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# CASE STUDY OF THE TOEFL IBT PREPARATION COURSE

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# CASE STUDY OF THE TOEFL IBT PREPARATION COURSE

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# ABSTRACT

On account of the introduction of the Next Generation TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-based Test) in September 2005, it is worthwhile to explore the impact of the new test on ESL/EFL teaching and learning.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the TOEFL iBT preparation course from both teachers' and students' perspectives. This study was conducted in a Southwestern Ontario town from January to April 2007. In total, six teachers and four students were involved in this study.

A qualitative case study method was used in this research. Personal interviews and classroom observations were used as the main tools to collect data. Survey and document analysis were employed as supplementary instruments. A constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) was used to conduct data analysis.

Findings from this study reveal that participants have positive attitudes toward the change and the new test has had an influence on their teaching and learning practices to various degrees. Based on the findings, this study makes suggestions for teachers, students, and test designers respectively. Teachers should try to break the general skills into teachable elements and should be more aware of cross-cultural learning issues. Students should explore opportunities to speak English and prepare themselves for the possibly noisy test environment. Test designers should provide informative workshops to teachers on how to evaluate the performance of their students by using the rubrics.

Key words: TOEFL iBT; test preparation; ESL teaching; culture; test validity

# DEDICATION

To my beloved parents: Chen Xiaoxing and Feng Shuxiang

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# Chapter 1:   Introduction

This study was conducted in a middle-sized city in Ontario, a place where English is the predominant language, between January 2007 and April 2007. It involved six teachers, all native English speakers, and four students from East-Asia preparing for the Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-based test (TOEFL iBT), for a total of ten participants. In conducting this research, I investigated test preparation practices from both teachers and students' perspectives within the context of the TOEFL iBT. My aim is to shed light on the current teaching and learning trends during the TOEFL iBT preparation process. The findings from this study may be of particular interest to ESL teachers who are or will be instructing the TOEFL iBT preparation course, the test-takers who are preparing or going to prepare for the test, and those who are involved in designing the test.

## 1.1 Background of the Study

The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is the most widely-used and most internationally recognized test to evaluate non-native English speakers' language proficiency. However, the content and format of the previous TOEFL tests has been criticised by language educators for a long time. Graham (1987) seriously questioned whether the scores on the TOEFL actually reflect the test-taker's language proficiency due to the lack of oral proficiency assessment. Norton Pierce (1992) was concerned that the reading tasks on the TOEFL might encourage a trend that what test-takers read was

not what they needed outside the test situation. The complaint could also be heard from university administrators, who make admission decisions by referring to the score. In many cases, they found out that the international students who they recruited failed to fulfill their roles as Teaching Assistants due to their poor oral proficiency (see Thomas & Monson, 1991). As a speaking assessment was missing from the previous versions of the TOEFL, the score could not show that aspect of language ability.

In order to address these problems mentioned above, the ETS started to introduce the Next Generation TOEFL (also known as the TOEFL Internet-based test or iBT) in 2005. It was expected that this change would make the test more effective in measuring the test-takers' ability to communicate in an academic setting (ETS, 2007a). The evolution of the TOEFL test, in terms of the format and content, became a hot topic in the EFL/ESL teaching and learning community. The most striking changes are the inclusion of the speaking section and the integrated-tasks on the TOEFL iBT. With the speaking tasks being added to the test, oral proficiency --- a significant indicator of communicative competence, can be eventually assessed. The integrated type of tasks on the TOEFL iBT combines more than one language skill, which is close to communication situations in real life.

The changes that occurred on the TOEFL test reflect the current trend in second language education: a focus on communicative competence. The concept of communicative competence has stimulated a new form of language teaching approach: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It aims to develop learners' communicative

competence in language by having them interact in meaningful ways through the use of authentic materials and various classroom activities. The term of communicative competence and the characteristics of CLT will be described in the next chapter.

It is expected that the changes brought to the TOEFL test will have an impact on English teaching and learning; thus, it is interesting to explore how ESL teachers have adjusted their teaching strategies to cope with the TOEFL iBT and how the students prepare for the test.

## 1.2 Research Questions

In this light, I used the following research questions to guide the present study. As this study aims to investigate the TOEFL iBT preparation practice from both teachers and students' perspectives, I drew up two main research questions, under each of which five sub-questions were outlined.

1. **How do native English speaking teachers instruct the TOEFL iBT preparation course?**

   1.1 What are their perceptions and attitudes toward the changes that have occurred in the TOEFL iBT?

   1.2 What teaching materials do they use in the TOEFL iBT preparation course?

   1.3 What kind of classroom activities do they employ in teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course?

   1.4 What kind of adjustments do they make (if any) in teaching the TOEFL iBT

preparation course?

1.5   What kind of challenges do they face in teaching the TOEFL iBT

preparation course?

## 2. How do East-Asian students prepare for the TOEFL iBT?

2.1   What are their perceptions and attitudes toward the changes that have

occurred in the TOEFL iBT?

2.2   What are their attitudes toward the way their teachers instruct the TOEFL

iBT preparation course?

2.3   How do they prepare for the TOEFL iBT after class?

2.4   What kind of preparation manuals do they use as the self-studying

materials?

2.5   What do they perceive as the hardest and easiest sections in the TOEFL

iBT?

In order to answer these questions, a qualitative case study approach was employed. This method, according to Yin (2003), is used to explore the "how" and "why" questions about contemporary phenomena. In this study, I employed four instruments to collect data: interviews, classroom observations, survey, and document analysis. In the sense of gathering data, the first two are the main tools and the last two are used as supplementary ones. In total, ten participants (six teachers and four students) from three local schools were involved in this study.

## 1.3 Significance of the Study

Although the TOEFL test has been in use for almost half a century, there are not many research studies investigating the TOEFL preparation courses. Most research studies within this field focus on the validity of the test itself rather than how it is being taught. The only study dealing with the TOEFL preparation class was conducted by Alderson and Hamp-Lyons in 1996. That study will be explicitly reviewed in the next chapter. At that time, the paper-based TOEFL was in use, which differed greatly from the TOEFL iBT; thus, my study focuses on the new test by investigating how ESL teachers instruct the TOEFL iBT preparation class and how students prepare for the test. I hope my study will enhance the understanding of the nature of the TOEFL preparation classroom and enrich the existing literature on the learning process within the TOEFL context.

As this study is conducted within the context of North America, the teacher participants are all native English speakers, whose perceptions of language teaching and test preparation are supposed to be different from non-native English speaking teachers. Thus, the findings may have an implication on the teaching practice for non-native speaking TOEFL teachers.

Another significance of this study derives from its potential contribution to the East-Asian test-takers. To this group of learners, speaking is often regarded as their weakness due to diverse factors: the traditional grammar translation teaching method, the overwhelming written examinations, and the limited language exposure environment. The

strategies and techniques used by those who have taken the TOEFL iBT are valuable resources that potential test-takers can fall back on. One point that I want to emphasize is that not all strategies are applicable to this group of test-takers, because the participants in this study were preparing the test in an English speaking setting, which provided them with a favourable language environment to develop their oral proficiency.

This study is also significant in the way that it explores the test validity issue from a particular perspective, that is, the attitudes of teachers and students towards the changes that took place in the TOEFL iBT. This knowledge is useful both for test developers (i.e. ETS) and test users (i.e. university administrators). They can use this information either to optimize the test design or to set up the appropriate line for admission.

## 1.4 Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this study. First of all, as a small number of participants (i.e six teachers and four students) are involved in this study, the findings can hardly be generalized to a large population or other TOEFL preparation programs. The findings in the current study are further confined by time, place and resources. Since the TOEFL iBT was just introduced two years ago, inadequate understanding of the test may have a great impact on the way teachers instruct the class. As time goes on, their ways of teaching will definitely change to some extent. As this research was conducted in a medium-sized city in Canada, the findings are not applicable in other settings, for instance, in a non-native English speaking environment. Moreover, due to the time and

resources constraints, I was unable to observe the classes for long periods of time. The findings would be enriched if I could make the classroom observations through the whole course instead of a small portion of the program.

A second limitation may stem from the lack of information on how students performed on the TOEFL iBT test. Without this information, it is impossible to measure which kind of preparation is more efficient and appropriate. Although evaluation of teaching and learning efficiency is not the purpose of this study, it is of interest to note the relations between different ways of preparing for the test and the corresponding test results.

The last limitation is the language barrier. The interviews with students were conducted either in English or Mandarin (the first language of the researcher); however, as for the two Korean participants, the interview could only be completed in English. It is recognized that they have a fairly strong capability in English, but communication would be more accurate and effective if they had a choice to elaborate on certain points by using their first language. Thus, it would have been helpful to have had a Korean interpreter to facilitate the interview.

## 1.5 Overview of the Study

There are five chapters in this thesis. In Chapter One, I have provided the background and context of the present research, proposed the research questions, addressed the significance of this study, and finally stated its limitations. In Chapter Two,

I first introduce the history and characteristics of the TOEFL test, and then review the literature on different subjects (i.e Communicative Competence, Communicative Language Teaching, culture and language, washback, and test validity) with an aim to provide a theoretical foundation for the study. In Chapter Three, I explain the rationale for the research methodology, demonstrate the profile of the research sites and participants, present the methods for both data collection and data analysis and finally point out the potential limitations of this methodology. In Chapter Four, I present the findings under the themes according to the research questions. In Chapter Five, I discuss these findings and their educational implications for ESL teachers, test-takers, and test designers and providers. Limitations of the current study and suggestions for future study are also included in the last chapter.

# Chapter 2:   Literature Review

In this study, I investigate the test preparation practices from both teachers' and students' perspectives within the context of the TOEFL; thus, it is necessary to understand what content the test includes and how the content has changed since its initial implementation. As the TOEFL iBT is the current version in use now, its format and content are briefly reviewed in this part. Throughout the years, the evolution of format and content in TOEFL has reflected the development trends in the second language acquisition field --- emphasis has shifted from language form to language use (Canale, 1984). Thus, I present the theoretical basis that brought forward the change: communicative competence. Its application in the language teaching field, known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is briefly introduced, focusing on the characteristics. A review of the literature on the relationship of culture and language learning, washback studies in ESL/EFL field, and language test validity is also included.

## 2.1 The TOEFL overview

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has a history of more than 40 years'. As Pike (1979) quotes in the forewords of his Research Report, the TOEFL was developed in 1963 by a National Council on the Testing of English as a Foreign Language to assess the English proficiency of non-native speakers of the language applying for admission to colleges and universities in the United States. In 1965, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the College Board assumed joint responsibility for

the program. In 1975, the ETS took over the whole TOEFL project and has maintained its control ever since. The Educational Testing Service is an American non-profit organization that specializes in designing standardized tests, administrating their implementations, and evaluating their validity.

With its rapid development over the past twenty years, the TOEFL has become the most widely used and most internationally recognized English proficiency test. Currently, the TOEFL scores are used by more than 6,000 institutions and agencies in 110 countries to select students with the English skills needed to succeed (ETS, 2007b). In some countries, the TOEFL scores are even used by certain employers to interpret the English proficiency of the candidates.

The popularity of the TOEFL test is attributable to both internal and external reasons. The external factor is the currently high status of English in the world, which functions more like a global language. The internal factor is the continuous effort made by ETS to enhance the validity of the test through revising its format and content.

According to the testing instruments, the development of the TOEFL can be divided into three stages: the paper-based TOEFL, the computer-based TOEFL (the TOEFL CBT) and the internet-based TOEFL (the TOEFL iBT). The characteristics of these three versions of tests will be described as follows:

2.1.1. Paper-based TOEFL

Compared to other versions of the test, the paper-based TOEFL has the longest

history. It has been employed since the inception of the TOEFL test. The initial version of the paper-based test included 5 sections: Listening Comprehension; English Structure; Vocabulary; Reading Comprehension; Writing Ability. The total number of items was 200. The initial version had been used for almost ten years and then a "New-Format" TOEFL was introduced. The total number of sections was reduced from five to three, which are Listening Comprehension; Structure and Written Expression; Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary respectively. The total number of items was reduced to 150 (Clark, 1977). The "New-Format" TOEFL has been examined for its validity since its implementation and the Vocabulary subpart in section 3 has become a frequently criticized area. Testing knowledge of individual vocabulary words and phrases in isolated sentences is inconsistent with the real-world communicative situations, as it neglects the importance of context in assisting individuals to determine the meaning of unknown words (Schedl, Thomas, & Way, 1995). In 1995, the TOEFL Committee of Examiners modified section 3 and moved the vocabulary items into the reading comprehension part. That forms the latest paper-based TOEFL.

Another significant modification was the introduction of the TWE (Test of Written English) into the TOEFL test in July, 1986 (ETS, 1996). From then on, the writing ability of the test-takers could be evaluated. Test-takers are required to compose an essay based on an assigned topic within 30 minutes. The score range of the TWE is from 0 to 6.0.

From the description above, we can see that although the structure of the paper-based TOEFL has changed a lot during the past forty years, its content still

emphasizes evaluation of test-takers' grammar knowledge and discrete language skills.

### 2.1.2. Computer-based TOEFL

With the rapid development of advanced technology, the computer-based TOEFL (the TOEFL CBT) was introduced in 1998 by ETS (Kirsch, Jamieson, Taylor, & Eignor, 1998). ETS reported that this TOEFL CBT had many advantages, such as extra security, more complex and real life questions accompanied by graphics and visuals, and more accurate estimation of test-taker's English proficiency. Ironically, the implementation of the TOEFL CBT in China in 2002 was not successful due to some security reasons. Thus, until September 2006, the paper-based TOEFL test was the only version of the TOEFL in use in Mainland China.

According to the Bulletin for TOEFL CBT (2006-2007), there are four sections in the TOEFL CBT: Listening, Structure, Reading, and Writing. A tutorial is provided at the beginning of each section to familiarize test-takers with the item types and teach them how to answer the items on computers.

The major difference between the TOEFL CBT and the paper-based TOEFL is the scoring system. The first two sections (Listening and Structure) in the TOEFL CBT are scored on a computer-adaptive basis, which means that more credit is given for answering hard items correctly than successfully answering the easy items. Thus, the score is dependent both on the number of questions being answered correctly and on the difficulty level of the questions being successfully answered. As to the score report, test-takers'

unofficial scores will be displayed since they complete the test on the computer, however the scores do not include the Structure and Writing sections. At this point, the test-taker has an option of cancelling or submitting the score. If they choose to submit the score, their essays will be rated and an official score will be sent to them approximately three weeks later.

Besides the changes mentioned above, another significant improvement of the TOEFL CBT is the greater variety of item types in the section of Reading. In addition to the multiple-choice items used in the paper-based TOEFL, other types of questions such as inserting a sentence, making an order, and others are included in the TOEFL CBT.

In 1981, the original TSE (Test of Spoken English) was developed to measure the oral proficiency of the TOEFL test-takers and was revised in 1992 to better reflect current trends of overall communicative language ability (ETS, 2001). The tasks in the TSE include reading a passage, telling a story, describing a graph and answering a series of questions. The performance of test-takers is recorded on the tape and will be sent to ETS for evaluation. Unlike the TWE, the TSE is not a component part of the TOEFL test and test-takers can decide whether to take it or not based on their own needs.

## 2.1.3. Internet-based TOEFL (the TOEFL iBT)

Although many modifications and improvements have been made to the TOEFL, it is still regarded as being inadequate to truly reflect the test-takers' communicative competence. According to Bachman (1990), testing should be designed in a way that not

only reflects the learner's linguistic knowledge but also shows to what extent the learner is able to use this language in a real communicative situation. Furthermore, as the TOEFL test is used by North American college and university administrators to make admission decisions, they demand more accurate indications of international students' English speaking and writing capacities in an academic setting. Under these circumstances, a new version of the TOEFL test with much greater content relevance and consequential validity is called upon.

In 2005, a new generation TOEFL test was introduced by ETS, known as the TOEFL iBT. It was initially administrated in the United States in that September and then was expanded to Canada, France, Germany, and Italy in October 2005. ETS aimed to implement the new test in the rest of the world within 2006. Test-takers in mainland China tasted the first flavour of the TOEFL iBT on September 15, 2006. The recent news is that ETS has decided to offer over 25, 000 additional test seats in Mainland China by the end of 2007 (ETS, 2007c).

Compared to the paper-based and computer-based TOEFL, TOEFL iBT has been changed greatly both in format and content. A totally brand new speaking section has been incorporated into the test. More than merely adding a speaking section, new test items and tasks that integrate the four language skills have been created. There are four sections in this new test, which correspond to the four language skills --- speaking, listening, reading, and writing. However, rather than evaluate these skills separately, the TOEFL iBT assesses these skills together within one task. Following Phillips (2006), the

features and layout of the items in each section are summarized below.

First, let us look at the Speaking section, which is regarded as the flash point of the TOEFL iBT. In this section, there are six tasks and the total length is approximately 20 minutes. The first two tasks are independent, in which test-takers are asked to express their opinions about two individual topics. During each task, they have 15 seconds to prepare and 45 seconds to answer. The remaining four tasks are integrated ones, but they are different in the way that two of them integrate the skills of reading, listening and speaking and the other two integrate listening and speaking. In the former two integrated tasks, test-takers are required to illustrate their opinions based on both what they read and what they hear. Generally speaking, a reading passage in this section has around 100-120 words and the length of each listening passage is about one and a half minutes. Test-takers have 30 seconds to prepare and one minute to finish the answer. As to the other two integrated tasks, test-takers are given 20 seconds preparation time and one minute to answer them for each task. It is worth mentioning that the answering time is strictly controlled and the recording tape will automatically stop when the given time is used up.

The Listening section includes 4-6 lectures with 6 questions after each lecture and 2-3 conversations with 5 questions after each conversation. Compared to the old versions of the TOEFL test, the listening materials in the TOEFL iBT are much longer, thus taking notes has become a necessity. Note-taking was not allowed in the previous versions of the TOEFL test. Question types remain the same as those in the computer-based TOEFL test:

multiple-choice with one or two answers, ordering events or steps in a process and matching objects or texts to categories in a chart. A unique feature of this section is that at least one lecture is spoken with a British accent or an Australian accent. Furthermore, some portions of the lectures or conversations are repeated when test-takers answer certain questions.

In the Reading section, there are 3-5 passages with 12-14 questions after each passage. As to the question types, in addition to the traditional multiple choice questions, test-takers are also asked to insert a sentence to complete a passage. This new kind of question is called "reading to learn" questions, which aims to examine the test-takers' abilities in recognizing the structure and organization of passages and understand relationships between facts and ideas. The answer options in this type of question are more than four and the correct answer is more than one. A distinguishing feature of this section is that test-takers can click on some words or phrases in the passage to view the definition of that term.

Similar to speaking tasks, the Writing section also includes some integrated tasks. Generally speaking, there are two tasks in the section of Writing: Integrated Writing Task and Independent Writing Task. In the first task, test-takers first read a short text within 3 minutes and then listen to a lecture addressing the same topic from a similar or contrary perspective. Note-taking is allowed during the reading and listening period. After that, test-takers are required to write a summary of the main points made in the listening passage and explain how these materials relate to the points addressed in the reading

passage. The second task, Independent Writing Task, is similar to the TWE in the way that test-takers are requested to compose an essay on an assigned topic within 30 minutes. Unlike the TOEFL CBT, the essays in the new test must be typed on screen without the hand-writing option.

The TOEFL iBT test lasts for approximately 4 hours, which is much longer than the former test versions. On the final score report, test-takers are provided with comprehensive feedback about their performance on the test besides a numerical score (TOEFL Bulletin for TOEFL iBT, 2007-2008). This information helps test-takers to identify their strengths and weaknesses in the English language.

As stated on the homepage of the TOEFL website, the new TOEFL iBT was initiated to fulfill the goal that the test would more accurately assess the test takers' communicative competence in an academic setting. Thus, it is essential to know what the concept of communicative competence is and how this concept is reflected in the language teaching approach.

## 2.2 Communicative competence

The assessment focus of the TOEFL test has shifted from "linguistic competence" to "communicative competence". Thus, before introducing the concept of "communicative competence", I would like to review what "linguistic competence" is.

"Linguistic competence" is also regarded as "grammatical competence" (Omaggio, 2001). Chomsky (1965) referred to grammatical competence as a language learner's

"implicit and explicit knowledge of the system of the language" (Omaggio, 2001, p.3). In

his theory, Chomsky (1965) believed that an individual's actual performance did not

reflect his or her underlying knowledge because many other factors such as memory

limitations, distractions, errors, hesitations, false starts, repetitions, and pauses also affect

the performance. Based on this theory, the focus of foreign language teaching was on

grammar accuracy and vocabulary memorization.

However, the lack of communicative aspect in Chomsky's (1965) model was

discussed and criticized by other linguists, among whom are Campbell and Wales (1970)

and Hymes (1972). Campbell and Wales (1970) advocated that "the degree to which a

person's production or understanding of the language is appropriate to the context in

which it takes place is even more important than its grammaticality" (p. 249). Here, what

Campbell and Wales refer to as knowledge of appropriateness is communicative

competence. Similarly, Hymes (1972) also felt that Chomsky's competence-performance

distinction missed an important social dimension and he argued that "there are rules of

language use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (p.278).

Based on the work of Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980) developed a

theoretical framework and then Canale (1983) further clarifies the concept of

"communicative competence". In this model, communicative competence is composed of

four components:

1) Grammatical competence. This competence deals with "knowledge of lexical items
   and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology"

(Canale & Swain, 1980, p.29). In simple words, it is knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling, word formation, and sentence structure. This type of knowledge allows the user to convey messages in accurate grammatical forms.

2) Sociolinguistic competence. This competence is concerned with sociocultural rules of appropriateness of language use, which refers to "appropriateness of meaning, and is concerned with the extent to which particular communicative functions (e.g. commanding, complaining, and inviting), attitudes (including politeness and formality) and ideas are judged to be proper in a given situation" (Canale, 1983, p.7). With this knowledge, learners are able to know whether something is "sayable" in a given context.

3) Discourse competence. This competence refers to "mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres" (Canale, 1983, p.9). This type of competence enables learners to know how to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent meaning.

4) Strategic competence. This competence, which includes many strategies varying from paraphrasing, circumlocution to repetition and gesture, in order to compensate for the limitation in communication caused by non-linguistic factors, such as memory limitation, fatigue and distraction. It includes both verbal and non-verbal strategies.

Another well-known researcher in the study of communicative competence is Bachman (1990), whose model differs from Canale and Swain's in two ways: one is that a new component, psychophysiological competence is added, which refers to "the neurological and psychological processes involved in the actual execution of language as a physical phenomenon (sound, light)" (p. 84, parenthesis in original); the other is the separation of language competence and strategic competence. In this model, strategic

competence is no longer defined as a "coping" mechanism employed to compensate for linguistic deficiency but "as a general ability, which enables an individual to make the most effective use of available abilities in carrying out a task, whether the task be related to communicative language use or to non-verbal tasks"(p. 106). According to Bachman (1990), there are three components in strategic competence: assessment, planning, and execution.

