. Students also took a midterm test based on the first five units of 100 words, and a final (approximately one week before the TOEIC in late December 2014) on all 200 words. Testing was explicit in that students were given the English word and asked to provide its corresponding translation in Japanese. They then exchanged tests with their partner and corrected the tests while referring to the vocabulary list. All of the above took approximately the first fifteen minutes of class time from week three to week twelve. The final vocabulary test was timed to be within one week of when students were required to take the TOEIC test.

As noted above, the control group received no explicit vocabulary instruction, was not exposed to the vocabulary list, and took no vocabulary quizzes all semester. Instead, for the first fifteen minutes of class from week three to week twelve, students

did a free-writing activity based on a prompt (i.e: Write about your high school life.) which was not directly related to vocabulary acquisition or the TOEIC. Other than the explicit vocabulary instruction of the experimental group and the free-writing activity of the control group during the first fifteen minutes of class, the course content was identical in all other respects. Following the completion of the course, student experimental and control group scores on the December 2014 TOEIC were compared to establish whether the experimental group exposed to the high frequency vocabulary list showed a rise in test scores compared to control group scores.

## 2.3 Results and Discussion

Our hypothesis was that explicit instruction and weekly quizzes using a specialized list of frequent TOEIC words and coordinated around the TOEIC test date would result in significant improvements on the scores of our experimental group over our control group. However, in analyzing scores on the December 2014 TOEIC, we found no significant difference in the scores of our experimental group and our control group. In fact, scores varied little between the two groups, with the control group actually having slightly higher average TOEIC scores, 494 to 477 for the experimental group, on the December 2014 test.

**Table 1 : Overall Results**

	Pre (TOEIC Bridge)	Post (TOEIC IP)
Experimental Group (n=41)	147	477
Control Group (n=38)	148	494

We are now left with the question of why our experimental group did not show significant improvement relative to the control group and what possible confounding factors could have limited the effectiveness of the study. It is possible that one or more of the following factors could have contributed to the outcome.

First, the amount of vocabulary studied may have been too small (or too large) to produce a significant outcome. Ten weeks of weekly tests based on a list of 200 words may not have been sufficient to lead to vocabulary retention deep enough to allow knowledge of the words to have exerted an impact on the TOEIC. It is also possible that too few of the words from the list appeared

on the iteration of the TOEIC that students took in December 2014 to affect their test scores. However, some students from the experimental group reported anecdotally that they did notice many words from the list on the TOEIC test that they took.

Another possibility is that the way the vocabulary was tested in class did not allow students to sufficiently demonstrate their knowledge on the TOEIC. It could be argued that our technique of testing direct L1- L2 word translations did not allow for deep enough processing to affect TOEIC scores. This technique may not have been appropriate for the level of students. Perhaps it may have been better to present and test the vocabulary in ways more appropriate to higher level learners, such as contextually or via L2 only definitions.

The way students memorized the vocabulary may also not have been effective enough to influence test scores. Not all of the students in the experimental group scored highly on the final in-class vocabulary test before the TOEIC. One area of future research that could lead to better results is to experiment with different memorization techniques to achieve greater depth of processing of L2 vocabulary. Alternatively, the method of testing may not have contributed substantially to the desired learning outcome. It could be productive to evaluate students on the vocabulary either in-context, or in a format more similar to how it might appear on the actual TOEIC. An analysis of the data of the twenty-two experimental group students who scored 90% or over on the final vocabulary test revealed an average TOEIC score of 505 points, 28 points higher than the experimental group average, and eleven points higher than that of their 38 classmates in the control group.

**Table 2 : Over 90% on Vocabulary Tests**

	Pre (TOEIC Bridge)	Post (TOEIC IP)
Experimental Group (n=22)	151	505
Control Group (n=38)	148	494

Another possible confounding factor in our lack of significant results was the anomaly that the control group had two outlying students who achieved extremely high scores on the TOEIC in December, a 900 and an 895. Random

assignment of students saw these two students end up in the control group. These two students were removed from our results and the data re-analyzed to see if they skewed the results. In fact, when removed, the results showed a 477 (down from 494) average score for the control group of now 36 students, which was much closer to the average of 471 for the 41 experimental group students.