Language competence is the core of Bachman (1990)'s framework of "communicative language ability". As illustrated by the graph below, Bachman divides language competence into two subcategories: organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence includes grammatical competence and textual competence. Pragmatic competence encompasses illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. The concept and elements of each competence will be presented in the following part.

Organizational competence refers to "those abilities involved in controlling the formal structure of language for producing or recognizing grammatically correct sentences, comprehending their propositional content, and ordering them to form texts" (p.87). These abilities are sorted into two types: grammatical and textual.
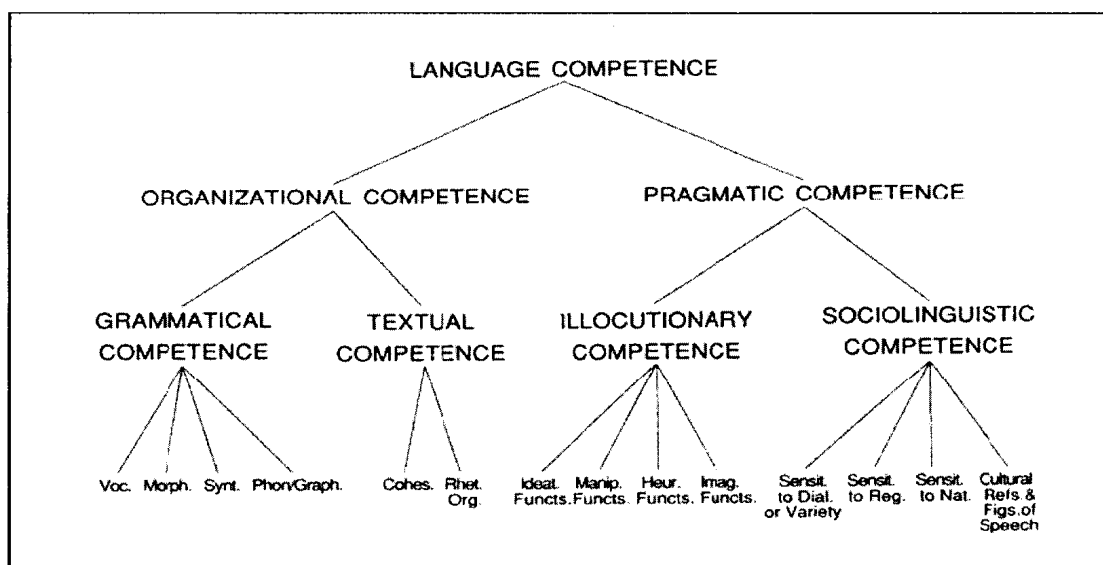
Figure 1: Bachman's model (1990)

Grammatical competence is defined the same as that in Canale and Swain's (1980) model, which encompasses the words selected, how they are ordered besides how they are pronounced and written. As to textual competence, it includes "the knowledge of the conventions for joining utterances together to form a text" (p. 88). This competence includes cohesive devices and rhetorical strategies, which are employed to link one thought to another and continue the conversation.

According to the same authors, pragmatic competence, the other branch of language competence, is concerned with "the organization of the linguistic signals that are used in communication and how these signals are used to refer to persons, objects, ideas, and feelings" (p.89). Pragmatics here is interpreted as "the relationships between utterances and the acts or functions that speakers (or writers) intend to perform through these utterances..."(p.89). Included in pragmatic competence are illocutionary competence (referring to a wide range of functions) and sociolinguistic competence

(referring to appropriateness of these functions). According to Bachman (1990), there are four kinds of functions: ideational, manipulative, heuristic, and imaginative. An ideational function draws on our own experiences of the world in order to express meaning. The manipulative functions serve the purpose of altering the world around us. The heuristic function realizes self-discovery in formal or informal settings. The imaginative function produces creative language for humorous or esthetic purposes. It is important to note that each of these functions may be performed simultaneously. The other element of pragmatic competence is sociolinguistic competence, which is defined as "the sensitivity to, or control of the conventions of language use that are determined by the features of the specific language use context; it enables us to perform language functions in ways that are appropriate to that context" (p. 94). The abilities within this competence include "sensitivity to differences in dialect or variety, to differences in register and to naturalness, and the ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech" (p.95).

The application of "communicative competence" in the foreign language teaching practice led to a new form of language teaching approach, the communicative language teaching (CLT). I will demonstrate the characteristics of CLT in the following section.

## 2.3 Communicative Language Teaching

There is a considerable debate on how to define Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and no single model is unanimously accepted as an authority (Mcgroarty, 1984;

Markee, 1997). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT is characterized by a "learner-centered and experience-based view of second language teaching" (p.158).

High premium of CLT, as Halliday (1994) points out, is placed on oral work and maximum student participation in pair work or group work. Students are expected to practice language through different kinds of classroom activities, in which interactions between students and teachers or between students and students are realized. Ramirez (1995) argues that CLT should focus on the uses of language within certain social and interactive situations. In addition to emphases on the contextual factors in language use and on learning by communicating, Nunan (1991) sums up the characteristics of CLT as:

1. Emphasizing learning to communicate through interaction in the target language;
2. Introducing authentic texts into the learning situation;
3. Providing opportunities for students to focus on language as well as the learning process itself;
4. Incorporating learner's own personal experience into the classroom learning process;
5. Attempting to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

Drawing on works done by previous language researchers (Canale & Swain, 1980; Dubin, 1995; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Taylor, 1983), Li (1998) outlines six features of CLT:

1. a focus on communicative functions;
2. a focus on meaningful tasks rather than on language per se;
3. efforts to make tasks and language relevant to a target group of learners through

an analysis of a genuine, realistic situations;

4. the use of authentic and from-life materials;

5. the use of group activities;

6. the attempt to create a secure, non-threatening atmosphere. (p. 679)

One problem of the Communicative Language Teaching is that it is not a culturally sensitive methodology (Ellis, 1996; McKay, 2002). The differences between the Western and Eastern culture may make some aspects of CLT "unsuitable for Asian learners and teachers" (McKay, 2002, p.214). Thus, the cultural issues in language learning will be discussed in the next section.

## 2.4 Culture and language

Bates and Plog (1990) defined culture as "the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning" (p. 7). In this sense, culture has a great impact on learning behaviours. As my study focuses on North American teachers and East-Asian students, I would like to compare their different cultural views of education in general and language learning in specific.

The findings from Hofstede's (1986) study showed that the culture of East-Asian countries is collectivistic and that of North America is individualistic. The table below illustrates some characteristics of these two cultures in the education domain.

**Table 1: Culture-related educational differences**

| Individualistic Culture | Collectivistic Culture |
| --- | --- |
| • Individual student will speak up in class and respond to a general invitation by the teacher | • Individual student will only speak up in class when called upon personally by the teacher |
| • Individual student will speak up in large groups | • Individual student will speak up in small groups |
| • Face-consciousness is weak | • Neither the teacher nor the student should ever be made to lose face |
| • Teacher expects students to initiate communication and find their own path | • Students expect the teacher to initiate communication and outline paths to follow |

(A selection from Hofstede, 1986, p.312-313)

The collectivistic culture can be traced back to the Confucianism, which originated from China and has a far-reaching influence on other East-Asian countries. Wen and Clement (2003) identify two major themes of Confucian thought, which are parallel to Hofstede's collectivism. One major emphasis of Confucian thought is the other-directed self (Gao, 1998a), one of the most obvious manifestations of which is face-protection orientation. The Chinese conception of face involves both integrity (lian) and public image (mian) (Gao, 1998b). As one's self (face) is largely defined in relations with others and their opinions and expectations of one, social risk-taking is very uncommon. This way of thinking tends to make students highly concerned about their classmates' opinions of their abilities, and therefore they prefer to keep silent instead of getting involved in class. Another major emphasis of Confucian thought is the submissive way of learning

(Wen & Clement, 2003). In this way of thinking, teachers are the authority and the source of knowledge and students are the passive receivers of knowledge without questioning or challenging the authority. This tendency is reflected in the typical dependence on the teacher among students who are reluctant to initiate communication in class.

According to Paige et.al (2003), the predominant view of education in China focuses largely on memorization and written examinations. This claim was supported by Cortazzi and Jin's (1996) empirical study. After having observed Chinese kindergartens and primary schools, they found that teachers put a strong emphasis on memory, imitation and repetitive activities. The early experience in school has a great impact on how they learn the second language at a later stage. It is not uncommon to hear some students recite the whole word list from a good-sized English dictionary. In another study, Cortazzi & Jin (1996) investigated Western teachers' perceptions of their Chinese students' language learning habits. One of the findings is the discrepancy between Western teachers' and Chinese students' attitudes toward certain teaching practices. In this case, Chinese students were concerned about the way that their Western teachers instructed, because they did not learn many strategies to help them deal with the exams.

Another difference is how people view the learning process. In East-Asian culture, learning should be conducted in a very formal and serious way, so playing games, watching TV, doing fun-like activities are not regarded as learning at all. The empirical study conducted by Anderson (1993) suggested that Chinese tend to associate games and communicative activities with entertainment, which they believe contributes little to

learning.

## 2.5 Washback

Washback was defined by Alderson and Wall (1993) as the influence of testing on teaching and learning. The direct impacts of tests on teaching can be reflected from McEwen's comments (1995), "what is assessed becomes what is valued, which becomes what is taught" (p.42).

Wall and Alderson are regarded as the pioneers in the field of washback study. From 1988 to 1991, they conducted landmark research in the context of Sri Lanka, where a new O-level examination was introduced in 1988. English has a high status in Sri Lanka. The O-level exam is a high-stakes test in the sense that its results determine whether students can pursue further study. In order to improve students' English proficiency, the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka developed a new English textbook and also created a new O-level test corresponding to the new textbook. The purpose was to stimulate teachers and students to follow the new textbook closely.

This study focused on the validity of the new test and its impacts on the classroom. Wall and Alderson developed a basic framework for the Washback Hypotheses, which simply posited that tests have impacts on teaching.

The results showed that washback on the content of teaching does exist; however, washback on the teaching methodology was not observed. The consistent finding can be seen in Chen's (2002) study of the impact of a public exam on English teaching in Taiwan,

which revealed that the test "may dramatically change the content teachers teach, but not the way they would teach" (p.15).

Another general conclusion drawn from Wall and Alderson's (1996) study was that washback is a more complex and challenging enigma than originally assumed. After reviewing all the empirical washback studies on the language tests, Spratt (2005) makes the same conclusion, "...rather than there being a direct, automatic and blanket effect of exams, washback is more complex and elusive." (p.21)

In the following part, I will present the washback studies of two world-known standardized language tests: the TOEFL and the IELTS[1]. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons conducted research to investigate washback effects of the TOEFL on the TOEFL preparation course instruction. The purpose of this study, as Alderson and Hamp-Lyon (1996) stated, is not trying to "prove nor falsify any or all of the Washback Hypotheses" but rather the aim is to "simply try and explore and understand what was going on in the TOEFL preparation classrooms" (p.282).

In this study, two teachers were selected as participants and both their "normal" teaching classes and their TOEFL preparation classes were observed. Teacher interviews and exploratory student interviews were also conducted. The results of the study revealed that the test (in this case, the TOEFL) does influence teaching and two teachers adjusted their teaching methods while instructing the TOEFL preparation classes. However, the test is only a minor factor resulting in such differences in teaching and there are many

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[1] The IELTS stands for International English Language Testing System. It is a test of English language proficiency.

other elements involved in this process, such as ingrained teaching styles, teachers' attitudes towards the test and learners' demands. This study demonstrated that the washback effect varied for different teachers, in different settings.

Hayes and Read (2004) investigated the washback of another standardized language test, the IELTS in New Zealand preparation schools. Two types of preparation courses were selected as observation targets. One was an intensive, test-focused, and independent course, while the other was part of an ESL course. Classroom observations, teacher interviews, teacher and student questionnaires, and pre/post-testing of the students were used to collect data.

Several findings were revealed. Course A is more teacher-centered and the instruction content is completely directed toward the test-taking strategies. However, Course B involves more student-centered activities and the teacher stated that his way of teaching this preparation class is not significantly different from the way he taught regular ESL classes. The test indeed has an impact on the content of the course due to inclusion of the IELTS preparation materials.

This study once again proved that washback does occur and tests exert a direct influence on teaching practice; however, they did not perceive the kind of positive washback which they expected at the beginning of the study.

## 2.6 Language test validity

Test Validity, as McNamara (2000) points out, is used to describe "the relationship

between the evidence from test performance and the inferences about candidates'

capacity to perform in the criteria that are drawn from that evidence" (p.138). To put it

into simple words, test validity demonstrates the consistency between test-takers'

performance in a test and their actual abilities in real situations.

From the traditional perspective, validity has been categorized into three types,

namely, content validity, criterion-related validity, and construct validity (APA, 1966).

Although these concepts still persist in the current validity theory, certain modifications

and refinements have occurred in the past few decades. In the current educational

assessment field, it is commonly accepted that validity is a unitary concept. Messick

(1989), in his famous chapter on validity, stated that construct validity is the whole of

validity and the other two types are only evidence for it.

Messick (1989) addressed two major threats to construct validity: construct

under-representation and construct-irrelevant test variance. According to Messick (1996),

construct under-representation jeopardizes authenticity, while construct irrelevance

jeopardizes directness. Authenticity and directness are the two significant indicators of

the validity of test design. Defined by Messick (1996), an authentic test should include

tasks in realistic settings, or those close to situations in the real world. A test, which is too

narrow to cover all the important facets of the construct, is regarded as construct

under-representation. As to directness, Messick (1989) presented two types of

construct-irrelevant variance: construct-irrelevant difficulty and construct-irrelevant

easiness. In the former case, the test contains tasks, irrelevant to the focal construct,

which makes the test more difficult for certain test-takers. In contrast, the test, being regarded as construct-irrelevant easiness, involves the tasks which enable test-takers to answer correctly in ways irrelevant to the construct being assessed. Test-takers who benefit from construct-irrelevant easiness and who obtain a higher score than they deserve are known as test-wise.

In this chapter, I first reviewed the historic development of the TOEFL test and then I presented the literature on the aspects of communicative competence, the Communicative Language Teaching approach, language and culture, washback, and language test validity. All these aspects are useful for understanding why the teachers and students prepared for the TOEFL iBT in certain ways. In the following chapter, I will describe the methodology used in this study.

# Chapter 3:   Methodology

In this chapter, I first describe the overall design of my research by restating the research questions and explaining the rationale for choosing the current methodology. Then I go over the data collection procedure, which includes a description of the settings, the participant selection process and instruments being used to collect data in this study. After that, data analysis techniques are reviewed and the possible limitations of this study are discussed.

## 3.1 Overview of the Research Design

### 3.1.1 Research questions

As has been stated previously, the purpose of this study is to investigate in depth the teaching and learning experience during the TOEFL iBT preparation process. There are two primary research questions with five sub-questions each.

1. How do native English speaking teachers instruct the TOEFL iBT preparation course?

   1.1  What are their perceptions and attitudes toward the changes that have occurred in the TOEFL iBT?

   1.2  What teaching materials do they use in the TOEFL iBT preparation course?

   1.3  What kind of classroom activities do they employ in teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course?

   1.4  What kind of adjustments do they make (if any) in teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course?

1.5    What kind of challenges do they face in teaching the TOEFL iBT

preparation course?

2. How do East-Asian students prepare for the TOEFL iBT?

2.1 What are their perceptions and attitudes toward the changes that have

occurred in the TOEFL iBT?

2.2 What are their attitudes toward the way their teachers instruct the TOEFL

iBT preparation course?

2.3 How do they prepare for the TOEFL iBT after class?

2.4 What kind of preparation manuals do they use as the self-studying materials?

2.5 What do they perceive as the hardest and easiest sections in the TOEFL iBT?

3.1.2 Research design

The nature of the study determines that a qualitative approach should be

implemented. According to Bogdan & Bilken (1992), qualitative researchers actually go

into the field and explore human behaviours within the contexts of their natural

occurrence. This study investigates both teachers' and students' teaching and learning

practices in a context of preparing a newly-adapted English standardized test (the TOEFL

iBT). My purpose is to illustrate the ways that teachers and students prepare for the test,

which aligns well with the main aim of the qualitative research: describing and

interpreting rather than measuring and predicting the phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis,

2003).

According to Merriam (1998), in qualitative studies, the researcher is "the primary instrument for data collection and analysis", fieldwork is employed, participants' perspectives are reflected, the analysis that takes place is inductive, and the findings are "richly descriptive" (p.11). The characteristics of qualitative research listed by Merriam put this study in that tradition.

Among diverse approaches to qualitative research, case study is probably the most widely used method (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Yin (2003) recommends a case study when "a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control" (p. 9). Such types of questions are just what this study tries to explore: How is the TOEFL iBT preparation course being taught? How do students prepare for the TOEFL iBT?

Another reason to select case study for this thesis is due to the uniqueness of the situation under investigation. A qualitative case study methodology should be used to explore substantive areas when little is known about the research topic (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998). At the time of the study, there were no prior published data on the topic, because the TOEFL iBT had been in place for less than two years. The period of the study is also unique in the sense that the public had not been fully aware of the new test.

Furthermore, case study enables researchers to "probe deeply and to analyze intensively the multifarious phenomena" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.182). The aim of this study is to investigate in depth not only what teachers and students were doing, but also what their attitudes and perceptions were towards the new test and what other factors

might have contributed to their teaching and learning approaches to the test.

Based on the three reasons mentioned above, the case study method was adopted in this study.

According to Gall et al. (2007), "a case is a particular instance of the phenomenon" (p.447). Thus, it is not limited to a single person. More than one person can be the object of the study as long as the defining element of the case study is "rooted in a specific context" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 52). In this study, the context is "the TOEFL iBT test" and the phenomenon being researched is "the teaching and learning ways of teachers and students when they are preparing for the TOEFL iBT". In this sense, this study is defined as one single case study including teachers and students as two sources of data for exploring the research topic.

## 3.2 Settings

After selecting the research problem, I began to look for schools or institutions that might provide the TOEFL preparation course in the local area. Due to the unique nature of the test, which is especially designed for non-native English speaking people who plan to pursue tertiary-level studies in North America, there is not a high demand for this kind of preparation course in this middle-sized city dominated by English language speakers. Two groups of people were identified as potential clients for the TOEFL preparation course. One was non-native English speaking immigrants and the other was visitors with temporary study/work permits. Most people prepare for the test back in their home

countries, because they can not gain acceptance into the universities in North America without an acceptable TOEFL score.

Having recognized this fact, I used all the resources I had to locate the potential participating schools. After searching on-line and consulting with my supervisor and one of my friends who used to be an ESL teacher, finally I found three sites that were offering the TOEFL preparation class.

Among these three sites, one is a public school and two are private language institutions. The background information of these three schools is illustrated below:

School A is the only public school among the three sites and it was founded in 1987. It specializes in adult education and provides a variety of programs and courses for continuing studies. ESL (English as a Second Language) is one of the largest programs at this school, which provides regular ESL classes as well as the standardized English language test preparation course. The TOEFL preparation course was started in 2000. Currently, it offers three TOEFL preparation courses: two during the daytime and one in the evening. The two daytime courses are provided two and a half hours each day and five days a week. The evening course is offered twice a week with three-hour classes each time. Students need to pass the Canadian Language Benchmark[2] level 6 to get into the TOEFL class; however, due to the difficulty of the new TOEFL, the administrators

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[2] Canadian Language Benchmarks: a 12-level scale of task-based language proficiency descriptors used to guide the teaching and assessment of ESL learners in Canada. The most distinctive feature of the descriptor systems is that they focus on the successful completion of communicative tasks, rather than on a strict emphasis on correct linguistic forms.

plan to increase the entry level to Benchmark 7. The unique feature of this course distinguishing it from the other two schools is the length of the course. It provides the TOEFL preparation course through the whole school year, from September to June. Students can join the course at any time during this period.

School B was founded in 1998 and it currently provides general ESL courses, business courses, TOEFL preparation courses, TESOL[3] certificate courses, and GED[4] courses. The TOEFL preparation course lasts for twelve weeks with two classes each week and three hours per class. Right now it offers two levels of the TOEFL preparation courses, an advanced one and an intermediate one. A placement test is implemented to determine which course is appropriate for each student.

School C was founded in 1999 and it currently provides general ESL courses and a TOEFL preparation course. The TOEFL preparation course lasts for twelve weeks with five four-hour classes per week. Right now it offers only one TOEFL preparation course and there is no entrance test for this course.

Table 2 summarizes the background information of the TOEFL iBT preparation courses provided by these three schools.

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[3] TESOL: acronym for "teaching English to speakers of other languages".

[4] GED credential course: acronym for "General Education Development". This course aims to prepare students to pass the GED test and to be certified as having American or Canadian high school-level academic skills.

**Table 2: Profile of the TOEFL iBT Courses Offered in Three Schools**

| Schools / Features | School A | School B | School C |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nature | Public | Private | Private |
| Course Length | •September to June (student intake throughout the year); <br> •5 sessions per week; <br> •2.5 hours each session. | •12 weeks; <br> • 2 sessions per week; <br> • 3 hours each session. | •12 weeks; <br> •5 sessions per week; <br> •4 hours each session |
| Total Hours | Approx. 438 hours | 72 hours | 240 hours |
| Entrance Requirement | Canadian Language Benchmark 6. Plan to raise the entrance level to 7 due to the challenge of the new TOEFL | Assessment test to determine the student's entrance level. | No |
| Numbers of TOEFL iBT courses | 3 (2 day courses and 1 evening course) | 2 (1 advanced course and 1 intermediate course) | 1 |
| As TOEFL test center | No | Yes | Yes |
| Observation Length | 3 classes+1 speaking lab | 6 classes | 2 classes |
| Computer labs | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Class size | More than 20 students; but only 12-15 were present during my observation | Intermediate: 4 students <br> Advanced: 5 students | 3 students |
| Room layout | Seating in rows | Seating in a circle | Seating in a circle |

## 3.3 Participant Selection

I initially contacted the directors of the two private schools by phone, which served two purposes: one was to confirm that they provided such a course and the other was to determine whether they were willing to participate in my research. As to the public school, due to ethical issues, I was not allowed to contact the administrators there directly without permission from the local school board. Thus, I continued my contacts with the two private language institutions while I waited for the permission letter from the school board.

The initial meetings with the directors of the two private institutions occurred in December, 2006 after the approval of my study by the Research Ethics Board (REB). My initial meeting with the public school was in late January, 2007 after receiving the permission letter. During the meetings, I showed the directors the information letter which clearly states the purpose of this study and the possible procedures being involved. The director of School B was one of the TOEFL teachers in her school and she agreed to take part in this study. Directors or administrators of the other two schools all expressed their interest in participating in the current research; however they needed to consult with the TOEFL teachers first to see whether they were willing to participate. I left several copies of the information letter for teachers with them and asked them to pass the letters to the TOEFL teachers in their schools.

The criteria for selecting teacher participants were very simple: firstly, they were to be native English speakers; secondly, they were currently teaching a TOEFL iBT course. Initially I thought to include a minimum experience criterion in teaching the TOEFL (i.e three years) as another condition, but I wondered if that might further restrain the potential subjects, as the size of the pool was already small.

A week after the initial visit to School A, I called the program director to find out the results of her consultation with the TOEFL teachers. She told me that two daytime TOEFL course teachers were willing to participate and then we arranged another meeting when she would introduce the teachers to me. During that visit, I met those two teachers and explained to them the significance and procedures of my study again and emphasized

the issue of confidentiality. At the very end of the conversations, I made an appointment

with each of the teachers for an interview.

In the following week, I first interviewed Eva[5], who was in her forties and had 20

years teaching experience in ESL and had been working as a private TOEFL tutor from

time to time throughout the past five years. She held an M.A. degree in Linguistics and a

TESOL certificate. I asked Eva to sign the consent form before starting the interview. The

interview lasted for 35 minutes. For some reason, Eva did not allow me to audio-tape the

interview so I had to take notes during the interview. After the interview, I arranged a

time with her for classroom observation. On January 31st, I observed one of her classes in

which she handed out the TOEFL materials to students and asked them to conduct the

self-study.

In the same week, I interviewed another teacher, Anne, at School A and the

interview lasted for one and a half hours, which was longer than I expected because she

had a lot to comment on each question. Unlike Eva, she taught the TOEFL materials to

the whole class. Anne was in her late fifties and had 20 years' teaching experience in ESL

and 7 years in the TOEFL preparation courses. She held both B.A. and B.Ed. degrees and

also she was TESOL-certified. I observed three of her classes in total including one

speaking class in lab.

I contacted the directors of two other schools while I was observing the classes in

School A. Teachers in these two schools were all willing to participate in my study. There

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[5] All participants in this study were assigned pseudonyms

were three TOEFL teachers in School B and one teacher in School C. I interviewed

Emma, the teacher from School C in mid February. She was in her mid twenties and had

one year's experience teaching English in Korea. This was her first time teaching the

TOEFL preparation course, so she had only a couple of weeks' experience in the TOEFL

class when I observed her class. She held a B.A. degree and of the six teacher participants

she was the only one who did not have a TESOL certificate. I observed three of her

classes.

As to School B, it ran two TOEFL iBT preparation courses; one was an advanced

level and the other was a high-intermediate level. The director, whom I interviewed

earlier, instructed the advanced level. For this study, she was referred to as Tina. Tina had

ten years' ESL teaching experience and also was a TESOL program trainer. She began to

teach the TOEFL preparation course five years ago. She held a B.A. degree as well as a

TESOL certificate. Another director of the school, Chris, jointly taught the

high-intermediate level with another teacher, Mary. He was in charge of the speaking and

writing parts, and Mary was responsible for listening and reading. Chris, in his late

thirties, held both M.Ed. and MBA degrees. He had ten years ESL teaching experience

and three years TOEFL teaching experience. He was also TESOL certified. Mary was in

her early 30s and had less than three years' teaching experience in ESL. She had taught

ESL in Japan for a year. This was also her first time teaching the TOEFL preparation

course, although she used to work as a private tutor and to prepare some Japanese

students for the paper-based TOEFL test. She held a B.A. degree and was a TESOL

certified teacher. I observed six classes in total in School B with two classes for each teacher.

The demographic information of teacher participants is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Profile of Teachers**

| Name | Eva | Anne | Chris | Tina | Mary | Emma |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | F | F | M | F | F | F |
| Age | Mid 40s | Late 50s | Late 30s | N/A | Early 30s | Mid 20s |
| Degree | M.A. | B.A.,B.Ed. | M.Ed.,MBA | B.A. | B.A. | B.A. |
| Years of teaching ESL | 20 | 20 | 10 | 10 | < 3 | 1 |
| Years of teaching the TOEFL | 5 | 7 | 3 | 5 | < 2 | A few months |
| With TESOL certificate | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Native speaker of English | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Any training related to the TOEFL iBT | No | Yes | No | Yes | No | No |
| School | A | A | B | B | B | C |

In the following section, I will outline the procedure for selecting student participants and describe the background information of each student.

Two guidelines were set up for choosing student participants:

1) They were to have come from East Asian countries.

2) They had experience in preparing for and/or had taken the TOEFL iBT test.

The only reason that I focused on East Asian students was because of my similar cultural background to them: I am from China, which enabled me to better understand their perceptions of the new test as well as their habits of preparing for it.

At the beginning of my first observation session in each teacher's class, I briefly introduced myself and the topic and purpose of my study to the students and then I asked them to raise their hands if they were from East Asian countries (China, Korea, Japan) so that I could hand out an information letter and a background questionnaire to each of them. They were allowed to keep these documents and read them after class. Whoever was interested in participating in this study could fill out the questionnaire and submit it to me in the next class.

There were no East Asian students in Anne's and Eva's classes, although they had a few students from that region in some of their former classes. Thus, I did not prepare any questionnaires for School A. In School B, there were 7 Korean students with 4 in the advanced level class and 3 in the intermediate one. Finally, I got three questionnaires back, among which were Helen and John. Due to some personal reasons, the third student decided not to continue his participation. In School C, only one student, Jane, met the criteria and she agreed to participate in this study. Through Jane, I met Kevin and decided to include him in my current study. Although Kevin did not take any classes in these three schools, he took an intensive TOEFL iBT preparation course which was taught by teachers who spoke the same language as he did. Furthermore, he had the experience of taking the paper-based TOEFL test back in his home country and he had written the TOEFL iBT test. I believed that his case would shed a distinctive light on the findings.

Helen was in her late twenties and she was from South Korea. She had been studying English for almost 13 years. She was attending the TESOL certificate program in School

B. One of the requirements to get the certificate for non-native speaking trainees was to pass the TOEFL iBT test, which was why Helen wanted to take the test. Helen had been in Canada for one year when the interview was conducted. Helen planned to go back and teach English in Korea. Helen had not taken the TOEFL test before.

John, like Helen, was also from South Korea. He was in his late twenties. He had been studying English for 9 years. He was attending the high-intermediate TOEFL iBT preparation course in School B. He had been in Canada for less than one year. He planned to get into graduate school in a North American university. John had not written the TOEFL test before.

Jane, in her late teens, was from mainland China. She had been studying English for almost 10 years. She had been in Canada for almost one year and she had been living with a home stay family since she came to Canada. She was taking the TOEFL iBT preparation course in School C. She planned to apply for an undergraduate program in a local university. She had taken the paper-based TOEFL test once back in China.

Kevin was also from mainland China. He was in his late teens. He had been studying English for 8 years and had been in Canada for 6 months. He was studying in a private school which offered pre-university courses for international students. The majority of his classmates were Chinese. The TOEFL preparation course which he took was a 48-hour intensive course. The TOEFL teachers were also Chinese. Kevin had two experiences of writing the paper-based TOEFL test back in China and he took the iBT just one month before our interview took place.

Table 4 demonstrates the demographic information of student participants.

**Table 4: Profile of Students**

| Name | Gender | Age | Country of origin | Years of studying English | Length in Canada | Wrote the TOEFL iBT before | Purpose of taking the iBT | School/ teacher |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kevin** | M | Late teens | China | 8 years | 6 months | Yes | Go to university | N/A |
| **Jane** | F | Late teens | China | Almost 10 years | Almost 1 year | No | Go to university | C-Emma |
| **Helen**[6] | F | Late twenties | South Korea | Almost 13 years | 1 year | No | Get the TESOL certificate | B-Tina |
| **John** | M | Late twenties | South Korea | 9 years | Less than 1 year | No | Go to university | B-Chris & Mary |

In total, I interviewed ten participants: six native English speaking TOEFL teachers

and four East Asian students who were preparing or had prepared for the TOEFL iBT.

**3.4 Data Collection**

Data were collected over a period of two months, from Jan 31, 2007 to March 31,

2007. Table 5 illustrates the data collection timeline.

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[6] Helen took four classes in School B and then she quit the course and decided to prepare for the test on her own. However Helen hired the TOEFL teacher Tina as her private tutor and they met twice a week and one hour per time

**Table 5: Data Collection Timeline**

| Time | Activity |
|---|---|
| January 29, 2007 to February 08, 2007 | • Jan. 29- Interview with Eva.<br>• Jan. 31- Observation of Eva's class.<br>• Jan. 31- Interview with Anne.<br>• Feb. 02, Feb. 07 & Feb 08 - Observation of three of Anne's classes respectively. |
| February 19, 2007 to February 28, 2007 | • Feb. 19- Interview with Emma.<br>• Feb. 20 & Feb. 28 - Observation of two of Emma's classes respectively.<br>• Feb. 28- Interview with Jane. |
| March 06, 2007 to March 31, 2007 | • Mar. 06- Interview with Chris.<br>• Mar. 07 & Mar. 14- Observation of two of Chris's classes respectively.<br>• Mar. 14- Interview with Mary.<br>• Mar. 12 & Mar. 19- Observation of two of Mary's classes respectively.<br>• Mar. 29- Interview with Tina.<br>• Mar. 06 & Mar. 08 – Observation of two of Tina's classes respectively.<br>• Mar. 23- Interview with Helen.<br>• Mar. 15 & Mar. 20 – Interview with John via email.<br>• Mar. 31- Interview with Kevin. |

In my study, four data collection techniques were employed: individual interview; classroom observation; survey; document analysis. In the following part, I will demonstrate these instruments in detail.

3.4.1 Interviews

In this study, I used one-on-one interviews with teachers and students; this method enables researchers to learn about their backgrounds, motivations and attitudes toward their teaching and learning activities. Of the types of interviews described by Merriam

(1998), I employed semi-structured interviews to explore participants' viewpoints. Semi-structured interviews, a format standing halfway between standardized (structured) interviews and informal (unstructured) interviews, adopt a flexible wording and order of questions to respond to contextual changes and address emergent issues (Merriam, 1998).

The interviews with teachers were conducted either in their offices or classrooms. The length of each interview varied from 35 minutes to 90 minutes. The language used in the interviews with teachers was English. With the exception of Eva's, all the interviews were audio-recorded.

I conducted an interview with each of the two student participants (Kevin and Helen) in a meeting room in a local public library and another participant (Jane) in the classroom. As to the last student participant (John), the interview was completed via internet because he was unavailable for a face-to-face interview. I first sent him the questions by email and then I sent him a follow up email to clarify some obscure comments he made in his last response. Except for Jane, the language used in the interviews was English. The interview with Jane was conducted in Mandarin. Although Kevin could also speak Mandarin, he preferred to use English during the interview. The interviews with Kevin and Jane were tape-recorded. Helen felt uncomfortable about being tape-recorded, so I decided to take notes instead of audio-taping the interview. The participants were competent enough in the English language to express their thoughts and beliefs in English, either in a spoken or written way.

All the participants were asked to sign a consent form before conducting an

interview. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the confidentiality of each participant. The tape recordings and transcripts were kept in a secure place and would be destroyed after the completion of the study.

The interview questions for the teachers were designed to address the main research question "How do native English speaking teachers instruct the TOEFL iBT preparation course?" I referred to a similar study conducted by Wall and Horák (2006) when developing the questions for teachers. As one characteristic of a semi-structured interview, on some occasions, I presented some emergent questions based on the participants' responses during the interview. For instance, I asked one teacher participant how she prepared individual students for the TOEFL iBT on a one-to-one basis after I knew that she also worked as a private tutor. In some cases, I changed the order of questions to help participants organize their thoughts and work out their answers.

The interview questions for students were developed following the main question "How do they prepare for the TOEFL iBT?" Some questions were adapted from Roberts's (2000) study, which investigated the way that Korean language learners prepare for the old versions of the TOEFL. Similar to interviews with teachers, I added new questions to address some emerging issues and altered the question order during the interview with students.

The interview questions for teachers and students are presented in Appendix A.

3.4.2 Classroom Observation

"Observation is the process of gathering open-ended, firsthand information by observing people and places at a research site" (Creswell, 2005, p.211). My rationale for conducting classroom observation was twofold: first, it enabled me to observe how the teachers instruct the TOEFL iBT preparation course in a classroom setting; second, it provided alternate data to the interviews. The use of multiple data, known as triangulation, helped to enhance the validity of case study findings (Gall et al, 2007).

According to the typology defined by Merriam (1998), the relationship between the observer and the observed in this study was one of "observer as participant". Within this role, "the researcher's observer activities are known to the group; [however] participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer" (Merriam, 1998, p.101). Before conducting the observations, my intent was to be a non-participant observer in class in order to avoid disrupting classroom activities. Despite my attempts to remain unobtrusive by sitting in a corner, students still recognized my presence. At the beginning of the first observation session, I introduced myself and briefly explained my study and handed out the questionnaires to solicit potential student participants. In some cases, when there was an odd number of students, I was asked to be a partner of one student during the pair-work activities. In summary, I played two different roles in this study. In Eva, Tina, Chris, and Emma's classes, I did not participate in any class activity and thus my role was a complete observer; and I was more like an observer as participant in Anne and Mary's classes, although observation was the primary task in these settings.

Classroom observations were conducted within two months and in total I observed 12 classes. Except in the cases of Eva and Anne, I observed two classes of each teacher, which covered instructions of the four skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) tested on the TOEFL iBT. I observed only one of Eva's classes. As to Anne, besides the two formal classes, I also observed one of the speaking lab sessions. The length of the class varied in each school, from 2.5 hours to 4 hours. The observation time schedule can be found in Table 4.

I used the Classroom Observation Scheme created and implemented in Wall and Horák's (2006) study to facilitate my observation. The advantages of adopting existing observation forms were twofold: their validity and reliability had been proved through trial and error; and they saved the researcher's time from having to develop his or her own scheme (Gall et al., 2007). Although Wall and Horák's (2006) research dealt with the TOEFL preparation courses before the introduction of the TOEFL iBT, they included observation items related to the TOEFL iBT, thus I made only minor modifications to the original scheme. The first part of the scheme consisted of background information about the course (i.e stage, number of students present, classroom layouts and etc.). The second part was the main body of the scheme; it was divided into five sections dealing with listening, reading, writing, speaking, and grammar accordingly. Although grammar was no longer tested in an individual section on the TOEFL iBT, I decided to keep it in the observation scheme in case teachers instructed grammar explicitly. In each section, a space for taking field notes on classroom activities was provided, as well as a checklist of

items expected to be observable in the class. I attached extra papers for note-taking when the space on the scheme was not enough. The last part of the scheme was a reflection on what had been observed earlier, which was useful information for later analysis.

The modified Classroom Observation Scheme is presented in Appendix B.

### 3.4.3 Survey

Compared to interviews and observations, the survey was not the major data collection instrument in this study. The survey was conducted only among student participants, and aimed to recruit potential student participants as well as obtain background information on each student. The questionnaire was adapted from Roberts's (2000) study, including the information related to age, gender, origin, years of learning English, years of being in Canada or other English speaking countries, the purpose of taking the test, and the purpose of learning English. In order to prepare for some specific interview questions in advance, information on their past experience in taking the TOEFL test was requested.

The student background survey is presented in Appendix C.

### 3.4.4 A review of relevant documents

With the permission of participants, I photocopied some of their TOEFL writing essays which were corrected by the teachers. Through reviewing these documents, I was able to see on what areas the teachers focused when they were marking the essays. This

information supplemented the data being collected from the interviews.

I also collected the teaching materials, class handouts, and evaluation guidelines used by the teachers as long as they permitted it.

## 3.5 Data Analysis

According to Burns (2000), data analysis is a process by which the investigator can uncover meaning from the data.

The procedure of data analysis in this study involved two steps:

First, I transcribed all the interview data and compiled them into Microsoft Word. As one interview was conducted in my first language (Mandarin), I first transcribed the data in that language and then translated it into English. The field notes taken during the observation sessions were entered in the computer. I proofread the transcripts and made some grammatical and stylistic changes to better present the information in a written form.

Second, I categorized the data into different trends and themes according to the research questions. This task was completed by following Merriam's (1998) version of the constant comparative method. Upon identifying a specific theme in one transcript, I analyzed other transcripts to see if the same theme was present. I crossed out the data which had been integrated into one theme and then I reviewed the rest of the data to develop more themes or categorizations. This activity was continued until no more themes emerged. During the process of developing themes, all the data were taken into

consideration, from interview responses, observation notes to questionnaires and writing samples analysis.

## 3.6 Limitations

There were several limitations in this case study. Due to the low demand for the TOEFL test preparation course in the local area, the number of candidates was limited, which restricted the participant selection. In order to include more participants in the study, certain criteria in the original proposal were modified or even given up. Thus, the findings can hardly be generalized to all TOEFL preparation programs.

Besides the small number of samples, the findings were also confined by time. As the TOEFL iBT was introduced less than two years before the study was conducted, the teachers' inadequate awareness of the TOEFL iBT and lack of experience in instructing the preparation course could have an impact on the results of the study.

Furthermore, although the student participants had adequate English proficiency to express themselves during the interviews or via email, it was still not as optimal as using their native language. For Chinese students, it was an advantage for them to have the option to speak Mandarin or English. They were able to elaborate on their thoughts more because they could speak Mandarin to get across their ideas when they had trouble in expressing them in English. Thus, it would be better to have a Korean interpreter to facilitate the interviews with the native Korean speakers.

## 3.7 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has described the research design and the rationale for selecting the current methodology, the settings, participant selection procedures and participant background information, data collection techniques, data analysis methods, and limitations of the study.

This thesis adopted case study as the research design. I developed four instruments to collect data from ten participants: semi-structured interviews with each participant; classroom observations of six teacher participants; background questionnaires among four student participants; examination of students' writings and other relevant documents. Using the constant comparative method, I identified themes and analyzed the data. The limitations of the study included sample selection, time, and language barriers.

In the next chapter, I will present research findings under the themes corresponding to the research questions.

# Chapter 4:   Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings of my study. As this research investigates two groups of participants: the teachers' and the students' attitudes towards the TOEFL iBT test and their preparation practice, I have divided the chapter into two parts, each one corresponding to one of the primary research questions. In each part, I have addressed each sub-question under the main research question. To provide a coherent and consistent synopsis, the themes are almost identical for each part.

In the teacher's part, where teaching is the main concern, I concentrated on four sub-themes: 1) Attitudes toward changes on the TOEFL test; 2) Teaching arrangement and materials; 3) Teaching practice; and 4) Changes in teaching practice and challenges. The first sub-theme deals with the teachers' attitudes toward changes in the test in terms of content, level of difficulty and test validity. The second sub-theme explores how teachers allocated instructional time and which training materials they used. The third sub-theme addresses general teaching practice from four aspects: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The last sub-theme investigates the adjustments teachers made to instruct the TOEFL iBT as well as the challenges they faced in this process.

Parallel to the structure of the report on the findings in the teachers' section, I also developed four sub-themes in the students' section: 1) Attitudes toward the TOEFL iBT; 2) Preparation materials; 3) Preparation practice; and 4) Challenges and other issues. In the first sub-theme, I explore the students' attitudes toward changes in the TOEFL iBT, the test validity, and the students' perceptions of the feedback that was given to them by their

teachers. The second and third sub-themes are identical to those in the teachers' part but the sub-themes reflect the students' viewpoints. The last sub-theme shows students' perceptions of what they took to be the easiest and hardest sections on the TOEFL iBT, language exposure and computer issues, and their experiences on the test situation.

## 4.1 Teachers' Perspectives

In my study, I observed and interviewed six teachers in total --- Anne, Eva, Chris, Mary, Tina, Emma --- who were all English native speakers and had varying amounts of experience teaching ESL. Five teachers hold the TESOL certificate. Their length of instructing the TOEFL preparation course varied from a few months to 7 years. Two teachers had attended workshops related to TOEFL teaching.

Under this category, four themes emerged: "Attitudes toward changes on the TOEFL test"; "Teaching arrangement and materials"; "Teaching practice" and "Changes on teaching practice and challenges".

4.1.1 Attitudes toward changes on the TOEFL test

4.1.1.1 Attitudes toward changes on the content

Five teachers who have taught previous versions of the TOEFL test are in favor of the changes that have occurred in the test. Emma, who started as a TOEFL iBT instructor, did not make any comments on this issue because she was unaware of such changes.

Chris claimed that the new TOEFL was more reliable in assessing test-takers'

English proficiency to study at the university level because of the speaking component. From his past experience, he found that some of his former students who obtained a high score on the old TOEFL test failed in universities. He attributed this failure to their poor English speaking abilities. Having studied in an MBA program before, Chris realized how important the role of oral communication played in the business program, which was a preferred major among international students.

> The *business program involves a lot of oral communication...If students do not have confidence in their presentation skills and a good command of vocabulary, they will not succeed in university. In such programs, the demand for speaking is more than fluency but effective communication.*

Similar to Chris, Mary believed that the way the TOEFL iBT tested students was more realistic in the sense that it assesses the learners' language abilities for effective communication in the real world. She especially emphasized that the inclusion of a speaking section would benefit students in the long term.

Although Tina also held a positive attitude towards the changes, she attributed the benefit to the elimination of the grammar section from the TOEFL iBT.

> *If you give the grammar section in the old (TOEFL) tests to me or some of my native-speaking friends, we can not do well because we do not use it that way in our daily life...Students have to be able to use grammar correctly when they are speaking or writing instead of the theoretical context which nobody uses.*

Anne and Eva both believed that the score of the TOEFL iBT better represents the test-takers' language ability than that of the previous versions.

4.1.1.2 Attitudes toward changes on the difficulty level

Except for Emma, the other five teachers all claimed that the TOEFL iBT is more

difficult than the old versions of the test and makes higher demands on test-takers'

English abilities.

The directors of the ESL program in school A stated that they planned to raise the

TOEFL preparation course entrance level from the Canadian Language Benchmark[7]

level 6 to 7 due to the difficulty of the TOEFL iBT. She commented,

> *There are some people in the current (TOEFL) class who cannot manage. Benchmark 6 is the minimum but they are having trouble in following the class and taking the test. We thought that students must finish level 6 and be ready for level 7 in all skills before they are eligible to do the TOEFL class.[8]*

> *The course started in September and people can keep registering right through the whole year if they want. With the current testing (the TOEFL iBT) way, they need a whole year. It is hard!*

Anne stated that it was easier to help students to get a high score in old versions of

the TOEFL, because grammar was easy to teach and students usually could obtain a very

high score in that section. Another reason that Anne found the TOEFL iBT was harder is

that fewer testwiseness strategies can be used to deal with the new test.

> *I used to have some "trick" tips for students to work out the questions in the grammar section in the old TOEFL. I told them that "when two options are similar, neither one is likely to be the correct answer."*

Tina attributed the difficulty of the TOEFL iBT to the fact that it is longer than

previous versions because of longer reading passages, an extra writing task and inclusion

of the speaking component.

> *They (test-takers) have to read more and write more and they have to speak. All of these changes make it more difficult.*

Eva agreed that the TOEFL iBT was more difficult than the previous versions

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[7] Canadian Language Benchmarks: it is defined in Chapter 3.
[8] The regular ESL classes in school A are arranged based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Students have to pass current level in order to move on to the next level.

overall. She stated that note-taking skills in the listening section, integrated writing skills, and speaking skills are the most challenging aspects in the new test.