**Table 3 : Results Minus Outliers**

	Pre (TOEIC Bridge)	Post (TOEIC IP)
Experimental Group (n=41)	147	471
Control Group (n=36)	148	477

Based on numerous self-reports, an impending TOEIC test did seem to increase instrumental motivation in students. Some also reported that the process of memorizing vocabulary in this way was helpful for them. They noticed some of the words from the list on the test and that helped decrease test anxiety and increase confidence. For most of the students in this study, it was their first time taking the full-length TOEIC (as opposed to the abbreviated TOEIC Bridge version) and having studied a vocabulary list proved confidence-building for them. While this is an ancillary benefit that accrued to only some students in the experimental group, it should be recognised that increasing confidence is an important factor in successful foreign language study.

As was mentioned, this is a preliminary report and further research in this area will be ongoing. Perhaps the largest confounding factor of this initial research was the unequal comparison between the TOEIC Bridge and the actual TOEIC. One goal of this initial step of what is envisioned as a long-term research project was to work out logistical problems. It is hoped that future iterations of this research will yield clearer, more definitive results which can be applied to improving the TOEIC scores of all students at SUAC.

**2.4 Conclusion**

The hypothesis of this study was that weekly quizzes on words from a list of frequent TOEIC vocabulary in the ten weeks before the test would result in improved scores for an experimental

group over a control group. It was hoped that using preparation for the TOEIC as a short-term instrumental motivator for students would spur them to study the vocabulary and result in significantly better scores. This proved not to be the case. In the Results and Discussion section some possible reasons why results did not meet expectations were mentioned.

It is certainly too soon to draw any firm conclusions. While the initial iteration of this research did not produce the expected results, this could very well be due to errors in research design or in how the material was presented. This is a long-term research project in which the ultimate goal is to identify efficient and effective strategies for helping students improve their TOEIC scores.

The tentative plan for the fall 2015 semester is to have both sections of the English Composition class as experimental groups. The idea is to test two different methods for vocabulary acquisition and compare both of them to the larger control group of students who were not exposed to the high-frequency vocabulary at all (i.e. all those not enrolled in English Composition in fall 2015 but who took the TOEIC in April and again in December 2015). For example, one of the experimental groups will be required to write the target vocabulary on word cards and study the word cards for the first fifteen minutes of class. This group will not be given any quizzes of any kind. The other group will be presented the vocabulary in the same way as fall 2014, as described in this paper, with weekly quizzes, a midterm review and final quiz at the end of ten weeks.

The conditions provided in having all incoming students take the TOEIC upon entrance to university in April, as well as having the fall semester English Composition course closely aligned with the students taking the TOEIC in December, provide excellent conditions to experiment with various methodologies to raise test scores. As this was only a preliminary study, it is the intention of the authors to take full advantage of this opportunity to continue researching the utility of purpose-driven vocabulary instruction.

## References

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Vocabulary List Units 1 & 2				
	単語	意味	単語	意味
<b>1</b>	<b>ビジネス (1)</b>	<b>&lt;前半&gt;</b>	<b>ビジネス (1)</b>	<b>&lt;後半&gt;</b>
	multinational	多国籍の	alter	変える, 変更する
	conduct	経営する, 行なう	identify	明確にする
	enterprise	会社	distribution	流通, 配送
	merger	合併	competitor	競争相手
	establishment	設立, 施設	exceed	超える
	venture	冒険的事業	domestic	国内の
	acquisition	企業買収	formal	正式の, 格式の高い
	diversify	経営の多角化を図る	overall	全体の
	trend	傾向, すう勢	patent	特許
	implement	実行する	relatively	比較的
<b>2</b>	<b>ビジネス (2)</b>	<b>&lt;前半&gt;</b>	<b>ビジネス (2)</b>	<b>&lt;後半&gt;</b>
	innovative	革新的な	telecommunications	遠距離通信
	comply	従う	accordance	一致
	impact	影響	up-to-date	最新式の
	output	生産量	recession	不況
	capacity	受容能力, 収容能力	bankruptcy	破産, 倒産
	inadequate	不十分な	reorganization	(会社の) 再建, 再編成
	breakdown	故障	closure	閉鎖
	garment	服	facilitate	容易にする
	architectural	建築学の	exclusive	独占的な
	contractor	請負業者	legal	法律上の, 弁護士の

Figure 1