As Mary taught the reading and listening sections, she could compare these two components in the iBT and the old versions. Mary felt that the listening is harder and more challenging for students because the material is longer and the speaking speed is faster. As to the reading passages, she also found that each passage is longer; however she felt that the topics on the TOEFL iBT are similar to what occurred in the old tests and the demand for vocabulary remains the same.

In contrast to Mary's opinion about the vocabulary requirements for students, Anne stated that test-takers do not have to rely on memorization of a huge number of words as heavily as before, because they have a better chance to guess the meaning of the word within the context. In this sense, the demand for vocabulary is lowered to some degree on the new test. It is interesting to note that Anne still encouraged her students to expand their vocabulary and memorize as many words as they could, although she has recognized the importance of the skill of guessing words based on context.

4.1.1.3 Attitudes toward the relationship between the test score and English proficiency

Although all teachers agreed that the TOEFL iBT is more valid in assessing test-takers' English proficiency, they did not believe that the score from the iBT is a true reflection of their students' English language ability.

According to Eva, the TOEFL iBT is still a very technical test and there are certain

rules and formats to follow no matter how many changes have been made to it. She claimed that the difficulty level of the TOEFL iBT will be lowered when the public become more familiar with its content and format.

Chris stated that in some cases the test-takers' English level is higher than what the score has shown but in other cases it is lower. Chris recognized that many factors can affect a test-taker's score such as nervousness. This point was also mentioned by Mary, who thought that nervousness has a significant impact on test-takers' performance.

Anne commented that one of her students took the iBT twice and his score in the speaking section remained the same, but Anne felt that his oral proficiency had improved substantially compared to the time when he first took the test.

Tina pointed out that the TOEFL iBT assesses not only the test-takers' English language proficiency but also their academic knowledge and thinking abilities. Thus, the score from the iBT cannot be used solely as a measurement of language proficiency.

4.1.1.4 Summary

All teachers held a positive attitude toward the changes that had occurred on the TOEFL test. They agreed that the TOEFL iBT is a better assessment tool for test-takers' language proficiency. They also recognized that the new test has become more demanding for test-takers. Although they believed that the TOEFL iBT is a fairly good judge of the test-taker's overall language ability, they still did not think the score is a true reflection of their English proficiency.

4.1.2 Teaching Arrangement and Materials

4.1.2.1 Time allocation

Anne from school A and Chris, Mary, and Tina from school B all taught two skills in one session. Anne and Tina divided the time for each skill equally. Chris spent longer time on the TOEFL writing than on the TOEFL speaking, because he found that most of his students had more problems in writing than in speaking. His explanation for the students' stronger spoken abilities is that 4 out of 5 students in that class had previously studied in the regular ESL programs, which had a very strong emphasis on English oral practice. Mary spent more time on listening than on reading because there are more exercises in the listening section from the textbook. Emma instructed four skills in one session and she spent an hour on each skill. As self-study was adopted in Eva' class and the individual students worked on different skills, there is no way to tell the time arrangement for the whole class.

From the above description, we can see that three teachers divided the teaching time for each skill equally. In contrast, Chris adopted a different approach by spending more time in addressing the skill that the majority of the class was not good at.

4.1.2.2 Teaching materials

As to teaching materials, all teachers used commercial TOEFL preparation books as the main resource. School B adopted the TOEFL textbook *Northstar: Building skills for the TOEFL iBT* (Boyd & Numrich, eds, 2005) which is a series with three different levels:

intermediate; high-intermediate; advanced. School B used high-intermediate and advanced books. Chris gave two reasons for choosing this series,

> *ETS, the TOEFL test official designer, as the co-author of this series guarantees the quality of this series. A consistent and systemic curriculum can be built on, so it is easy for intermediate level students to develop their skills gradually and move on to the advanced level.*

Unlike School B that adopted one course book, teachers from school A and school C used a variety of commercial TOEFL preparation materials, from *Longman preparation course for the TOEFL test: Next generation iBT [Phillips, 2005], Delta's Key to the Next Generation TOEFL Test: Advanced Skill Practice Book [Gallagher, 2005]* to *Thomson complete guide to the TOEFL test: iBT edition [Rogers, 2006].*

Anne used the listening and reading sections in *Thomson* as classroom practice materials because her former students who had already taken the iBT commented that the difficulty level of these two parts is close to what was assessed on the real test. She used *Longman* to teach speaking and writing. *Delta* was used as the sample testing materials.

*Longman* is used as the main course book in Emma's class. She stated that *Longman* presented useful strategies to deal with each skill. She used *Delta* as the supplementary practice material in class.

Besides the commercial TOEFL preparation books, teachers also used some non-TOEFL materials in class. Chris integrated the writing materials of the GED class into the TOEFL preparation class. Emma used resources from the internet, such as grammar exercises and speaking activities. Anne assigned some writing topics from the textbooks that were used in the Benchmark class.

In summary, all teachers used the commercial TOEFL preparation books extensively in class.

## 4.1.3 Teaching Practice

In this section, I describe what teachers did in the TOEFL iBT preparation course. As all teachers except Eva arranged the class based on the four skills tested on the TOEFL iBT: Reading; Listening; Speaking; and Writing, the findings on teaching practice are presented in these four areas. Unless indicated specifically, the discussion of the teachers and their teaching practice in this part did not include Eva. The teaching approach of Eva is presented in section 4.1.4.

## 4.1.3.1 Teaching Reading

All of the teachers followed preparation books when they were teaching the reading sections. The layout of the textbooks, to a large extent, determined how the teachers arranged their teaching practice in class. Anne, for example, adopted the *Thomson* text to instruct reading skills and there were eight strategies to deal with different types of reading questions in this preparation book. Thus, Anne organized her teaching in the following order: introducing the features of one type of question first, explaining the strategy that can be used to work out the answer, and then getting students to do exercises including this kind of question. Unlike Anne, Tina instructed the reading class in reverse order in that she first asked students to do a reading exercise and went over the answers

with them, and then she introduced the main types of questions in the exercise and asked students to categorize the questions into certain types and finally she got them to reflect on which types of questions were their strength and which were their weakness. How Tina organized the reading class was based on the textbook she used in class.

Except for Emma, all other teachers did not time their students while they were doing the reading exercises. Emma reported that she gave students a quiz in one different component every day through the whole week. In the reading quiz, students were asked to finish three passages within an hour, which was consistent with the real test's requirements. She would collect their answer sheets and mark them after class. The next day she handed them out and explained the items that students had trouble with. The way that she reviewed the passages was different from other teachers: she asked each student to read aloud one paragraph of the passage and she listened attentively and corrected any inaccurate pronunciation. In contrast, Anne and Tina preferred students to read silently and Mary read the passage aloud to the whole class instead of asking students to read.

The reading passages on the TOEFL iBT are much longer than those on the previous version, so skimming and scanning are regarded by the TOEFL teachers as the most important skills to deal with the reading tasks. According to Mary, these two skills can improve the reading speed as well as reduce the nervousness of test-takers that is caused by the test-takers not knowing every single word in a whole passage. Emma taught students to skim the whole passage by reading the first and the last sentence of each paragraph. Mary asked students to read questions first, especially the

complete-the-summary question, which provided a clue for the main ideas of the whole passage.

Another skill mentioned by all teachers is guessing the meaning of new vocabulary by looking within the context. Mary stated that her former students went to the dictionary at once when they met a new word in the reading passage, but now she taught them to look for the meaning from the previous or the following sentence.

*Vocabulary is a big concern for most students and I am trying to teach them context-based reading. If they have a general idea of what is being said in the sentence, they may be able to come up with or give an educated guess as to what the word might mean rather than rely so much on dictionary for every unfamiliar word.*

All teachers but Emma combined vocabulary teaching with reading activities. They explained new words or phrases arising from the passage. Some of them offered explicit definitions, while others like Mary preferred to give students some hints and let them work out the meaning on their own. Tina encouraged students to use these new words in their writing assignments or daily conversations. As to Emma, she taught vocabulary as an independent section. She spent 20 minutes in every class instructing a vocabulary list, usually including 10 to 12 words. As she taught different forms of the target word, the number of words that students learned was greater than the number indicated above. Emma also asked students to make sentences by using the new words they had just learned.

Anne and Tina combined the reading section with other language skills. Anne developed students' writing skills along with their reading skills. Anne pointed out that reading passages can be used as writing samples.

*When I teach reading, I always tell my students, "Remember! When you read the essay, you should pay attention to how each paragraph is organized and how the whole passage is structured. It will help your writing."*

In one of her reading classes, I observed that Anne taught students to analyze the main structure of a passage. Later she illustrated the structure on the blackboard and asked students to compose an essay by using that structure after class.

Tina incorporated speaking activities into the reading class. For example, one reading selection discussed the health care system in the United States, so Tina first introduced the situation in Canada and then she got students to talk about the health care system in their home countries

The majority of the teachers only used the TOEFL reading materials in class. Emma reported that she incorporated some real life materials into reading class from time to time.

*The TOEFL passages are very academic-oriented, so I try to find some interesting articles from newspapers. I ask them to pick out the transitional words or underline unique expressions.*

Although Mary also expressed her willingness to adopt some authentic reading material, she found that the class time was too limited to cover it.

*I'd like to use real life resources as much as I can. I find that newspapers and magazines are good reading substitutes for TOEFL students, because many passages in the textbook are taken from those types of resources. It would be nice to mix them up, but with time limits it might be a little bit difficult.*

In summary, all teachers followed their TOEFL preparation books closely when they were teaching reading. Only one teacher, Emma used some non-TOEFL reading materials on occasion in class. My observations revealed that the reading class was taught in a teacher-centered manner and students did not have many chances to get involved. Most

teachers built students' vocabulary through reading activities. All teachers admitted that vocabulary was one of the most crucial factors that determined students' success on the TOEFL reading test.

Three teachers combined other language aspects in the reading class: Emma corrected students' pronunciation by getting them to read the passage aloud; Anne prepared her students for writing by analyzing the structures of the reading passages; Tina developed students' speaking skills by letting them talk freely on topics from the reading materials.

4.1.3.2 Teaching Listening

Interviews and observations revealed that all teachers taught listening in a practice pattern: the teachers played a CD and got students to do exercises first, and then the class went over the questions and answers together. In the process of checking answers, teachers taught the new words and some culturally-based issues arising from the task. Anne, for example, explained how middle school and high school are distinguished in the North American context. This clarification is important for students to understand the listening materials, because many of them went through different educational systems in their home countries.

One of the biggest changes in the listening section on the TOEFL iBT is that test-takers are allowed to take notes on the test. All teachers realized the importance of developing students' note-taking skills. Anne and Emma found that some of their students

did not know how to take notes.

> *Taking notes is hard for them. It is difficult for them to figure out the main points. (Anne)*

> *One of my students tried to write down every word that the speakers said. She felt frustrated and then gave up (taking notes) when she found that she missed one or two words. (Emma)*

As Tina's teaching philosophy is to "improve students' overall language abilities as well as learning skills", she regards note-taking as one of the fundamental skills that enable students to survive in university. Thus, she placed a great deal of emphasis on teaching that skill. That is also one of the reasons why her school (school B) adopted the textbook "Northstar", which provides specialized practice for training note-taking skills in the listening section.

How did teachers develop their students' note-taking skills? Observation revealed that notes comparison was the most common way used by teachers to teach this skill. Due to the large size of her class, Anne usually divided students into groups of 4 or 5. She then asked them to compare the notes within the group and finally each group had to write the notes on the blackboard. However this activity was quite time consuming and Anne did not do it very often in class. In most cases, Anne asked students to compare their notes with the sample notes from the preparation books. In one of her classes, I observed that she took notes on the overhead simultaneously with students and showed her notes later to let them compare. Tina and Mary got students into pairs to compare their notes and then asked them to read the notes they had taken to the class. In Emma's class, she often checked students' notes directly and pointed out any problems she found.

Sometimes, she asked questions that were different from the preparation books to see how well the students understand the listening passage.

Three teachers introduced the strategy of using abbreviations in note-taking activities. Its advantage, according to Tina, is "helping students write more in the limited time". Emma taught students how to take notes in an organized way.

> *I also teach them to put things into categories. If the listening passage deals with three different things, I will get them to separate the page into three sections and write down the main points under each section. In this way, their notes are more organized, so they can locate the information more easily.*

Tina and Emma both mentioned the strategy of listening to the speaker's tone of voice, which can help students figure out the speaker's attitude.

From my observations, I found out that the amount of time spent repeating one listening passage varied from teacher to teacher. Anne usually played it once. When her students had any difficulties in following certain part of the passage, she would read the transcript aloud to the whole class. Like Anne, Emma also played the whole passage only once, but she would replay part of the passage where most of her students missed the points. As for Tina and Mary, they followed the instructions from the textbook and played the whole listening passage more than once.

All teachers claimed that they only used the TOEFL related listening materials in class. Mary expressed that she planned to use some regular ESL listening materials in the future, but she found that the schedule was quite rigid and she did not have enough time to cover everything from the designated textbook. Emma also said that she found some good listening exercises on the internet, but she was afraid that her students were not

interested in doing the non-TOEFL focused exercises.

Inclusion of integrated tasks is another significant feature of the new TOEFL test. However my observations suggested that only Tina and Mary integrated other language skills when teaching the listening section.

Tina combined speaking practice into the listening instruction section. The textbook used in Tina's class was built on different units and each unit dealt with one theme, thus Tina asked students to discuss the topic freely and to express their opinions before starting the listening section. One of her classes impressed me greatly. The topic of that class was "addiction" and Tina first explained the meaning of the word and then she asked students to give examples of addictions from their own experience. Students were quite involved in the discussion, and each one got a chance to speak meaningful sentences in class.

Mary provided students with a chance to practice their writing skills by using the listening materials. She asked students to write a paragraph to summarize the main ideas of the listening material and to present their own opinions about the topic. The aim of this homework was to develop students' paraphrasing skills, which were useful for doing integrated writing and speaking tasks on the TOEFL iBT.

To sum up, all teachers adopted a uniform approach to listening instruction and they all emphasized the note-taking skill. Although they did introduce some strategies to take effective notes, they did not give explicit explanations on how to implement them. For instance, they advised students to write down the main points, but they did not teach them

how to distinguish main points from secondary points. It seemed that they hoped students would master this ability through drills. When students had trouble in understanding the listening materials, some teachers chose to read the transcripts while others preferred playing the CD again. Two teachers developed students' listening skill along with speaking and writing skills.

### 4.1.3.3 Teaching Speaking

Inclusion of the speaking component was the most notable change in the TOEFL test, which put teachers in a dilemma: on the one hand, they supported the idea of adding a speaking section into the TOEFL test, because the test could better represent test-takers' overall language proficiencies; on the other hand, they had to face the challenges which were brought up by teaching the speaking component.

Interviews and observations revealed that all teachers relied heavily on the preparation books when they were teaching the speaking section. Anne used two books while teaching the speaking section. One book served the purpose of instruction, which described the features of each speaking task, provided sample responses and even included analysis of certain responses; the other book, having plenty of speaking tasks, was used for classroom practice. Anne found that the analysis of sample responses was particularly useful for students because they could learn the thinking pattern for completing the speaking tasks. Tina, Chris and Emma also followed the speaking section in the textbook closely and got their students to practice those questions.

In contrast to reading and listening class, students got more involved in speaking class and they had many opportunities to participate in the class activities. All teachers adopted a practice mode to instruct the speaking class, but they had different approaches for getting students to prepare for the speaking tasks. Due to the relatively large number of students, Anne usually divided them into groups of 3 or 4 students and gave each group a speaking question. Every group had different topics. Anne first gave them some time to discuss the topic within the group and then she asked two students from each group to present their responses. Anne stated that she gave students adequate time for response preparation in the first few weeks and then she shortened the time as the course progressed. Finally she would time them as they would be timed in the real test situation. Anne asked one student to be the timer, responsible for stopping the speaker when the response time was up. Chris and Tina usually adopted a pair-work mode in speaking class, in which the student was allowed to discuss the questions with the partner and then both of them would present their responses individually. Chris and Tina gave students longer preparation time than what the real test allowed, but they controlled their students' response time. In Emma's speaking class, students prepared for the questions on their own and Emma timed them exactly as in the real test situation, including preparation time and response delivery time.

Tina and Emma audio-taped their students' spoken responses and then gave them feedback based on the recordings. The difference is that Emma played the recording sentence by sentence in class and pointed out the mistakes or inappropriate usages, while

Tina first gave a general comment without referring to the recording in class and then provided more detailed suggestions to students in the next class after listening to the recordings. Emma also asked students to write down any problem they found while their classmate was speaking. Tina and Emma both gave students a second chance to do the same question if any of them were willing.

My observation revealed that teachers' feedback addressed the problems in the areas of pronunciation, grammar, specific vocabulary and sentence structure. Among all the teachers, I only observed Emma mark her students' speaking performance. One of the reasons for the lack of evaluation might be that teachers were not familiar with the marking system in the speaking component of the TOEFL iBT, so they did not want to misguide their students. Although they all had the rubric (a sort of evaluation framework) which was created by the ETS, they were not sure how to use it in measuring their students' speaking performance. Anne commented,

> *I find that trying to use the rubric in assessing speaking is really a problem. I had one student who took the (TOEFL) iBT twice and he got 24 in speaking in the first time, but he needed 25 to be eligible for studying in the program he wished, so I worked with him and we went through all the speaking exercises we could find and I felt that his speaking had improved. However, he took the test again and the score in speaking remained the same.*

A variety of activities were observed in speaking class. Chris played a game called "Flash Card", in which students drew a card and then spoke spontaneously on the topic shown on the card. Tina got students to talk about the events in their daily life, which she found was a good warm-up exercise to help students overcome shyness and nervousness. As most of her students were from Asia, Tina found that some of them were too timid to

speak in front of the class.

> *Some students are incredibly shy which makes speaking very difficult, not because of their English ability but their emotional restrictions. I prepared some interesting daily topics and got them to speak in class, in this way they become more comfortable in speaking in public.*

Emma encouraged free discussions among students on those topics in which they were interested, such as TV shows and holidays. In one of her speaking classes, she arranged an interesting debate by asking students to play the role of Bush or Gore and to defend their standpoint on a political issue.

The sub-skills in speaking taught by teachers varied from case to case. Chris focused on correcting the non-standard speaking habits and pronunciation problems of his students. Tina and Emma integrated vocabulary studies into the speaking class. They taught transitional words and synonyms that could be used in response. Anne taught specific grammar points related to certain type of speaking questions, for instance, she taught the grammatical rules for forming the superlative when introducing the personal preference speaking task. Anne found this way to teach speaking was very effective, "It breaks down the general skill into teachable components and builds the students' speaking skill step by step."

The similarity between the TOEFL speaking and writing tasks was recognized by three teachers: Anne, Chris and Tina. Anne stated,

> *Everything is integrated in the new test. Speaking is very much like writing a short essay. The only difference is that, instead of writing it down, they have to speak it out.*

Chris also found that the test required test-takers to speak formally in the same way

as they wrote an essay. Tina taught students to organize their speaking response in the written format: introduction, body and conclusion. As the speaking time for each task varies from 45 seconds to one minute, she taught students the appropriate allocation of time for each part to help them maximize their performance.

Besides practicing speaking in the regular classroom, students in school A[9] also had a chance to speak on the computers once a week. Although all three schools had computer labs, only students in school A had access to computers on a regular basis to practice speaking. School B provided two mock tests during which students were able to speak on computers. With Anne's permission, I observed one of her lab classes. She handed out the CDs and headphones to each student and got them to practice. She also distributed paper for them to take notes. Each student worked at their own pace and they could select the questions or rework the same question if they wanted. The set-up imitated exactly what was in the real test situation except that the preparation time was not set up and students were able to speak when they felt ready. The CD also provided sample response outlines to help students generate ideas to answer the questions. Students recorded their responses on the computers, so Anne could give them feedback later. My observation revealed that most students had problems in finding appropriate examples to support their opinions. However this problem was seldom addressed by Anne and other teachers, who concentrated more on the format of the response, such as speaking pace, pronunciation, grammatical errors rather than on the content.

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[9] I was not able to observe Eva's speaking lab.

In summary, teachers gave fewer lectures and had students participate more in speaking class. The commercial TOEFL preparation books were still heavily used in class, either as a lecture tool or as practice resources. Besides following the exercises on the preparation book, some teachers also organized different activities to develop students' general speaking abilities. Different teachers addressed different elements that were essential for a good speech. As to feedback, teachers paid more attention to the format of the responses instead of the content. Among the six teachers, I only observed Emma marking the students' speaking performance. She created her own evaluation scheme instead of using the ETS rubrics. With her permission, I photocopied the scheme she used for speaking assessment. In this scheme, Emma broke the abstract speaking proficiency into seven measurable aspects: answer to question; comprehensibility; organization; fluency; pronunciation; grammar; and vocabulary. The grading system in her scheme was consistent with what was in the ETS rubrics, from 1 to 4.

4.1.3.4 Teaching Writing

There are two tasks in the writing section on the TOEFL iBT. One is an integrated writing task and the other is an independent one. Anne adopted different approaches to instruct these two tasks. For the integrated one, she introduced a template to the class: for example, the first paragraph always began with the sentence "In this set of materials, the reading passage discusses...and the listening passage addresses..." According to Anne, the template could help students to organize their thoughts and to compose essays in a

structured manner. Besides teaching the template, Anne placed great emphasis on developing students' paraphrasing skill. As this task asked test-takers to summarize the main ideas of the listening and reading materials by using their own words, it was fundamental for them to master the paraphrasing skill. My observation illustrated that she taught the paraphrasing skill mainly through practice: she wrote down the key words of what she heard and read on the blackboard, and then got students to write sentences by integrating the keywords.

As to the independent task, Anne stated that she did not use any templates. Instead, she focused on teaching the basic knowledge of essays, such as sentence structures and transitional words or phrases. Anne stated,

*I give them freedom to write in the way they wished as long as the essay was organized and the ideas were clearly expressed.*

During the interview, Anne commented that most of her students had fairly strong writing skills because they received a lot of training on composing short essays with similar topics to the TOEFL in the Benchmark classes. I reviewed some of her students' essays and found that they all had well-organized structures and sound arguments. Anne claimed that the score range of her former students who had taken the test was between 23 to 25 out of 30.

In the first few sessions, Chris and Tina concentrated on instructing the elements included in an essay and how to compose them. According to Chris, this class aimed at improving students' general writing abilities.

*If you only teach them to write the TOEFL essays, it will not help (them) develop*

*their writing skill. The students write 300 or 400 words well and then they get stuck. You need to show them the skills purposeful to write much longer essays, because that is what they are going to do when they get into the university.*

Unlike other teachers who only used the TOEFL books to teach the writing class, Chris brought non-TOEFL materials into the class. In one of his classes, I observed that he prepared some brainstorming exercises which were from the GED course. Although the topics were different from those on the TOEFL, Chris believed that they were still useful in strengthening their thinking abilities.

Chris and Tina integrated speaking activities into the writing class. They got students to communicate their ideas and thoughts on the topic before starting to write them down. Tina asked students to work in pairs to exchange and discuss their ideas. After discussion, students were given 5 minutes to draw up the outline. Then they were asked to compose their essays on the computers. Tina emphasized the importance of proofreading, thus she asked students to finish writing within 25 minutes and to leave 5 minutes for review and self-correction. Students saved their essays on discs, so teachers could read them and give comments later.

During the interview, Tina mentioned that she gave students a second chance to rewrite the essay if they were dissatisfied with what they did in class. She would correct these rewritten essays, but she would not mark them because they were not done under time restraints.

Emma put a great emphasis on instructing structure and grammar in writing class, because she found that it was where her students had serious problems. She stated,

*The content in their essays is really good and they have everything they need, but they need help in organizing their work and using correct grammar to get across their ideas.*

Instead of going over all grammatical rules in class, Emma picked up the grammatical problems that she spotted from her students' writing. She prepared exercises for the class to practice specific grammar points.

As to instruction of essay structure, besides introducing the basic essay components, Emma used her students' writing to illustrate how to organize an essay. She explained to them why two paragraphs should be combined into one or where to divide a paragraph into two separate ones.

Emma stood out from other teachers by assigning writing homework. She gave students a writing task every two days and the topic was not always based on the TOEFL. The purpose of providing non-TOEFL topics was to sustain their enthusiasm in writing.

*I try to choose some interesting topics for them to practice, because they will become bored in writing the TOEFL essays all the time.*

Interviews and observations revealed that only Anne and Tina introduced the ETS writing rubric in class and helped students to familiarize themselves with this marking criterion. Anne presented some good writing pieces done by students to the whole class and got them to make a judgment on how much score their writings deserved. Unlike Anne, Tina encouraged peer grading in class. She found it was helpful in making students understand what was expected from their writing.

With Anne and Emma's permission, I photocopied some of their students' writing samples that they had corrected. After analyzing these essays, I discovered that Anne and

Emma corrected the essays from different perspectives, which to a great extent was determined by the students' needs in writing. Anne paid more attention to the micro-level of the essays, including spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, and sentence problems, because the majority in her class had already acquired good organizational skills. In contrast, as students in Emma's class had serious problems with essay structure, she focused more on the macro-level, that is, the whole structure of the essays. Emma made a checklist to assess whether the essays had a general introduction statement, the first point statement, supporting examples, the second point statement, supporting examples, summary of point one and point two, and restatement of thesis.

Due to the school's privacy policy, I could not gain access to the students' work at School B; however, during the interview, Tina stated that she did not correct the errors herself; instead, she created a set of symbols to flag errors and she asked students to correct them by themselves. For instance, she would put a symbol "V" beside a word which used a verb tense incorrectly. Tina believed that students were able to learn better this way,

> *They will not learn anything if you correct everything for them. They have to go back and correct their own mistakes.*

In contrast to the lack of evaluation in speaking class, all teachers marked the essays and they felt more comfortable in using the ETS rubric to evaluate students' written work. As the independent writing task was similar to the old TOEFL writings, teachers' past experience of teaching and marking the TOEFL essays enhanced their ability to deal with the new test. Although the integrated writing task is brand new, all teachers expressed that

it was not difficult to understand and apply the evaluation criteria. Anne stated,

> *I will take their marks off according to how many points they missed from the listening and reading materials.*

When Anne was marking students' essays, she had a tendency to lower the score a little bit. She gave two reasons: first, students might be over-optimistic about their writing abilities so that they would become too lazy to do more practice; second, the evaluation was very subjective and no one could know exactly how many mistakes the ETS rater would accept.

Like Anne, Chris was also strict in marking students' essays. As he taught the intermediate level class, most of his students did not have good writing skills and the average score was low. This had a negative impact on students' confidence and motivation to learn. In order to empower his students, Chris kept the first essay the students had written at the beginning of the course and then asked them to compare it with their current writing. From this, students could recognize the progress they had made. Chris did the same thing in the speaking class by recording their oral performance on a MP3.

In summary, all teachers provided instruction on the basics of essay writing. Some teachers introduced templates in writing class, while others did not. Most teachers stuck to the writing topics in the TOEFL commercial preparation books and made students write them in class. One teacher incorporated some non-TOEFL writing exercises in class, and another teacher assigned some creative writing homework. All teachers marked their students' essays, however, only two teachers helped students to become familiar with the

TOEFL writing scales. The feedback given by teachers varied from case to case.

### 4.1.4 Changes in Teaching Practice and Challenges

### 4.1.4.1 Changes in teaching practice

As I was not able to observe how these teachers instructed the previous versions of the TOEFL class, the theme of what adjustments the teachers had made in instructing the TOEFL iBT class was explored through their personal reflections. Eva[10] and Emma did not make any comments on this issue because it was their first time teaching the TOEFL preparation class.

Anne stated that the class had become more student-centered. She used to give lectures in front of the class all the time and now there was more group work and individual work in class. Students were given more opportunities to speak in class. Another change she mentioned was that she tried to integrate many skills together. For instance, she began to make students discuss their writing topics in the TOEFL iBT class.

In agreement with Anne's comments, Chris commented that it was a one-way instruction mode in his previous TOEFL preparation class but there were many interactions between his students and him in the current TOEFL class. He gave his students feedback on their speaking and writing performances and encouraged them to ask questions if they did not understand his comments.

Mary did not perceive a great difference between the way she taught the old TOEFL

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[10] Eva had the experience of working as the TOEFL private tutor on a one-to-one basis, but it was her first time to teach the TOEFL preparation course.

class and the TOEFL iBT class; however, she did made a change on the way she taught the reading class. Before, she allowed students to use the dictionary whenever they met a new word, but now she encouraged students to guess the meaning of the word within the context.

Unlike the three teachers mentioned above, Tina expressed that she did not make any obvious adjustment in teaching the TOEFL iBT class, as the way she taught the old TOEFL class was the way she was teaching at present. She admitted that the new test had an influence on what she taught; for example, she spent less time on grammar instruction. However she did not see any obvious changes on *how* she taught in class. Since the first TOEFL preparation class, Tina regarded it as her main aim to improve students' general language ability, thus she provided abundant chances for students to use English in class. Furthermore, Tina mentioned that her teaching style might vary from time to time, but it was never because of the changes occurred on the TOEFL iBT.

In summary, the changes on the TOEFL iBT have an impact on the teaching practice in the TOEFL preparation class; however the extent of the change varied from case to case. Two teachers stated that their teaching approach has changed from teacher-dominated and one-way instruction into student-centered, communicative and interactive based instruction. However, for the other two teachers, the new test only influenced what they are teaching rather than how they are teaching in the current TOEFL iBT preparation class.

4.1.4.2 Challenges from teaching diverse students

The biggest challenge faced by most TOEFL teachers was how to handle a group of students with diverse language levels and learning styles. Chris stated that he made great efforts to detect the strengths and weaknesses in English of each student.

*My job is to get to know the students very well, because if I do not do it I can not teach them well...However sometimes it is very difficult to assess them verbally.*

Moreover, he tried to identify the learning ways that students were comfortable with and then varied his lesson plans to accommodate their needs accordingly.

*Some students respond well to lectures and others respond well to action type of questions. As a teacher as well as a learner myself, I have the way that I like being taught, but it never means that it is the exact way that they like to learn.*

Anne also struggled in finding a balance in teaching the heterogeneous class.

*In my current class, I have students who are relatively low and who are high in terms of English language ability. I am trying to get the low ones to the high ones without depressing the advanced group. It is hard!*

It was interesting to know that students had been screened before getting into the TOEFL class at Anne's school and they were required to pass a certain level on the Benchmark. However, Anne told me that this requirement was not rigid and the school still allowed some students to join the class even if they did not attain the required level.

In some cases, students' cultural background might also cause some problems for teachers. Tina narrated her own experience in getting Korean students to speak in class.

*Some students are incredibly shy and they are reluctant to speak in front of the class. Sometimes, I have to push them a little bit or else there is no way to develop their speaking skill.*

Emma encountered a similar situation. There was a very reticent Chinese student in her class, who always kept silent even when she was asked to answer the questions.

Emma told me that in the first few sessions this student could not speak a single sentence if there were other students in class. Emma found that this student performed better when it was a one-to-one teaching situation. My observation verified Emma's words. I observed two of Emma's speaking classes: one with three students present and the other was only made up of the student in question, who looked more relaxed and gave a better responses in the latter class.

In order to deal with this issue, Tina started the speaking class with some easy and interesting topics for students to discuss and she found this strategy was very effective.

> We did some warming-up and fun questions that everybody could have an answer at the beginning of each speaking class. They become more accustomed to doing the TOEFL tasks after the initial exercises.

### 4.1.4.3 Challenges from using computers

Another potential challenge facing by the TOEFL iBT teachers was their computer competence. The three schools all had their own computer labs and two of them even served as TOEFL test centers; however, my observation revealed that the computers were used more as a practice tool rather than a medium of instruction. Teachers did not provide instruction on how to use a computer. All teachers claimed that the majority of their students had adequate computer skills to deal with the TOEFL test on computers, so there was no need for them to spend class time in teaching that knowledge. Two teachers mentioned that some of their students had problems typing, but they believed that the responsibility was more on the students' side because the typing skill could only be improved through practice. Thus, the schools provided computer facilities for students to

practice on after class. During the interviews, all teachers but one stated that their computer literacy did not have any significant impact on the way they ran the TOEFL classes. Anne stated that there was a computer technician in her school and she could seek help if any issue beyond her ability emerged. In one of her speaking lab classes, I witnessed that one student had problems recording his own voice on the computer and Anne asked the technician to solve the problem. The official test administrator and the TOEFL teacher emphasized the importance of having a strong computer background. From his experience, it was impossible to fulfill the role of the official test provider without sound computer knowledge because a lot of unpredictable situations could occur before or during the test. All schools provided mock tests on computers with the aim of helping students to become familiar with the testing procedures so they will not feel too nervous at the time of the real test. Another advantage stated by one teacher was that students could skip the direction parts and use that time to do the tasks.

4.1.4.4 Self-study teaching approach

The following section will present a different teaching approach to the TOEFL iBT preparation class: the self-study approach. Among six teachers, Eva was the only one who adopted the self-study teaching approach in her TOEFL class. During the interview, Eva briefly described the way she conducted the self-study program in the TOEFL iBT preparation class. At the beginning of the course, she gave each student a needs assessment to find out their strengths and weaknesses in English. Then she selected

practice materials from commercially prepared books, which were divided into different areas (i.e. listening, reading, writing, and grammar). She then distributed the materials to students according to their assessed needs, and students were instructed to work through the material on their own. Eva brought two computers and two CD players to class for students to work through tasks that required listening. Students could ask for her help anytime if they had questions or problems arise. Eva corrected and marked the essays that the students did in class; however, I was not able to review this work. I observed one of Eva's classes and found that the class was managed exactly as she had described during the interview.

## 4.2 Students' Perspective

In this study, I interviewed four students: Helen, Kevin, Jane, and John. They are all from East Asian countries: two from Korea and two from China. Their ages varied from 18 to 30. Unlike other student participants, Kevin took a TOEFL iBT preparation course which was taught by Chinese teachers. Helen attended a few sessions at School B and then quit the course and prepared on her own.

As to the test-taking experience, Kevin and Jane had written the paper-based TOEFL back in their home country. By the time of the interview, only Kevin had taken the TOEFL iBT.

Parallel to the themes illustrated in the teachers' perspective section, the findings from the students' data are also divided into four themes: "Attitudes toward the TOEFL

iBT"; "Preparation materials"; "Preparation practice"; "Challenges".

4.2.1 Attitudes toward the TOEFL iBT

4.2.1.1 Attitudes toward the change

Kevin and Jane, who had experience in preparing for the previous version of the TOEFL test, claimed that the TOEFL iBT is more difficult than the paper-based TOEFL. John noted that the speaking section in the new test is the biggest challenge for him.

Students held different opinions on the way grammar is tested in the TOEFL iBT. Helen and Kevin supported the removal of the grammar section from the test. They believed that it is better to measure grammatical skills within other language skills. On the contrary, Jane and John thought the grammar section should be kept as in the previous versions. John stated that grammar is the foundation of developing the other language skills so it must be tested independently. Jane found that it is easier for her to identify the problems in grammar with that section included in the test.

All students agreed that the TOEFL iBT equipped them with better language abilities to survive in university in the future. With the inclusion of the speaking section in the test, they are forced to improve their speaking skill, which they realized is one of the most important factors for succeeding in university. Helen stated,

*One of the advantages of the TOEFL iBT is that it forces me to speak English. As my goal is to obtain a high mark on the test, I put great efforts into speaking practice.*

Another change Kevin noticed during the preparation practice is that fewer test-taking techniques can be applied to deal with the new test.

4.2.1.2 Attitudes toward the relationship between the score and the English language proficiency

In agreement with the opinions held by teachers, four students thought that the score on the TOEFL iBT represents their English proficiency in a more accurate way than the previous version, but they did not think that it is a true reflection of their language ability.

Kevin, who took the test, found that the score he got on the writing section was higher than his real writing ability. He got a full score in writing (30 out of 30); however he did not believe that his writing skill had reached the level which the score indicated. In contrast, he believed that his speaking ability deserved a higher score than what he had been given.

Jane got very nervous when sitting the test (TOEFL PBT), which had a negative impact on her performance. Thus, she did not regard the score as a true reflection of her language proficiency.

Helen was concerned with the issue of using computers on the TOEFL iBT. For those test-takers with poor computer skills, the score they get on the test could be influenced by their computer literacy.

Although they never believed the TOEFL iBT to be a perfect tool to measure their language ability, the students indeed felt that their general English proficiency has been improved through the test preparation activities.

John found that his academic English had made tremendous progress in the past few weeks, especially his writing skill. More than the language itself, Jane stated that her

learning skills (i.e. note-taking skill, presentation skill and etc.) were also improved by preparing for the test.

### 4.2.1.3 Attitudes toward the feedback given by the teachers

Except for Kevin, all students found that the comments and feedback given by their TOEFL teachers were very useful, especially for the speaking and writing tasks.

Helen hired the TOEFL teacher to be her private tutor after having quit the preparation course. She and her tutor only worked on the speaking and writing parts of the test. Helen found one-on-one tutorials very effective because her personal needs had been taken care of.

> *My grammar is good, so the teacher mainly gives me some suggestions on how to organize the essays and how to write more beautiful sentences by using some "big" words. As to speaking, she taught me from which direction to look at the speaking question, which is just what I need.*

Jane also had a positive attitude toward the feedback given by the teacher.

> *The teacher corrects my pronunciation of certain words and teaches me how to organize my response in speaking activities. I find my performance on speaking tasks become better and better.*

Like Helen and Jane, John felt that his writing and speaking skills improved a lot after reviewing the comments given by the teacher. He knew more about how to write and speak in a native-like way. The only issue is that sometimes he felt uneasy when the teacher pointed out his mistakes in class.

The TOEFL iBT preparation course which Kevin attended was a 48-hour intensive one; thus, the teachers did not have time to give thorough feedback to each student in

class. Moreover, all the TOEFL teachers of this particular course were not living locally,

so it was hard for them to provide feedback after class. Kevin stated that the feedback

given by the TOEFL speaking teacher was quite general and superficial.

> *The comments made by my speaking teacher are like "pay attention to your grammar", "your response is too short", "you miss one point from listening material". The problem is that I still do not know which grammatical errors I made or how to extend my answer or avoid missing any point.*

Even worse than the speaking, Kevin did not receive any feedback from the TOEFL

writing teacher. However, it was Kevin who voluntarily gave up the chance to get

feedback. Recognizing the fact that he was not able to review students' essays and give

them some feedback in class, the TOEFL writing teacher offered his email address and

asked students to send their writing via email and then he would review and correct them.

Kevin felt confident about his own way in dealing with the TOEFL writing tasks, so he

did not take advantage of this offer.


4.2.2 Preparation Materials

Helen stated that she used *Hacker,* a series of commercially prepared TOEFL books

which are compiled and published by a Korean language training institute. She told me

that this institute has a high reputation in Korea for good language test preparation. She

commented that this series was excellent for self-study.

> *The preparation manual provides all the information a test-taker wants to know about the TOEFL iBT, from question types to test-taking tips. It also includes two complete mock tests for practicing.*

Besides the commercially prepared books, Helen also incorporated some authentic

English materials, such as newspapers, documentary films and radio programs when preparing for the test.

Kevin expressed that he only used the textbooks that were handed out in the TOEFL preparation class. I reviewed the Listening and Reading Fascicle and found that the content was identical with that in *Longman*. As the only student who has taken the iBT, Kevin commented that the reading passages in the textbook were shorter and easier than those on the real test. Kevin also downloaded some sample tests from the ETS website for mock testing. Besides these materials, he did not buy any other commercially prepared books.

Unlike Helen and Kevin, Jane used a variety of TOEFL books: *Longman* and *Thomson* in class; *Barren* and *Delta* for self-studying. It is interesting to note that the *Delta* book she used was the Chinese translation version.

Besides using the textbook *Northstar* as the main preparation manual, John also adopted the *Hacker* series as supplementary materials. He expressed that although *Northstar* was good in terms of building the TOEFL skills step by step, it was not enough for preparing him for the test because there were not many exercises for practicing.

In conclusion, all students used commercially prepared materials for studying the TOEFL iBT. Some of them also incorporated authentic language materials during the preparation practice.

4.2.3 Preparation Practice

Except for Helen, all students took the formal TOEFL iBT preparation course. Helen is a very unique case in this study. She first registered in the course but later she quit; however, she did have a private tutor to work with her in speaking and writing twice a week. For the rest of the time, she prepared for the test on a self-study basis.

John and Jane attended the course which was provided by School B and School C respectively. Both courses were taught by native speakers but the length and course arrangement were different.

Kevin took the course which was taught by non-native speakers who spoke the same mother tongue as him. Compared to the courses which John and Jane took, it was very intense and the total instruction time was 48 hours.

Interviews revealed that all students spent varied amounts of time practicing language exercises after class. Some of the students worked on the assignments given by the teacher while others did simulation tests which they found from outside commercial books or from the internet.

4.2.3.1 Reading

A significant finding is that all student participants emphasized the importance of building vocabulary in the TOEFL iBT reading preparation practice. Two of the students combined this activity with the reading exercises. Helen stated that she highlighted the new words or phrases which she found in the reading materials, either TOEFL reading

passages or articles in newspapers. Then she copied them down in her notebook for memorizing. Similar to Helen, Jane also integrated vocabulary learning into the TOEFL reading practice. As well, Jane had a chance to study vocabulary in class and the teacher prepared a vocabulary list with 10 to 12 words for every class.

Kevin and John studied vocabulary separately from reading activities. Both of them used the TOEFL vocabulary book with definitions in their first language. Kevin told me that he started accumulating vocabulary long before doing the TOEFL exercises. However he commented that the efforts he put into studying vocabulary were not worthwhile.

> *I spent almost four months in memorizing the words in the TOEFL vocabulary book; however I only met a few of them in the real test. It is not worthy of my time.*

One of the possible reasons for such perceptions is that the vocabulary book he used was not updated. The words in this book were collected from the old version of the TOEFL test. Kevin stated that he chose this one because he did not find any vocabulary book on iBT at that time.

As to specific reading practice, all students stated that they went through reading passages on the TOEFL preparation books. Three of them practiced under timed conditions. Then these students would check with the key to measure how many questions they did correctly.

Among the four students, Kevin was the only one who was studying in a pre-university program in a local school. He took the English 4U[11] course, in which he

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[11] English 4U course is a university preparation course, equivalent to Grade 12 English.

was required to read English novels and literature; however, he recognized that the materials he dealt with in general English class were not the same as the readings on the TOEFL.

> *I think it is important to do the reading materials close to the TOEFL iBT. I can practice the strategies I learned in the TOEFL preparation course. For example, I only read the first and the last paragraph and the first two sentences of other paragraphs and then go to questions and answer whatever I know and go back to the reading passage for those questions that I am not sure about.*

However Kevin regretted that he was not able to use this strategy in the real test. He told me that he was so nervous that he forgot to apply this strategy, thus he was not able to complete all reading questions within the test time.

In conclusion, all students regarded the memorization of vocabulary as the major part of the reading preparation, no matter whether they integrated this vocabulary study with the TOEFL reading passages or not. They heavily depended on TOEFL preparation books and used reading material as the main way to prepare for the TOEFL reading test. Two students used authentic reading materials as supplementary work in their reading preparation practice.

### 4.2.3.2 Listening

Helen was very unique in her way of preparing for the TOEFL listening section. Instead of practicing the listening tasks in the TOEFL iBT preparation books, she mainly used authentic materials in her listening preparation practice. She listened to the news on the radio and took notes while listening. She had an MP3 player which enabled her to

record the news, so she could replay the news to check whether she missed any point in her notes. She even created her own integrated tasks, because she found that what she heard on radio to a large extent dealt with the same issues that were discussed in daily newspapers. She could compare the similar or different viewpoints of what she had heard and what she had read. This activity was incredibly useful for her to develop the skills which were necessary to do the integrated tasks in the TOEFL iBT writing and speaking sections.

Being asked about how she got this idea, Helen stated that it was from her former TOEFL teacher Tina. The interview with Tina verified this issue: Tina learned this idea in a workshop that she had attended, in which TOEFL teachers were encouraged to create their own integrated tasks by using authentic resources in daily life.

Helen stated that she might spend some time in working on the listening material in the commercially prepared books; however, her main focus was on the outside authentic listening materials. Besides listening to the radio, she also watched documentary films in the fields of history, anthropology or geography, which were common topics on the TOEFL test.

The other three students followed the listening exercises closely in the commercial books. Like Helen, they all paid great attention to practicing their note-taking skills while doing the listening exercises. Jane stated that she used to have trouble taking notes because she wanted to write down everything she heard. The teacher taught her how to take concise and clear notes and she found her note-taking skill had improved by

following the instructions given by the teacher.

John expressed that he watched the news on TV as an alternative way of developing the listening skill; however, he seldom watched TV shows or movies because he found that characters used a lot of slang or spoke with strange accents which were different from the TOEFL listening materials. Jane also listened to the news on the radio but did not watch TV very often. Jane lived in a homestay family and she had a different taste from the family members in the types of TV programs. She commented,

*The children of my homestay family like watching cartoons. I find they are too naïve for my age. As to comic plays, I do not understand the jokes that they make in the show. To me, it is a waste of time in watching those programs on TV.*

In conclusion, all students regarded the note-taking skill as one of the most important techniques in the TOEFL listening performance. Except for one student, all participants used the TOEFL listening materials as the main preparation resource. Three students believed that listening to news is a good alternative of improving TOEFL listening performance. One student created her own integrated tasks by combining what she heard on radios with what she read in newspapers.

### 4.2.3.3 Speaking

As mentioned earlier, Helen had a tutor to work with her on the TOEFL speaking and writing tasks. The tutorial was twice per week and one hour each time. The tutor went over all the Speaking tasks from the selected coursebook with Helen and asked her to practice within the real time limit and her responses were recorded on a MP3 player.

Based on the recordings, the teacher provided feedback on Helen's performance and let her try again. Helen stated that usually she practiced one question a few times until the tutor felt satisfied with the response. Helen had not started to practice the TOEFL speaking tasks outside the tutorial at the time the interview was conducted, but she planned to do it soon. She had just figured out how to record her own voice by using an MP3 player, so she could show the tutor her responses that she did after class and hope to get feedback from her.

The interview with Jane showed that her TOEFL teacher adopted a similar form of instruction to Helen's tutor in terms of teaching speaking. The difference was that Jane did not get many chances to repeat the same question. Jane stated that sometimes the teacher also organized some activities like free talks or debates to develop their speaking ability. Jane had just started to practice the TOEFL speaking questions on her own, but she found that it was hard because she had to time herself at the same time as she concentrated on response preparation activities. Jane also practiced speaking questions on the computers.

Kevin also met the same problem when practicing the TOEFL speaking questions.

*I put a watch in front of me and it kept me busy because I had to watch time as well as thinking of what to say.*

Although it was hard to do two things at the same time, Kevin found that this practice benefited him because he realized the importance of managing time. He stated that at first the introduction of his response was so long that he did not have time to illustrate the body section, let alone provide a conclusion. Thus he tried to reduce the

length of introduction and get into the main body quickly. Reflecting on his TOEFL speaking class, he stated that he indeed learned some response formats to answer certain types of speaking questions but he did not have adequate opportunities to practice in class due to the large number of students and the tight class schedule. When the course was over, he spent at least one hour practicing TOEFL speaking questions every day for almost a month until the test day. During the self-study period, he did not record his responses nor did he ask any teacher to give any comment on them. Kevin found some sample responses on line and tried to understand the criteria the evaluators used to grade their speaking performance.

From his personal experience, Kevin emphasized the importance of practicing speaking on the computers. He used to believe that he was not able to see the question when he began to speak so he tried hard to remember the question during the practice; however, he found out that the question was on the screen all the time when he practiced the mock test on the computer, which was exactly the same as in the real test situation.

John stated that speaking was the biggest challenge for him. He felt that he did not have enough chances to practice speaking in class. He tried to find some TOEFL speaking tasks from the internet and go over them after class; however, he found those questions were much harder than he expected and he did not have a clue about how to answer them.

In conclusion, all students found TOEFL speaking tasks either from commercially prepared books or from the internet and practiced them outside the tutorial or class

sessions. Two students timed themselves while practicing on their own. Two students had

experience in practicing the TOEFL speaking questions on the computers. One student

had great difficulty in doing the real TOEFL speaking tasks.

4.2.3.4 Writing

Helen stated that she wrote four TOEFL essays (two independent ones and two

integrated ones) each week. She submitted her writings to the private tutor, who would

give her feedback in the next session. Besides practicing the real TOEFL topics, Helen

used a lot of authentic materials as her writing resource. She picked up one or two

newspaper articles which she found interesting and wrote summaries. This skill was

required in the integrated writing task. Helen paid attention to the expressions that

appeared in newspaper articles. She also copied every word or phrase she found useful in

her notebook and tried to use them in her own writing. As for typing skills, Helen

practiced on the computer for half an hour every day to improve her speed.

As Kevin got the full score (30 out of 30) in the writing section on the TOEFL iBT,

it is worthwhile to examine how he prepared for writing. Kevin stated that the template

he prepared beforehand proved to be very helpful on the test day, which provided him

with extra time to work on arguments and supporting examples.

Kevin spent a lot of time in creating and revising the template rather than just

copying the templates that were taught by the TOEFL teacher. The following was the

template he used in the introduction paragraph of the independent writing task.

*Here is my first paragraph, "There is no denying that...has become controversial, not only for professionally but also for publics as a whole. Some people think that...while others dispute this opinion. As far as I am concerned, I am in favor of... Among several factors that influence my choice, there are three conspicuous ones listed as follows."*

Kevin listed two advantages of creating his own template: one was that it would be consistent with his writing style; the other was that the originality prevented him from using a similar template to what might be used by other test-takers.

It was astonishing to see that Kevin only wrote ten TOEFL essays, including both independent and integrated tasks during the whole preparation period. Kevin commented that quality was more important than quantity in the writing practice. Although he did not write many TOEFL essays, he put great effort into composing every essay and adapted the template he created to fit each topic. He found that this practice was very effective in preparing for the TOEFL writing tasks. Kevin was very confident about his typing skill, so he did not spend extra time in practicing it on the computers.

Unlike Kevin, Jane did not prepare any templates for the TOEFL writing. She found some model essays from the internet and reviewed them carefully to see what were good or bad in those essays. Jane stated that she practiced writing in an intensive way. She wrote at least nine essays each week, five in class and four or more outside class. She commented,

*Practice makes perfect. I believe that my writing ability will definitely be improved through extensive practice.*

Jane submitted all her writing to the TOEFL teacher for review, who provided feedback and suggestions every time. Jane stated that the teacher's comments played a

very important role in her whole writing preparation practice. She spent time reading those comments. Jane composed essays on the computer when she was practicing after class.

John stated that he had good grammar knowledge, so he did not regard writing as a big challenge. In every writing class, the teacher asked the students to finish one TOEFL essay on computer within 30 minutes. After class, John practiced one or two TOEFL essays each week. Sometimes, he chose to rewrite the essay that he had done in class if he felt it was not satisfactory. Similar to Jane, he also sent his writing to the TOEFL teacher and asked him to proofread it and provide feedback.

In conclusion, all students composed TOEFL essays as the main practice for developing writing skills. One student used authentic materials to develop the summarizing skill as well as to build vocabulary. One student emphasized the importance of templates in facilitating the TOEFL writing and created his own style template and tried it in daily practice. Three students had teachers review their essays. Three students spent a certain amount of time on the computer to strengthen their typing skills.

### 4.2.4 Challenges

#### 4.2.4.1 Perceptions of the hardest and the easiest section on the TOEFL iBT

During the interview, four student participants were asked to name the easiest section and the hardest section on the TOEFL iBT based on their perceptions. Table 6 illustrates the result.

### Table 6: Easiest and Hardest Sections for Students

|  | **Helen** | **Kevin** | **Jane** | **John** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Easiest section** | Listening | Writing | Reading | Reading |
| **Hardest section** | Speaking | Reading | Speaking | Speaking |

Three students ranked the speaking section as the most difficult on the TOEFL iBT. A lack of speaking experience was cited as the main reason for this difficulty. Although they had all lived in an English speaking country for one to two years, the students stated that they were still not confident about their speaking ability.

> *I am living with a Canadian roommate, so I have many chances to speak English in my daily life. My problem is to find the most appropriate word to express my thoughts during the conversation. (Helen)*

> *Since came to Canada, I have been living with my relatives so I do not speak English a lot. I feel that I have not got used to speaking English. (John)*

Another reason mentioned by most participants is that they are not accustomed to the format of the TOEFL speaking.

> *It is very strange for me to speak to a microphone. The setting is not natural. No interaction! I can not use body language to assist in conveying my meaning. (Jane)*

> *The preparation time is too short. I become nervous under time pressure and my brain just stops working in some cases. (Helen)*

It is interesting to mention that Kevin got the lowest score in speaking but he ranked speaking as the second most difficult section. He commented that this score did not reflect his true speaking proficiency, which he believed should deserve more. He knew how to improve his speaking performance but he felt that he could not do anything to

overcome the obstacles in reading.

> *I am not familiar with the topics of TOEFL reading materials. What is more difficult is that some information is implied in the passage rather than illustrate directly. I always have problem to identify the meanings behind such information.*

As to the easiest section, two students chose reading and one listening and one writing. The participants claimed the reading section was the easiest, and one gave two reasons for this: first, the students had mastered a large amount of vocabulary; second, they had extensive exposure to reading practice in their former English education.

> *In contrast to speaking, reading is emphasized a lot in our English education system. We have gone through an uncountable number of English tests from middle school to university, which all had reading skill assessed. (John)*

Helen commented that her listening skill made more progress than other skills since she came to Canada because she had adequate exposure to the language environment.

> *I have a lot of chances of hearing English in daily life, such as casual conversations between native speakers in public places, news on the radio, and TV programs.*

Compared to other language skills, Helen felt that listening was the one that she was most confident with. Thus, she rated the listening section on the TOEFL iBT the easiest one.

Kevin stated that TOEFL writing was the easiest section for him because he had some effective strategies to assist him in getting a high score on that section. He commented that he spent the least time on TOEFL writing during the whole preparation period.

In sum, three out of four students regarded the speaking section as the most difficult section of the TOEFL iBT. This finding is consistent with the original assumption that Asian students are weakest in speaking. Moreover, as a new section added to the TOEFL,

the format and content of the speaking tasks have not been fully studied, which makes it even harder for test-takers.

The participants' perceptions of which section is the easiest one reflect which language skill they are good at and have more confidence with. The confidence is built through extensive practice, a positive language environment and effective strategies.

4.2.4.2 Challenges from using computers

The interview revealed that none of the four participants had any problems typing on the computer or fulfilling basic computer tasks (i.e. scrolling up and down to review reading passage, clicking on specific icons and etc.).

One issue mentioned by two students is that they were not used to reading on the computer. Kevin stated that he felt dizzy from staring at the screen after a long time and he believed that this had a negative impact on his performance, especially in the reading section.

> *On the test day, I was given five reading passages to do. My eyes was getting soured and my vision was blurred when I was reading the last passage, so I had to close my eyes for a while and then carry on with the remaining material.*

Helen also stated that it took her a long time to adjust to reading on the screen. Although she did not regard working on computers as a big issue since overcoming the reading problem, she expressed that it would be unfair to those test-takers who had very little computer knowledge.

Jane mentioned that she had difficulty speaking into microphones. She did some

speaking practice on the computers after class and she felt that it was totally different

from the way how people talked in daily life.

> *I do not like speaking to a machine. There is no interaction and communication. I*
> *can not use my hand gestures or facial expressions to convey my meanings. It is just*
> *very unnatural to me.*

This issue will be addressed in the next chapter.

### 4.2.4.3 Challenges from real test situations

Among the four student participants, Kevin is the only one who had gone through

the real TOEFL iBT situation when I did my data collection.

Reflecting on the whole test process, Kevin stated that what impressed him most is

that the test environment was noisy. As the TOEFL iBT is implemented on a "first come,

first served" basis, the test-takers even in one examination room do not start the test at the

same time. Kevin arrived at the test center a little bit late, so the test-takers sitting besides

him had already begun the test when he came to the room. The first task he had to do was

to test the microphone and earphone to see whether they functioned properly and then to

adjust the volume according to his needs. In consideration of the neighbors who were in

the middle of the test, Kevin tried to lower his voice during this trial. However, not every

test-taker was considerate like him. Kevin stated that he was disturbed by other

late-arriving examinees who spoke very loudly when they were testing the equipment.

According to the test arrangement, the test-takers have 10 minutes' break after

completing the first two sections (Reading and Listening). As Kevin was a couple of

minutes late, he overheard the spoken responses of his neighbors who were doing the

Speaking tasks during his break. However, as four out of six Speaking tasks are integrated with listening or reading materials, he had no way to tell the content of the tasks. During the Speaking test, Kevin felt that the time went slowly and he still had five or more seconds left when he finished his answer in most tasks. Kevin believed that it was one of the reasons that he did not get a high score in the TOEFL speaking. Another explanation for his unsatisfactory Speaking score might be that Kevin spoke too fast during the test. As the responses were recorded on the computers and would be evaluated later by ETS examiners, speaking at a good pace was very important.

I visited one online Chinese forum on the TOEFL iBT, where the test-takers shared their feelings and experiences of the real test situation. Many test-takers complained that they were disturbed and distracted by their neighbors' voices during the test. The strategies to deal with this issue will be addressed in the next chapter.

Another issue noticed by Kevin was that some test-taking strategies taught in the preparation course were difficult to apply in the test situation. For instance, he was taught to predict the main ideas of the listening material based on the reading material in the integrated writing task; however, Kevin found that he did not have time to make such predictions because the recording was played as soon as he went over the reading material.

In this chapter, I have presented the TOEFL iBT test preparation practice from two perspectives: teachers and students. The findings from each side included four parallel aspects: perceptions of the new test; preparation materials; preparation (teaching or

learning) practice; and challenges. In the final chapter, I will discuss the findings derived

from teachers and students, the implications for stakeholders involved in the TOEFL iBT,

and then the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

# Chapter 5:  Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter includes four sections. In the first section, I briefly summarize the whole study, including the major research problem, the methods used to collect and analyze the data, and the participants' profiles. In the second section, I first recapitulate the study's findings and then discuss the trends that emerged from the findings in light of the relevant literature raised in Chapter Two. In the third section, I present the implications of this study to the TOEFL iBT test preparation practice. I then offer an overview of the study's limitations and make recommendations for future studies. I hope that this study may be of particular interest to ESL teachers who instruct the TOEFL iBT preparation class, to prospective test-takers who prepare for the test, and to those involved in designing and providing the test.

## 5.1 Summary of the Study

As a newly adapted test, the TOEFL iBT has changed dramatically in terms of its format and content. With a brand new Speaking section and integrated tasks being included in the TOEFL iBT, it is not hard to imagine the challenges faced by the TOEFL teachers and test-takers. Thus, the purpose of my study is to investigate the experience of teachers and students in the process of preparing for the TOEFL iBT.

The qualitative case study methodology was adopted to collect data in this study. In the whole data collection process, four specific instruments were used: interviews, classroom observations, a survey, and document analysis. A personal interview was

conducted with all participants either in face-to-face meetings or via email. In total, I observed twelve classes in three different schools. The survey was conducted among students with the purpose of recruiting potential participants and obtaining their background information. The documents collected in this study included the students' writing essays, classroom handouts and evaluation guidelines. The data were analyzed by using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998).

There were ten participants involved in this study, including six TOEFL teachers and four students (test-takers). The six teachers are native English speakers and the students are from East-Asia.

## 5.2 Summary and Discussions of the Findings

In this section, I recapitulate the principal findings presented in Chapter Four. The findings responded to ten sub-questions under two primary research questions: How do native English speaking teachers instruct the TOEFL iBT preparation course? How do East-Asian students prepare for the TOEFL iBT?

As most of the issues are mentioned by both teachers and students, the findings are presented by combining teachers' perspectives with the corresponding views from students. Additional themes derived from either teachers or students are also included. Each of the findings is discussed in the context of the relevant literature.

5.2.1 Perceptions of the TOEFL iBT

All participants believed that the TOEFL iBT better reflects the English language proficiency of the test-takers than the previous versions of the TOEFL. As this topic is closely related to the construct validity of the new TOEFL, I will discuss it in detail.

According to Messick (1989), test authenticity and test directness are two significant indicators of the construct validity. Test authenticity can be interpreted as "the extent to which a test or assessment task relates to the context in which it would normally be performed in real life" (Leung & Lewkowciz, 2006, p.214). Teachers Chris and Mary commented that the TOEFL iBT is more realistic, which confirms positive progress regarding test authenticity. The comment from teacher Tina on the removal of the grammar section also implies that the TOEFL iBT is a model much closer to authentic situations in which the language is used. Messick (1989) identified "construct-irrelevant variance" as the threat to test directness. Two types of construct-irrelevant variance are noted: construct-irrelevant difficulty and construct-irrelevant easiness. As indicated in Chapter Two, testwise behaviors are derived from a construct-irrelevant easiness test. If test-takers are able to improve their score by mastering "the testwiseness strategies" (Millman, Bishop, & Ebel, 1965) rather than the relevant content, the validity of the test will be under threat. When interviewed, both Anne and Kevin expressed that fewer test-taking strategies can be used to deal with the items on the TOEFL iBT. In this sense, the construct validity of the TOEFL iBT has likely improved because the test authenticity and test directness have been strengthened in the new test.

Other evidence of construct validity is predictive utility. In the context of the TOEFL test, the predictive utility is more valid if a test-taker with a higher score on the test has a better chance to succeed academically in university. Teacher participants commented that some of their former students did not survive in university although they obtained good scores on the old versions of the TOEFL. Such comments are supported by previous studies (Wang & Shan, 2007; Huang & Klinger, 2006), which revealed that international students did not acquire adequate English language competency for academic purposes despite their high scores on standardized language tests (i.e. the TOEFL and the IELTS). However, no research has been done on the predictive utility of the TOEFL iBT; thus, whether the score on the TOEFL iBT is a better predictor of the test-takers' academic success at the tertiary level needs to be explored in future studies.

The above analysis also explains the finding that none of the participants regarded the TOEFL iBT as a perfect assessment tool for measuring English abilities although they all agreed that the test validity of the TOEFL iBT has been enhanced, comparing to that of the previous versions.

5.2.2 Preparation Materials

Both teachers and students in this study relied heavily on using commercial TOEFL iBT preparation materials. This finding is consistent with Wall and Horák's (2006) and Roberts's (2000) studies. Wall and Horák's (2006) study found two main reasons behind this issue: students' expectations of gaining a high score on the test and lack of resources

and training opportunities for teachers to develop their own syllabus. I also identified similar situations in my study.

First, I want to discuss the aspect of students' expectations. The TOEFL preparation courses provided in school B and school C were commercial ones and the tuition fees were quite expensive, so it is natural for students to have high expectations for the value of such courses. The ultimate goal of taking such courses for most students was to obtain a high score on the TOEFL test; thus, some of the students might feel frustrated or even quit the course when they found that the course could not help them fulfill this goal. In this study, one student, Helen, quit the course after having attended a few classes and decided to prepare for the test on her own. When I asked why she chose to study by herself, she implied that the course failed to boost her score in a short period of time. School B, which Helen attended, used a series of textbooks with the aim to develop students' English language ability step by step rather than maximize the score in a short term. One problem mentioned by John of using this series of books is the gap between the speaking exercises in this book and those on the test. The textbook used in his TOEFL speaking class is organized into units and in each unit the tasks for all sections (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) are designed around the same topic. Thus, students already acquired a lot of information about the topic through reading and listening practice before getting into the speaking tasks. The adequate background information will definitely help them answer the question. It was totally different from the real TOEFL iBT speaking tasks, which required test-takers to respond within a very short time and

with quite limited information about the topic. Furthermore, John's class used the high-intermediate level rather than the advanced textbook; thus, the difficulty level of the speaking tasks is no doubt lower than those real TOEFL questions. He felt frustrated when he found that the real TOEFL speaking tasks are much harder than he expected, because he worried about when he would be ready for taking the test. The purpose of adopting this coursebook, according to teachers, is to build students' language skills on a solid basis; however for students, they are more concerned about how to obtain a good score on the test within the shortest time. The divergence on the aims of the preparation courses between teachers and students caused more problems and it even impacts what materials teachers are going to use in class. In this study, two teachers mentioned that they seldom used non-TOEFL and real life materials in class because their students wanted to do only the TOEFL related exercises.

Then, I want to look at the issue that teachers' inadequate knowledge about the test and limited training opportunities on teaching the TOEFL. The six teacher participants in my study are all native speakers, so they did not need to take the TOEFL and indeed none of them had ever written the test. A TOEFL iBT sample test is provided on the ETS website; however, only those who have registered for the test can access it. Thus, they had no other ways to acquire the knowledge of the format and content of the test but had to rely on commercial materials. As teachers did not know what the test looked like, they had to refer to reports of students who had written the test when they chose which course books or which part of the books to be used in class.

None of the six teachers had received any formal training in teaching TOEFL iBT. Only Anne and Tina mentioned that they attended a few workshops related to teaching the TOEFL. Mary observed a few sessions of Tina's course, which was the only "training" she got before starting to teach the course.

In addition to the reasons mentioned above, there was one more explanation for the heavy use of the commercial textbooks in this study --- the short history of the TOEFL iBT. It is less than two years since the TOEFL iBT was initially implemented. Teachers could not rely on their past experience in teaching the old versions of the TOEFL test. For them, the ready-made TOEFL commercial materials were the most convenient resource.

As to the real life materials, they were used as supplementary to the commercial books. In this study, two teachers incorporated the resources from the general ESL classes. One teacher used resources from the internet and newspapers. One student used the authentic (real life) materials extensively during the TOEFL preparation practice and she even created her own integrated tasks by employing the resources from newspapers and radios. The usage of authentic materials in class is one of the characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching (Nunan, 1991; Li, 1998). I will return to this topic when I evaluate to what extent the teaching practice in this study meets the CLT criteria.

5.2.3 Reading Preparation Practice

The general impression I received from observing the TOEFL reading classes is that it was still very teacher-centered: teachers instructed the strategies, went through the

reading materials and questions, checked the answers with the whole class, and explained

any issues (i.e. vocabulary, culturally-based context, etc.) arising from the exercises. For

the rest of the time, students worked on the reading exercises silently and individually.

The common way that some teachers got their students involved in the class activities

was to ask them to read the text aloud paragraph by paragraph. However, other teachers

chose to read it aloud for the students or let the students reading it silently. The three

different approaches all have their own benefits: asking students to read materials aloud is

good for detecting their pronunciation problems; the teacher read for them can improve

their listening skill; reading silently is what is demanded on the real test, so students can

easily get used to the situation. Thus, a good reading class should mix the three activities

together, which not only addresses students' different language aspects but also avoids the

boredom due to the repetition of one strategy.

Chris and Anne mentioned that many of their students who had taken the test

commented that they had difficulty finishing the reading tasks within the test time. This

issue brought up the importance of the skill of rapid reading. The interviews with the

teachers revealed that most of them did realize the necessity of addressing this skill in

class but they were not sure how to instruct it effectively. Instead, they got students to do

a lot of reading exercises and they assumed that the students could acquire such skills

through drills. Another issue is that most teachers did not time the students while they

were doing the reading exercises in class. Without time pressure, students might not

develop the habit of reading fast and using various strategies to accelerate their reading

speed.

Through the observations, I found that three teachers combined other language skills into the TOEFL reading instruction. One teacher gave students chances to discuss the topic of the reading materials in class. This a good strategy, because the students became more involved.

Only one teacher used some newspaper articles as supplementary materials in the TOEFL reading class. The limited class time is the main concern for most teachers in regard to using authentic reading materials. They struggled to cover all the reading texts from the commercial books during the course. However, students did not have such problems and they used more authentic reading materials during their reading preparation practice.

All the students invested a large amount of time in memorizing the vocabulary. This finding further validates the perception that memorization plays a significant part in the East Asians' second language learning process (Paige et al., 2003; Cortazzi & Jin,1996). Kevin spent four months memorizing all the words of a TOEFL vocabulary book; however he felt that the effort he put in did not produce the result he wanted because he only saw a few of the words from that book in the reading passages. Kevin's complaints were understandable, but he did not realize that the mastery of vocabulary benefits all aspects of the language not just the reading performance. For instance, Kevin's strong performance in writing may have been because of his good vocabulary knowledge. From Kevin's comments, we can see that the washback in language learning is very limited and

students still have a very narrow and instrumental view to test preparation.

## 5.2.4 Listening Preparation Practice

The listening classes I observed showed that the teachers adopted a relatively uniform practice pattern in class: they played a CD and got students to do exercises and then they went over the questions and checked answers with students. Similar to the reading class, participation of students was quite limited.

Since note-taking was allowed on the TOEFL iBT, developing that skill became the main focus of the TOEFL listening preparation practice. Teachers introduced the strategy of using abbreviations to help student take effective notes. Another strategy mentioned by one teacher was to divide the paper into different sections and put the notes under different themes. There is no doubt that well-structured notes are useful for dealing with the questions on the test; however, I found that the strategy is more easily said than done, because listeners cannot know how many main points are included in the listening material without listening to the end. Thus, listeners have no way to tell how many sections should be drawn on the paper before the listening material is played.

Tina and Mary taught the listening section by combining it with other language skills. Tina who introduced some speaking activities in reading class did the same to the listening class and she asked students to discuss the topic of the materials they were going to listen to. Another teacher developed the students' writing skill, particularly the paraphrasing skill along with the listening practice. She assigned homework for students

to summarize the main ideas of the listening materials they heard in class and to express

their own opinions on those issues.

Due to time restraints and the students' requests, all teachers only used the TOEFL

commercial books in the listening preparation class. Unlike teachers' total dependence on

the TOEFL listening materials, student participants used authentic materials as well as the

TOEFL exercises in preparing for the TOEFL listening after class. One student even put

more emphasis on the authentic listening materials and she listened to the radio news

every day and watched documentary films in the library on a regular basis. Two students

watched TV programs as an alternative way of developing listening skill; however, they

preferred to watch news reports, which they believed were closer to the TOEFL listening

materials. Their preference for certain type of TV programs reflects another aspect of

East Asian culture, that is, the more rigid work/play dichotomy. People being brought up

in such a culture have a tendency to perceive the activity of watching TV as

entertainment (playing). That explains why the students felt that it is just a waste of time

to sit in front of the TV and watch the sitcoms. Admittedly, the language used in TV

shows might be different from that on the TOEFL listening. It should not be overlooked

that language and culture are interdependent (Robinson, 1988; Kramsch, 1993; Cortazzi

& Jin, 1999). The nature of the relationship of language and culture can be best illustrated

from Brown's(1994) comments, "a language is part of culture and culture is part of

language, the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without

losing the significance of either language or culture" (p.124). Without knowing the slang

or the culturally-based humor, a person can not be regarded as having fully mastered the language.

5.2.5 Speaking Preparation Practice

Compared to the reading and listening classes, the speaking classes were more communicative in the sense that teachers spoke less and students participated more.

Different teachers focused on different aspects when teaching the speaking section. Some paid more attention to pronunciations, while others stressed grammar or usage of words more. Four teachers timed their students as in the real test and one teacher gave students more time in the first few weeks to prepare and deliver the responses.

As for feedback, all the teachers put more emphasis on the structure of the response than the details. Only one teacher, Emma, was observed having graded the students' speaking performance by using the adapted ETS rubrics. All the other teachers in my study did not mark their students' speaking performance. During the interview, teachers Anne, Chris and Tina stated that they did not know how to use the ETS speaking rubrics appropriately. After reviewing the TOEFL iBT speaking rubrics on the ETS website, I found that these are just descriptive documents and are too abstract to be used in evaluating the individual student's spoken responses. I would suggest that the ETS organize some workshops to explain to teachers how to interpret the rubrics and how to use them for evaluations.

After reviewing several TOEFL speaking tasks and observing some students'

performances, I realized that the speaking test measured not only language ability but also thinking ability and knowledge width. Once I talked with a native English speaker who had recently helped an immigrant with speaking for the TOEFL test; the native English speaker commented that she even had problems in doing certain speaking tasks, because she did not have enough background knowledge to answer it. Being a native speaker, language was definitely not an issue for her and what hindered her performance was a lack of knowledge related to the topic.

The teachers followed the speaking section on the TOEFL commercial books closely when introducing the features of the tasks and getting students to practice; however, they did use a variety of non-TOEFL resources to develop students' speaking ability. One teacher played the game "Flash Card" to train the students' skill of delivering spontaneous speech; one teacher organized the debate activity by selecting a topic on the internet in class; one teacher facilitated free discussions about the issues that happened in their daily life. In this sense, the speaking class is taught more like how the CLT class is conducted.

All student participants used the speaking exercises in the TOEFL commercial books as the main preparation resource. Two students timed themselves while doing the TOEFL speaking practice. Two students practiced the speaking tasks on computers. Three students felt that it was difficult to do the TOEFL speaking tasks.

5.2.6 Writing Preparation Practice

All teachers taught basic knowledge on the structure of an essay. In most cases, they first presented orally the explanations provided in the commercial books and then got students to compose one or two TOEFL essays in class. Among the six teachers, only one teacher introduced the template to deal with the writing tasks. One student also used the template during preparation for the TOEFL writing section. In his case, this strategy proved to be very effective. He got a full score on the TOEFL writing section (30/30). However, from my personal TOEFL preparation experience, using the template may lead to a possible plagiarism problem. For instance, if the teacher taught the same template in class and every student used it on the test, their score will be deducted due to the identical content of their writings. Thus, the teachers should warn students of the potential dangers of applying the template and encourage them to use their own word in their writings instead of copying what was taught in class.

Paraphrasing skills are emphasized by all the teachers. Four teachers got students into the habit of drawing up outlines before composing the whole essay. Three teachers asked students to proofread their own essays before submitting. These are all useful skills for developing the learners' general writing ability.

Two teachers helped students to understand the marking criteria used to grade their essays. Unlike assessing the speaking performance, all teachers showed more confidence in marking the TOEFL essays written by their students. One reason may be that the teachers are familiar with the marking criteria used to assess the TOEFL essays from their

previous TOEFL PBT or CBT teaching experience. The way that one teacher provides feedback on her students' essays impressed me considerably. She adopted a set of symbols to mark the errors; instead of correcting mistakes for students, she got students to find out how to fix them on their own. This method turned students from passive learners into active learners.

Two teachers integrated speaking activities in the writing class and they got students to communicate their thoughts before writing them down.

Most teachers only used the TOEFL iBT preparation manuals while instructing the writing class. Only two teachers incorporated some non-TOEFL related materials to teach writing. One teacher encouraged creative writing among her students and she assigned them homework to write on any topic that interests them. The advantage is to free students from what may be a boring writing process in the TOEFL class.

Three students had their essays corrected by either a private tutor or teacher and they all found the feedback very useful in improving their writing abilities. It is worthwhile mentioning that the student who got 30 on the TOEFL iBT writing did not receive any feedback from either teachers or peers. His case raises a question: how useful is the feedback in relation to success on the TOEFL writing section?

5.2.7 Computer Issues

The interviews and observations revealed that none of the teacher participants spent much time instructing students on computer knowledge. All three schools had their own

computer labs. Two schools served as official TOEFL test centers. However, the frequency of using the computer labs was low. The majority of the sessions were carried out in the classroom settings. Except for one teacher, all the other teachers did not consider developing their students' computer literacy as a part of the TOEFL iBT course.

The age range of the students in these three schools is from 18 to 30 and this group of people had fairly sound computer knowledge to handle this computer-mediated test. In the case of the four student participants, they all reported that they did not have any problem in completing the basic computer operations required on the TOEFL iBT. This may have been one of the reasons why teachers did not see the necessity of teaching computer knowledge in class. Furthermore, most teachers believe that many computer skills (i.e. typing skill) can only be improved through practice; thus, they asked students to work on computers after class.

One thing the teachers have to bear in mind is that testing on computers is still a challenge for all test-takers. More than mastering the technical skills, test-takers have to overcome the emotional restraints while taking a test on computers. For instance, some of them have problems with reading on the screen; and others do not feel comfortable and natural speaking into a microphone. Thus, it is the teachers' responsibility to help their students become familiar with working on computers and to minimize the negative effects caused by students' fear or unease with computers.

## 5.2.8 Challenges

During the interview, teachers stated that the challenges they confronted when teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation class were mainly from two aspects: students' diverse English language levels and students' different cultural backgrounds.

Among the three schools, two offered the screening test, which is assumed to make the class more homogeneous in the aspect of students' English levels; however, neither of those two schools took the results of the screening test seriously and they still allowed students to join the TOEFL course even if they failed the test. This fact is not hard to understand in the way that the commercial TOEFL courses are profit-orientated and the more students they recruited the more profit they obtained. Thus, the screening test did not perform its expected function.

From my observations, all the teachers except one spent almost equal time in teaching each of the four skills tested on the TOEFL iBT. Instead of dividing the time equally for each language aspect, the exceptional teacher tended to spend more time addressing the language aspect he perceived was the weakness of the majority of his class. However, this approach may disadvantage a minority of students who had a different skill development need.

Most teachers had a common feeling that the East Asian students in their class were not active class participants and in some extreme cases the students would not speak a word in the presence of other people. One student expressed that he felt uneasy when the teacher openly corrected his mistakes in class. Having a similar cultural background as

those East Asian students, I can easily identify two reasons behind such behaviors. First, education in East Asian countries emphasizes memorization and mental activeness instead of creativity and verbal activeness (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hu, 2002). This leads to the relatively low speech ability of East Asian students. Second, the face-saving culture in East Asian societies makes the situation even worse. The concept of *face* indicates both integrity and moral character (lian) and public image (mian) (Gao, 1998b). East Asians are more concerned with other people's opinions about them and they fear "losing face" if they cannot answer the teachers' questions or do not have the correct answers. Thus, they prefer to keep silent when they feel that they are not sure how to answer certain questions.

Based on the understandings described above, there are some issues that the TOEFL teachers may want to consider when they are teaching speaking. First, teachers could let students realize that it is natural to make mistakes in speaking and they should not feel bad when they have difficulty in completing certain tasks. Second, teachers and administrators should try to keep the class size small, which not only creates a more relaxing speaking environment but also gives each student more chances to practice. Third, teachers could discuss any errors or areas in need of correction with the student in a more private setting instead of pointing out individual errors directly in class. Fourth, teachers could start with some easy and non-TOEFL discussion topics as a warm up. I have observed this strategy in one teacher's class.

As to students, the biggest challenge came from the Speaking tasks. Three out of

four students claimed that speaking was the most difficult section on the TOEFL iBT. Lack of training in speaking back in their home countries and unfamiliarity with the format of the TOEFL speaking tasks were the major causes of this problem. It is interesting to note that the four students had been in an English speaking country from six months to one year. The finding revealed that staying in an English environment does not naturally lead to language advancement. Many researchers pointed out that motivation of second language learners plays a more significant role in language acquisition, which incites language learners to interact and communicate with native speakers of the target language and helps learners attain greater success in language performance (Gardner, 1985; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Inbar, Donista-Schmidt, & Shohamy, 2001). This issue will be further discussed in section 5.2.11.

## 5.2.9 Changes in teaching practice

The most significant change I noted is that teachers integrate different language skills into their classroom teaching. During the interview, all teachers who had taught the previous versions of the TOEFL claimed that they used to teach each skill separately, but now they combined them together in their teaching.

Another crucial influence of the TOEFL iBT on teaching is that teachers made great efforts to develop their students' speaking abilities. The observations revealed that teachers implemented a variety of oral activities in class and provided students with more opportunities to speak in class than before.

The two findings mentioned above are evidence of the existence of washback, because the integrated tasks and the speaking section are included on the new TOEFL.

As to general teaching approach, two teachers claimed that they shifted from grammar-based teaching toward more communication-oriented teaching. They spent less time instructing grammar knowledge. They implemented more group work and pair work in class. They related students' personal experience through various classroom activities, especially in speaking class. They stressed contextual competence rather than grammatical competence in reading class. They prepared pre-listening questions to enhance meaningful learning instead of language itself. All these points reflect some features of Communicative Language Teaching (Li, 1998; Nunan, 1991). However, other characteristics of CLT were missing in the participants' teaching practice. Instead of using authentic materials, all the teachers relied heavily on the commercial TOEFL preparation books. Although some teachers mentioned having adopted some real-life resources in class from time to time, the extent and frequency were too low to meet the criterion of CLT. Furthermore, none of the teachers were observed trying to link the classroom learning activities to real-life situations.

One teacher admitted that the new test had an impact on what she would teach in class, but she did not perceive a dramatic change on how she taught this course. In the interview, she expressed that her class is always communication-oriented and student-centered. Even though there was no speaking section on the old TOEFL, she still paid attention to developing students' speaking skill. As her teaching philosophy is to

improve students' communicative competence rather than merely focusing on their test performance, she has no need to make a lot of adjustments to teach the new TOEFL preparation course. As seen in Chapter Two, the above finding is consistent with a series of washback studies which demonstrate that tests have more impact on teaching content than on teaching methodology (Wall & Alderson, 1993; Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Ferman, 1996; Watanabe, 1996; Alderson, 1998; Chen, 2002).

## 5.2.10 Self-study teaching approach

Among the six teacher participants, one teacher adopted a self-study teaching method to instruct the TOEFL iBT class. How she handled the class was already described in the previous chapter. I believe that the way she taught the class was more or less influenced by her previous experience of working as a private TOEFL tutor.

The advantage of this self-study teaching method is that it can solve the inherent problem of the non-homogeneous class. As discussed above, students came to the TOEFL class with diverse English language background and learning habits, it was impossible for teachers to accommodate every student's needs in the traditional teacher-led lockstep instruction method. On the contrary, students in the self-study mode are able to work at their own pace and to concentrate their time and energy on those language areas where they had relatively poor performance.

Based on what I observed in class, I do however have a few concerns about this

unique teaching approach. First, the result from initial needs assessment should not be used as the only criterion to determine which area(s) students should put more efforts into. As language ability is dynamic, it is necessary to keep a track of the progress students have made as the class goes on and then make adjustments to cater for their new learning needs. Second, students need basic information about the nature of the test, such as question types, quantities of items, time limits, before starting to practice on their own. More important, they should be taught some strategies to deal with different items on the test. I was not sure whether Eva introduced such information in class, although she claimed that she taught some strategies to deal with the reading and writing tasks. Third, it is good that students are given opportunities to ask for help in class, but not every student feels comfortable asking questions in front of a group of people. As was mentioned above, students from the East Asian countries feel embarrassed by asking teachers questions in class. They are more accustomed to waiting for teachers to diagnose their problems and then offer help correspondingly (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Furthermore, many problematic areas may be ignored if the teacher totally relies on student self-reports, because in most cases students do not have adequate knowledge and capability to identify what sub-skills they lack for doing well on the TOEFL tasks. The last area of concern with this self-study class is that speaking training is missing. During the interview, Eva pointed out that the school provided students with a chance to practice speaking on computers once a week and she did not arrange any classroom activity to develop their speaking skills. She stated that she might organize a debate activity in the last few

sessions. However, the length of such activity seemed to be too short to satisfy students' demands in the speaking part.

As my study focuses on the East-Asian students, I did not find any suitable student participant in Eva's class; however, I was able to conduct a quick and personal conversation with students during the break time, from which I got a general idea of how they felt about this teaching approach. It is interesting that they had very different or even contrary opinions about this class. Some students supported this teaching approach, while others did not feel comfortable learning in such ways. Students who had a positive attitude toward this instructional approach had rich TOEFL preparation experience, as most had already written the test. Thus, they have a better self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in TOEFL than other classmates and they knew clearly how to allocate time for studying each skill. However, even for those more mature learners, they expressed that they still need the teacher to help them identify the reasons why they performed poorly in certain areas.

In my opinion, the self-study approach will be more effective if teachers become more involved in the whole process. Instead of asking students to approach them alone, the teachers should take the initiative in taking care of the problems that student have met during the practice.

5.2.11 Language environment

The uniqueness of the case of these four student participants is that they all prepared

the TOEFL iBT in an English speaking country. It is assumed that they should greatly

benefit from such a language learning setting; however, the findings revealed that staying

in an English environment does not guarantee improvement in English proficiency. Two

factors are involved: the availability and convenience of using the language and their

willingness to immerse themselves in the environment.

Compared with Kevin and John, Helen and Jane were in a more favorable language

learning condition because both of them were living with roommates who are native

English speakers. In daily life, they had many chances to practice speaking and listening.

The difference between Helen and Jane was that the former was more active and made

full use of the opportunities to practice English with her roommate while the latter was

less active and always waited for roommates to approach her first.

As for Kevin, although he attended a pre-university program in a local institution, all

of his classmates came from the same country as him. During the interview, he was

somewhat frustrated about this arrangement because he found that his exposure to

English was somewhat restricted. Having high self-motivation, Kevin tried to use English

every chance he could get. The most valid evidence was that Kevin insisted the interview

be conducted in English rather than in our first language.

John had been living with his relatives since he came to Canada. In the interview he

appeared to be shy and introverted. He was the only participant who requested to answer

my questions via email instead of talking face-to-face. One of the possible reasons may

be that he had lack of confidence in his speaking ability. Among the four students, he is

the one who worried most about the Speaking section on the TOEFL. This finding reveals

that self-esteem is also an influential factor in language learning. According to Duxbury

(2006), learners with high self-esteem often strengthen their competence while those with

low self-esteem often judge themselves harshly.

## 5.2.12 Test-taking experience

Among the four student participants, only one had written the TOEFL iBT by the

time the interview was conducted. Against his expectations, this student found that the

test environment was noisy, which to certain extent had a negative impact on his

performance. After reflecting on the performance in the speaking section, the student felt

that he spoke a little bit faster than during the preparation practice. He believed that this

was the main reason why he did not get a good score on this section.

## 5.3 Recommendations and Implications

### 5.3.1 Implications for the TOEFL teachers

The teachers involved in this study are all English native speakers and they have no

need to write the TOEFL test, which is designed for people whose first language is not

English. For those teachers, their knowledge about the TOEFL test comes mainly from

commercial preparation materials. However, there is a variety of TOEFL iBT preparation

books on the current market and the closeness of these books to the actual TOEFL test is

different from case to case. How do teachers make a judgment of which book to use in

class? I have two suggestions on this issue: one is that the teachers may obtain feedback from their former students who had already taken the test (this was done by one teacher participant); the other is that teachers should go over the TOEFL simulation test provided on the ETS website. If conditions permit, I strongly recommend that teachers take the TOEFL test in person. This will not only provide them with a better understanding of what the real test looks like, but also help them discover some problems that may emerge from the test situation. For instance, they may ask students to practice speaking in a noisy environment as well as teach the strategies to deal with distraction issues if they realize that the test environment is not quite as expected.

One of the findings is that most students had difficulty in completing the reading tasks within the set time; thus, the TOEFL teachers should pay attention to developing the speed-reading skill of their students. It is recommended that teachers should time their students when they are doing the TOEFL reading exercises. Under time pressure, students will be more aware of accelerating their reading speed.

All teachers mentioned that note-taking is one of the most important skills for the TOEFL test-takers. Indeed, this skill is needed to complete the tasks in three sections (listening, speaking, and writing) of the test. However, I found that some strategies taught by teachers to improve the note-taking skill were too superficial to be useful. One student, who had written the test, commented that that he had problems in using some test-taking strategies taught by the TOEFL teachers in the real test situation. I observed that some teachers asked students to write down keywords or the main points of the listening

passage, but they neglected the fact that some students may not be able to differentiate between main points and auxiliary points. Thus, the teachers should break down the skill into teachable sub-skills. In this case, they should first teach students what is regarded as main points and what is not.

As to speaking, a good strategy used by the teachers is that they all timed their students when they were speaking. The response time allowed for each speaking question is not long (from only 45 to 60 seconds), thus it is important for students to know how to make full use of the time. Without time pressure, students have the tendency to spend too much time on the introductory part, leaving them not enough time to deliver the most important points. Another issue I noticed from my observation is that teachers focused more on the organization and structure of the response rather than on its content. For the independent speaking tasks, students were asked to express their opinions or preferences. Many students had difficulty in finding appropriate examples to support their statements. Thus, teachers should prepare some reading materials on similar topics to provide their students with background knowledge.

Teaching templates proved to be an effective way of dealing with the TOEFL writing tasks. The risk of using templates is that the essays may look similar to each other, which will be considered as plagiarism. For teachers, it is better to provide students with sample templates and then teach them to create their own template. In this way, it not only avoids the risk of plagiarism but may also enhance students' writing creativity.

One of the most important qualities that TOEFL teachers should acquire is cultural

sensitivity. Students attending the TOEFL preparation class are from different countries and have various cultural backgrounds and learning habits. During an interview, one student told me that he did not feel comfortable when the teacher pointed out his mistakes in class. The teacher may have had good intentions; however, he was not aware of the emotional struggles of his students caused by the cross-cultural learning experience. As long as he was sensitive enough to identify the challenges faced by this student, he could easily find a solution to deal with this issue, like providing feedback in a private setting. In contrast, another teacher realized that some students were not used to speaking in front of a large group of people, so she arranged the warm-up exercises at the beginning of each speaking class and made students work in small groups.

The last suggestion I want to bring up is that the TOEFL teachers should attend workshops regularly organized by the ETS. There are multiple benefits for teachers to participate in such events. First, their knowledge of the TOEFL iBT will be updated and they may learn some new teaching strategies; second, they have a chance to share their teaching experience so they can learn from each other about how to teach the TOEFL course more effectively; third, they will learn how to interpret the ETS rubrics, as most of teachers in this study complained that they had difficulty in applying the ETS rubrics to assess their students' performance, especially in the speaking section.

## 5.3.2 Implications for the prospective test-takers

Among the four student participants, three ranked speaking as the most difficult

section on the TOEFL iBT. The one who ranked speaking as the second hardest part got the lowest score in that section. All the data illustrated the fact that the TOEFL Speaking section is the "Everest" for the test-takers, especially for those from East Asia. One of the possible reasons is that people from that region did not get many chances to practice oral English in regular English classes. Thus, the test-takers should seek out opportunities to speak English, for that is the only way to get accustomed to using the language. For people who are preparing the test in an English speaking country, they should make full use of the ideal English learning environment to develop their speaking skill. Besides working to improve the general speaking proficiency, test-takers should pay attention to broadening their knowledge specified on the TOEFL speaking topics. It is also important for them to spend adequate time practicing on the computer, which will get them ready to, for instance, use the microphones. Test-takers should maintain a good pace when delivering their response into microphones. One point that they have to bear in mind is that speaking clearly is more important than speaking fast. A lot of people assume that speaking fast is an indicator of fluency; however, speed means nothing if no one can understand what one is saying.

With the changes on the TOEFL test, there are two major skills that test-takers need to develop: note-taking skill and paraphrasing skill. They could use authentic materials to improve these two skills. In this study, one student incorporated newspapers, radio programs, and documentary films in her TOEFL preparation activity. She even created her own integrated tasks by combining the newspapers and the broadcasts. This is a great

alternative way to prepare for the TOEFL iBT.

Many students are test-orientated and this is very understandable given that the stakes associated with the test; however, test-takers should broaden their horizons and pay more attention to developing authentic language proficiency as well as cultural awareness instead of focusing solely on the test. Students' academic success in university depends on the overall language ability rather than a numerical score.

The interviews with students revealed that practicing on computers is an essential step in the whole test preparation practice. Moreover, it is recommended that the test-takers consciously practice the whole test under rather noisy conditions, so they can get familiar with the real test situation.

### 5.3.3 Implications for school administrators

In this study, most teachers found it very challenging to manage a class of students with diverse language levels. The screening tests did not fulfill the function they were supposed to. It is the school administrator's responsibility to implement the placement test rigidly and to guarantee that classes are as homogeneous as possible. They could consider offering the different levels of the TOEFL preparation course as school B did.

School administrators should also encourage TOEFL teachers to upgrade their teaching skills by attending the TOEFL related workshops or training programs. The school should pay the registration fees for their teachers to take the TOEFL iBT test.

5.3.4 Implications for test developers (the ETS)

The findings revealed that the teachers needed extensive training on the TOEFL iBT teaching, especially guidance on instructing and assessing the newly added speaking section. After having checked the ETS website, I found that ETS does provide workshops for TOEFL iBT teachers; however, the frequency was too low and the locations were limited. There are no workshops offered in the middle-sized city of the study. Thus, in order to attend this workshop, the TOEFL teachers in my study would have to drive about two hours to a large metropolis. What makes the situation even worse is that teachers would have to wait for at least half a year to attend the next workshop. A suggestion is that ETS could consider offering the workshop on line, so that the distance and time will no longer be a problem.

In her study, Hamp-Lyons (1998) brought up the issue of establishing a standard code of practice for the whole TOEFL preparation industry. I believe that this is a valuable proposition. The ETS may consider cooperating with the TESOL association to run an accredited training program for TOEFL teachers.

Another problem is how speaking is tested on the TOEFL iBT. During the interview, one student commented that it was very unnatural for her to talk to a machine. Her comments reminded me of the significance of non-verbal actions in communication. Body language facilitates communication between two interlocutors. According to the widely recognized theoretical framework of Communicative Competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), strategic competence, one component of the framework, includes both

verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which can compensate for breakdown in communication. Body language is one of those non-verbal strategies. Unfortunately, it is missing on the TOEFL iBT speaking test.

As to the issue of the noisy test environment, I do not know whether the ETS regards this as a very serious problem or not, but at least they could consult with the test centers to discuss this issue.

## 5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

### 5.4.1 Limitations

One natural limitation of this single-case study is its generalizability. Due to the small number of participants and the unique context (a middle-sized city in an English speaking country), the finding from this study can not represent the full picture of the TOEFL iBT preparation practice. Moreover, the findings can hardly be validated by any existing research, since the TOEFL iBT has only been implemented for a short period of time and few studies have been done. However, from another perspective, the current lack of research on the TOEFL iBT preparation practice enables this study to serve as a starting point for future study.

Another limitation of this study is the relatively small number of classes that I observed. It was constrained by time and privacy issues. At the time when I conducted the research the TOEFL iBT preparation courses were in an early stage of implementation. As such, the teaching strategies may have changed in the middle or late stages of the

course. Additional observations would potentially have enriched the findings and provided more information for the recommendations.

An additional limitation is that I was unable to get information about the three student participants' performance on the TOEFL iBT test. I tried to contact them two months after the interview to see whether they had written the test, however I was unable to reach them. Their performance on the TOEFL iBT, to some degree, would reflect the efficiency of their test-preparation activities. Their test-taking experience would definitely reveal more test situation issues which were valuable for the prospective test-takers.

## 5.4.2 Suggestions for future research

As the TOEFL iBT has only been implemented for less than two years, the TOEFL teachers' knowledge about the changes on the new test is still growing. Their teaching methods will change when they know the new test better. Thus, it would be interesting to conduct this type of research with the same group of teachers after a period of time or in longitudinal research.

The context of this study is very unique in the way that it was conducted in an English native speaking setting. The teachers were all English native speakers. As the majority of the test-takers are preparing for the TOEFL test in their home country, it will be interesting to investigate how the non-native English speaking teachers instruct the TOEFL iBT preparation course. Are there any differences between these two groups of

teachers in the way of teaching such a course? In this study, the student participants were all from the East-Asian countries. The future research could explore the TOEFL iBT preparation practice of the students from other regions.

Another interesting study would be to investigate how English native speakers perform on the TOEFL iBT, especially in the speaking section. The significance of this research is to demonstrate what else is required from the test-takers for them to do well on the test besides language ability.

This study revealed the potential of the self-study teaching approach in the TOEFL preparation course. More studies on this innovative teaching method within the TOEFL iBT context are needed. The focus of such research should be on how to design this method appropriately so it can produce the optimal effect.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

**Questions for teachers:**

Age:_____

Gender:_____

Degree held:_____

Training received:_____

No. of years teaching ESL:_____

No. of years teaching the TOEFL preparation course:_____

1. What are your major aims in teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation class?

2. What changes have you perceived in the TOEFL iBT compared to earlier versions? What can you tell me about the format of the TOEFL iBT? (question types, topics, exam procedure)

3. Do you like the changes that have occurred in the TOEFL iBT? From your experience, do you believe TOEFL iBT score reflects students' real language ability? Why or Why not?

4. Have you taught the old versions of the TOEFL test before (i.e. the paper-based TOEFL, the TOEFL CBT)? If yes, can you comment on any changes in the difficulty between previous versions and the TOEFL iBT; which one is more difficult in your opinion? Are certain parts in the TOEFL iBT more difficult or easier than those in previous versions? Which parts are they and why?

5. What do you find to be the most difficult aspects of teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation class?

6. How do you arrange your teaching in this preparation class? Do you have a course outline? Do you use any preparation manuals, if so what are they?

7. What classroom activities do you employ in instructing the TOEFL iBT course? (pair work, group work, individual work, whole class, etc.) What is the purpose of each activity?

8. Over the length of the course, how much time do you spend on each of the language skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing)? Which one do you concentrate on the

most? Why? Do you work on skills individually (eg. One day in listening?) or do you combine skills in your lesson?

9. What types of activities do you typically use to practice each skill?
   - How do you develop students' listening skill? What kind of listening materials are used in your class?

   - How do you develop students' reading skill? What kind of texts do you usually give students to read in class?

   - How do you develop students' speaking skill?

   - How do you develop students' writing skill?

10. Do you assign essays for students to write for TOEFL iBT preparation? If so, do you give them feedback/marks for their essays? What system of marking do you use?

11. Which test-taking techniques do you cover in your lessons? How often? What kind of exam practice do you include in your lessons?

12. What kind of adjustments to teaching have you made in instructing the TOEFL iBT?
    - How do you teach the integrated skills tasks in the TOEFL iBT?

    - Do you help students familiarize themselves with how to take the test on computers? If so, do you feel your confidence in using computers has an effect on your ability to teach TOEFL iBT preparation class?

13. What are your sources of information about TOEFL? (if web sites or books are mentioned, get details of exactly which one if possible).What kind of training have you received? Have you ever attended a workshop designed for the TOEFL iBT teachers? If so, how far has this training influenced the teaching methodology of your lessons?

14. Have any of your previous or current students written the TOEFL iBT before yet? How did they perform in the new test? Have you noticed certain problems your students encountered in preparing for and sitting the new test?

15. Do you work as a private tutor with some student? What do you teach during the

tutoring session? Usually which area do you focus on in the instruction?

**Questions for students:**

1. What is your major aim in taking this preparation course? Why did you decide to take a preparation course rather than simply preparing on your own?

2. What areas of language does your teacher focus on most in the lessons? What kind of materials do they use in class? What do you think about these materials?

3. How do you prepare for the Speaking section of the TOEFL iBT?
   What activities do you have for developing your speaking skills in class?
   Do you do self-study on the Speaking section outside class? If so, what do you do?

4. How do you prepare for the Listening section of the TOEFL iBT?
   What activities do you have for developing your listening skills in class?
   Do you do self-study on the Listening section outside class? If so, what do you do?

5. How do you prepare for the Reading section of the TOEFL iBT?
   What activities do you have for developing your reading skills in class?
   Do you do self-study on the Reading section outside class? If so, what do you do?

6. How do you prepare for the Writing section of the TOEFL iBT?
   What activities do you have for developing your writing skills in class?
   Do you do self-study on the Speaking section outside class? If so, what do you do?

7. In your opinion, what preparation methods are the most effective for getting a good result on the TOEFL iBT, either on your own or in class? (prompt)

8. Which section of the TOEFL iBT is the easiest for you? Why?

9. Which section of the TOEFL iBT is the most difficult for you? Why?

10. What do you think about taking a test on computers? Do you have any difficulties in working on the computers? If so, what kind? How do you solve these problems?

11. Do you feel confident in your computer skills? In what ways does your confidence in using computers affect your ability to do well on the TOEFL iBT?

12. Do you use any TOEFL iBT preparation manuals? If yes, which one (s) do you use and why did you choose it (them)? How do you use it and what benefits do you think

you can get from it? Please give some examples.

13. What do you think about the way teachers instruct in the TOEFL iBT preparation class? Do they teach any test-taking strategies? If so, what strategies? Which ones do you personally find to be the most helpful? Which ones are least helpful?

14. Does your teacher give you any feedback about your writing and speaking assignments? If yes, how do you feel about it?

15. Do you think that the score you received on the TOEFL iBT reflects your English language proficiency? Why or why not?

16. If you took old versions of the TOEFL before, what changes have you observed from the TOEFL iBT? What do you think about the importance of grammar in the new test?

17. Do you think that the TOEFL iBT is more difficult or easier than the old ones? In which ways?

18. What advantages or disadvantages do you think that the TOEFL iBT has regarding the assessment of English ability?

19. Do you feel your general language ability has improved through preparing for the TOEFL iBT? In which ways?

# Appendix B : Classroom Observation Scheme

| Teacher | | Institution | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Date | | Time | |
| Stage of Course | beginning/middle/end | Class length | |
| Classroom layout | in rows/ in circles | Number of students present | |

| S work mode:<br>Individual   Pair<br>Group   Class | Medium: Computer<br>Paper & Pen | Atmosphere: ☺ etc. | Skill focus:<br>Integrated<br>Single |
|---|---|---|---|

Start time:    End time:    S work mode: I  P  G  C   Medium: Com  PP  Atmosphere:    Skill focus:
Int  Sing

| Grammar | | |
|---|---|---|
| Activities:          Notes: | | |
| | | Grammar taught explicitly |
| | | Work on spelling |
| | | Work on plural forms |
| | | Work on word order |
| | | Work on tenses |
| | | Work on grammar points |
| | | Multiple choice grammar exercises |
| | | Completing sentences from choices provided |
| | | Completing sentences (no choices provided) |
| | | Identifying incorrect words/phrases from choices provided |
| | | Identifying incorrect works/phrases in a passage (no choices of proofreading) |

| Start time:  End time:  S work mode: I  P  G  C  Medium: Com  PP  Atmosphere:  Skill focus: Int  Sing | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Listening** | | |
| Activities:  Notes: | | |
| | | Identifying main ideas (gist) |
| | | Identifying supporting details |
| | | Identifying order in a process |
| | | Making inferences |
| | | Categorizing topics/objects |
| | | |
| | | Identifying pragmatic function |
| | | Identifying pragmatic stance |
| | | Linking content |
| | | Identifying the meaning of specific lexis |
| | | Identifying the meaning of colloquialisms |
| | | |
| | | Multiple choice |
| | | Selecting a visual |
| | | Selecting more than one answer |
| | | Matching (objects/text to categories, etc.) |
| | | Short answer |
| | | Selecting a negative response |
| | | |
| | | Both reading and hearing directions |
| | | Both reading and hearing questions |
| | | Both reading and hearing response options |
| | | Looking at visuals while listening |

| Start time:  End time:  S work mode: I  P  G  C  Medium: Com  PP  Atmosphere:  Skill focus: Int  Sing | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Reading** | | |
| Activities:  Notes: | | |
| | | Identifying main ideas (gist) |
| | | Identifying supporting details |
| | | Identifying factual information |
| | | Making inferences |
| | | Identifying paraphrasing in the text |
| | | Identifying synonyms (words or phrases) |
| | | Identifying vocabulary from context |
| | | Examining text organization- coherence & cohesion |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Linking info between texts |
| | | Looking at informal and formal registers |
| | | Looking for another purpose |
| | | Scanning |
| | | Identifying reference |
| | | |
| | | Multiple choice |
| | | Inserting text in correct place |
| | | Selecting specific words/phrases, etc. to respond |
| | | Making/completing charts from info in text |
| | | Making/completing timelines from info in text |
| | | Short answer |
| | | Selecting a negative response |
| | | |
| | | Reading texts of 250-350 words |
| | | Reading texts of US culture |

Start time:     End time:     S work mode: I  P  G  C    Medium: Com  PP   Atmosphere:     Skill focus:
Int  Sing

| **Writing** | |
|---|---|
| Activities: Notes: | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Generating ideas |
| | Organizing ideas |
| | Developing ideas |
| | Supporting ideas with examples/evidence |
| | Selecting appropriate vocabulary |
| | Developing sentence structure |
| | |
| | Writing essays |
| | Writing an essay—no time limit |
| | Writing an essay in time limit |
| | Writing essays—no word limits |
| | Writing essays with word limits |
| | |
| | Writing essays based on a listening |
| | Writing essays based on a reading |
| | Organizing ideas from listening/reading before writing |
| | |
| | Writing on topics from ETS pool |
| | Writing on topics selected by teacher |
| | Writing on topics selected by students |
| | |
| | Examining ETS scoring scale |
| | Synthesizing data from 2 or more texts |

| Start time:    End time:    S work mode: I P G C   Medium: Com PP   Atmosphere:    Skill focus: Int Sing | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Speaking** | | |
| Activities:            Notes: | | |
| | | Generating ideas |
| | | Organizing ideas |
| | | Developing ideas |
| | | Supporting ideas with examples/evidence |
| | | Selecting appropriate vocabulary |
| | | Developing sentence structure |
| | | |
| | | Organizing ideas before speaking |
| | | Discussing material from listening passage |
| | | Discussing material from reading passage |
| | | |
| | | Preparing for responses—no time limit |
| | | Preparing for responses in time limit |
| | | Delivering responses—no time limit |
| | | Delivering responses in time limit |
| | | |
| | | Speaking activities (i.e presentation, debate and etc.) |
| | | Examining ETS scoring scale |

To be completed by the observer after the lesson

| What teaching materials & textbooks were used? |
|---|
| |

| Did the students use English at school? | No | Yes | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | rarely | sometimes | mostly |
| | | | | |

| What percentage of the lesson time was spent on the following? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Listening | % | Writing | % |
| Reading | % | Speaking | % |
| Grammar | % | Other | |

| Did the teacher assign any homework?            Yes     No |
|---|
| If so, please give a description |
| |
| Do you think you observed the influence of the TOEFL iBT exam on the methodology in this lesson (i.e how the |

teacher taught) Yes   No

| Please explain |
| --- |
| |

Do you think you observed the influence of the TOEFL iBT exam on the content in this lesson (i.e what the teacher taught)?    Yes  No

| Please explain |
| --- |
| |

Please note here anything else, which is not covered above, that you think might be of interest regarding this study

| |
| --- |
| |

Please note here any documents obtained from this lesson
Teaching materials _____
Lesson plan       _____
Marking guidelines _____
Class handouts    _____
Other

# Appendix C: Student Background Survey

In each of the following questions, please fill in the blank or circle the answer which describes you best

**1. You are:** ___ Male ___ Female

**2. Which country are you from:**

**3. How old are you?**

   18-20    21-25    26-30   31 and over

**4. In total, for how many years have you studied English? (include kindergarten, elementary, middle school, college, university and private English education.)**

  Less than 1 year  1 to 2 years  3 to 4 years  5 to 6 years  more than 6 years

**5. In total, how long have you been in an English speaking country? (i.e. Canada, U.S.A., The United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.)**

  Less than 2 months  2 to 6 months  6 to 12 months  1 to 2 years  more than
2 years

**6. Preparing for the TOEFL iBT helps me to improve my general English proficiency**

  Not at all    A little bit  Somewhat  Quite a lot  A great deal

In the following two questions, please choose all that you think apply to you.

**7. Why are you taking the TOEFL iBT?**

  ___ To enter a university or college in Canada or U.S.A.

  ___ To enter a company in my home country

  ___ To improve my English

  ___ Other (please specify)

## 8. In what ways do you think you will use English in the future?

___ Doing business with Native speakers

___ Doing business with speakers of languages other than English

___ Studying in a North American university or college

___ Teaching English

___ Traveling

___ Other (please specify)

# Appendix D: Letters of Information to Participants

## Letter of Information to School Administrators

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Jie Chen (Jennifer). I am an MEd student at the Faculty of Education, the University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into how ESL teachers teach the TOEFL iBT preparation class and how students prepare for this test.

### What are the Purpose and Potential Benefits of the Study?

The study aims to investigate teachers' and students' general attitudes towards the TOEFL iBT and how they prepare for this new version of the test. I hope information gathered from my study will help teachers and students better understand the new test and become more aware of how to prepare for it.

### What is the Procedure?

I am asking your permission to conduct a study in your school. The study will involve:

- A background questionnaire for students to fill out, approximately 10 minutes;
- An interview with teachers who volunteer after class, approximately 60 minutes per interview;
- An interview with students who volunteer after class, 45-60 minutes per interview;
- Non-participant classroom observation (maximum 8 classes). The number of classes observed will be negotiated with you and teachers.

### Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation:

The real name of the school and participants will not be mentioned in the thesis. Participation in the study is fully voluntary. All participants will be asked to sign a consent form and will have freedom to withdraw from the study whenever they want. I will not disturb the teacher and students during class time but will sit in the back of the classroom or the corner during the non-participant classroom observation to ensure no interruption of the teaching.

### Whom Should You Contact With Any Questions?

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, please feel free to contact me or my thesis supervisor Dr. Suzanne Majhanovich. The contact information is provided below:

Jie Chen                                              Suzanne Majhanovich
Student Researcher                             Thesis Supervisor

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant or the

conduct of the study, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca.

Please keep this letter of information for future reference.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated,
Thank you,

Sincerely,
Jie Chen

## Letter of Information to Teachers

Dear Teacher:
My name is Jie Chen (Jennifer). I am an MEd student at the Faculty of Education, the University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into how ESL teachers teach the TOEFL iBT preparation class and how students prepare for this test.

### What are the Purpose and Potential Benefits of the Study?
The study aims to investigate teachers' and students' general attitudes towards the TOEFL iBT and how they prepare for this new version of the test. I hope information gathered from my study will help teachers and students better understand the new test and how to prepare for it.

### What are the Criteria for Participating in the Study?
You are invited to participate in the study if you have more than three years' teaching experience in a TOEFL preparation class and are currently instructing the TOEFL iBT preparation course.

### What is the Procedure?
I will conduct an interview with you. Time and place will be decided at mutual convenience. Questions in the interview will explore background information, attitudes towards the changes that have occurred in the TOEFL iBT, and how you teach the TOEFL iBT preparation class. The interview will last for approximately an hour.
With your permission, classroom observation will also be conducted. A non-participant observation method will be employed in order to minimize interference. I would like to observe your classroom for about 8 classes. The number of classes observed will be negotiated with you and the school administrator.

### Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your

employment status. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity and privacy. The raw data collected from the questionnaire and interview only can be accessed by the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and thesis committee members. For accurate interpretation and analysis later, the interview will be audio-taped with your permission. The audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed one year after the thesis has been completed.

## Whom Should You Contact With Any Questions?

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, please feel free to contact me or my thesis supervisor Dr. Suzanne Majhanovich. The contact information is provided below:

Jie Chen                                    Suzanne Majhanovich
Student Researcher                    Thesis Supervisor

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant or the conduct of the study, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca.

Please keep this letter of information for future reference.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated,
Thank you,

Sincerely,
Jie Chen

## Letter of Information to Students

Dear Student,
My name is Jie Chen (Jennifer). I am an MEd student at the Faculty of Education, the University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into how ESL teachers teach the TOEFL iBT preparation class and how students prepare for this test.

## What are the Purpose and Potential Benefits of the Study?

The study aims to investigate teachers' and students' general attitudes towards the TOEFL iBT and how they prepare for this new version of the test. I hope information gathered from my study will help teachers and students better understand the new test and how to prepare for it.

## What are the Criteria for Participating in the Study?

You are invited to participate in the study if you are Chinese and currently preparing for the TOEFL iBT test.

## What is the Procedure?

First, a background questionnaire will be handed out for you to fill out. It will take you 10 minutes to complete. This questionnaire asks questions about your background and your experiences with the TOEFL. You will also be asked whether or not you are willing to participate in following-up interviews. Should you agree to do so, please write your name and email address or phone number for further contact.

If you agree to participate and are chosen, a follow-up interview will be conducted. The criterion for selecting participants is based on both the availability of the participant and the diverse background of participants. Specific and detailed questions about your preparation activities and attitudes towards the new test will be asked during the interview. It will last 45 to 60 minutes. The time and place will be decided based on mutual convenience. The language employed during the interview can be either English or Mandarin, depending on the preference of the participants. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed into written format.

With your permission, classroom observation will also be conducted. I will not make any comments about the participation of individual students in class who do not want to be observed. A non-participant observation method will be employed in order to minimize interference in class activities. I would like to observe about 8 classes. My observation focuses on the teacher's teaching practice and students' participation in class. The COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme) will be adapted to facilitate taking field notes on the teacher's practices.

## Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation:

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and privacy. Only your ethnicity and gender will be mentioned. You may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on you as a student. The raw data collected from the questionnaire and interview can only be accessed by the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and thesis committee members. The audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed one year after the thesis has been completed.

## Whom Should You Contact With Any Questions?

If you have any concerns or questions about this study, please feel free to contact me or my thesis supervisor Dr. Suzanne Majhanovich. The contact information is provided below:

Jie Chen                                      Suzanne Majhanovich
Student Researcher                            Thesis Supervisor

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant or the conduct of the study, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at 519-661-3036

or ethics@uwo.ca.

Please keep this letter of information for future reference.


Your cooperation is greatly appreciated,
Thank you,

Sincerely,
Jie Chen

## Appendix E: Consent Form

**Case Study of the TOEFL iBT Preparation Course**

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

# Appendix F: Ethics Approval Form

## USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS – ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

| | |
|---|---|
| Review Number: | #0612-1 |
| Applicant: | Jie Chen |
| Supervisor: | Suzanne Majhanovich |
| Title: | Case study of the TOEFL iBT preparation course |
| Expiry Date: | June 30, 2007 |
| Type: | MEd Thesis |
| Ethics Approval Date: | December 19, 2006 |
| Approved: | UWO Protocol, Letters of Information & Consent |

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research studyon the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

No deviations from, or changes to, the research project as described in this protocol may be initiated without prior written approval, except for minor administrative aspects. Investigations must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information and consent documentation, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Alan Edmunds (Chair)

### 2006-2007 Faculty of Education Research Ethics Sub-Committee

| | |
|---|---|
| Dr. Alan Edmunds | Faculty (Chair 2006-2007) |
| Dr. Ellen Singleton | Faculty |
| Dr. Margaret McNay | Faculty |
| Dr. Wayne Martino | Faculty |
| Dr. J. Marshall Mangan | Faculty |
| Dr. Allan Pitman | Chair of Graduate Education (*ex officio*) |
| Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki | UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board(*ex officio*) |

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Karen Kueneman, Research Officer
Room 1161B, Faculty of Education Building