An Examination
of the way a group of Korean language learners prepare for
the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

By

Michael Roberts

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Masters of Arts
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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Abstract

The way students prepare for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has implications for the test’s validity. A review of the literature on the washback effect from TOEFL reveals that studies have focused on classroom activities but few considered students’ attitudes towards TOEFL preparation and the extent to which these stem from their educational background. I surveyed through focus groups and structured interviews the attitudes of 14 Korean language learners preparing for the TOEFL in Toronto. The findings suggest: i) participants’ culture of learning seem to have an effect on the way they prepare for the TOEFL, yet their preparation is also influenced by individual motivations and experiences; ii) TOEFL preparation manuals influenced the way they prepared for the TOEFL; iii) participants engaged in preparation practices that seem to weaken the utility of the TOEFL; and iv) participants’ language education is affected by the TOEFL.
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For Youn-hee
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Review of Relevant Literature

This thesis has four chapters. First, I state the purpose for my research and give a general argument as to why this research is important for language education. I critically review the relevant literature that pertains to my study. From this review, I lay the theoretical foundations that justify the study. In the second chapter I state my research goals then demonstrate my research methods and instruments, showing how I have analysed the data. In the third chapter I present the findings from my research. In the fourth chapter I discuss the implication of the study and consider areas for future research that stem from it.

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to take a first step in examining how sociocultural backgrounds influence the way second language learners conceive of and prepare for standardised examinations. The first step is to examine one sociocultural group to see if there exists similarities within that one group. Given that my professional career has centred on teaching Korean language learners, I am specifically interested in how Korean learners prepare for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). My research questions are: How do a sample of Korean English language learners, studying in Toronto, prepare for the TOEFL? And, what are the overall attitudes towards TOEFL preparation of a sample of Korean language learners studying in Toronto?

Over the past decade the concept of washback – an idea that states that tests can have significant influence on behaviours of teachers and students – has become a major concern in testing. As Messick points out, for some educators this is the most important
aspect of test validity, "holding that a test's validity should be gauged by the degree to which it has a positive influence on teaching" (Messick, 1996). However in the same article, Messick goes on to argue that the actual test is only one of many influences on classroom behaviours.

However, such forms of evidence are only circumstantial with respect to test validity in that a poor test may be associated with positive effects and a good test with negative effects because of other things that are done or not done in the educational system (Messick, 1996, p.242).

In a study of the impact of the introduction of a new language test in Sri Lankan high schools, Wall (1996) revealed thirteen reasons why positive effects were not realised in the classroom after the introduction of the new test. These reasons included everything from lack of teacher training to political unrest.

By looking at Korean learners preparing to write the TOEFL in Canada, I will consider whether their 'culture of learning' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) shapes the way that they view language learning and testing in general and thus significantly influences their approach to TOEFL preparation. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) define culture of learning as "a taken-for-granted framework of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about what constitutes good learning ... and how language teaching relates to broader issues of the nature and purpose of education" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, p.169).

**Procedures**

I will begin by establishing a theoretical framework in which to understand how sociocultural backgrounds influence test preparation. First, it is essential to discuss the concept of test validity. Test validity is a multi-faceted concept. Messick (1980, 1996) and Bachman (1990) argue that all facets must be weighed in determining the validity of
a test in a specific instance. It is only within the context of validity that the concept of washback and the influences of sociocultural backgrounds on test preparation can be evaluated.

Second, since I will be looking at the TOEFL test, it is necessary to understand the test's purpose and history as well as the stakeholders involved in the TOEFL. For instance realizing the importance that universities place on a certain TOEFL score and the consequences of this position on lives of test takers helps us to understand why test takers approach TOEFL preparation the way they do and why they may be justifiably resistant to changing their preparation methods.

Third, to establish that there are pedagogical problems with the current state of TOEFL preparation, I will critically review current research being done on the present curriculum being used in many TOEFL preparation classrooms. Specifically, I will be looking at the studies done by Hamp-Lyons (1998, 1999) and Alderson (1996).

Fourth, I will consider some issues of test validity that have been raised with respect to the TOEFL. I will briefly consider the test itself and then examine relevant factors outside the test. This will include the state of test preparation materials and curricula, and universities' stringent demands for high TOEFL scores.

Fifth, I will review the available literature on the connections between sociocultural backgrounds and language learning, as it specifically relates to test preparation. This will help me form a theoretical framework in which to explore my research questions. Then, I will consider the main questions of the thesis.
Review of Relevant Literature

Validity

Test validity is a multi-faceted concept. Even though in this thesis, I am primarily concerned with one aspect of consequential validity, it is important to understand validity as a whole. The reason for this is that, as Messick (1980, 1989) argues, validity is a unitary concept so no one approach to test validity can successfully determine if a test is an appropriate and useful measurement for a particular group of examinees in a particular situation. Furthermore, as Bachman (1990) points out, consequential validity is contingent on the other aspects of validity. Messick (1980) classifies validity into two main subheadings – construct validity and consequential validity. Construct validity examines the evidence and interpretations that arise from the properties and use of the test itself whereas consequential validity looks at the social implications of using a test.

Construct validity considers whether there is enough evidence to support the argument that the test scores correspond to their interpretation: "Judging the extent to which an interpretation or use of a given test score is valid requires the collection of evidence supporting the relationship between the test score and an interpretation or use" (Bachman, 1990). Messick (1980) divides construct validity into content relevance, criterion relatedness, and predictive utility. When considered together they form the evidential bases of test validity.

In its simplest form, content relevance deals with the appropriateness of test items in relationship to what the test is supposed to be measuring. Content relevance is an agreement between "the specification of the behavioural domain in question and the
attendant specification of the task or test domain" (Messick, 1980, p. 1017). For example, if the purpose of a test is to measure a person's proficiency in English for a business setting, content relevance would consider how related the test items are to the real life situation of business communication. However, as Messick points out this rule is not absolute and sometimes it is necessary to omit items from a test that are centrally involved in the behavioural domain: "The elimination of certain items from the test because of poor empirical response properties may sometimes distort the test's representativeness in covering the construct domain as originally conceived, but it is justified if the resulting test thereby becomes a better exemplar of the construct as empirically grounded" (Messick, 1980, p.1018).

One very important aspect of content relevance is test authenticity. Authenticity in testing requires that the test be as close a model as possible to the actual context in which the language is being used: "Authentic assessments pose engaging and worthy tasks in realistic settings or close simulations so that the tasks and processes, as well as available time and resources, parallel those in the real world" (Messick, 1996, p. 243). Another aspect is test directness. Directness is an important issue for TOEFL preparation, as I will show later:

Direct assessments involve open-ended tasks in which the respondent can freely perform the complex skill at issue unfettered by structural item forms or restrictive response formats. The intent is to minimise constraints on examinee behaviour associated with sources of construct-irrelevant methods variance such as testwiseness in coping with various item types, differential tendencies towards guessing, and other artificial restrictions on examinee's representations of problem and on their modes of thinking or response (Messick, 1996, p. 244).

If a test is designed in such a way that students can more easily succeed by mastering the test format rather than learning the relevant content, then the validity of the test will
suffer. I will return to this later when I discuss the test-mastering abilities of Asian students and their effects on the possibilities of achieving directness on the TOEFL.

The other two aspects of construct validity, criterion relatedness and predictive utility, do not focus on the test construction itself but rather look to evidence arising from or outside the test as a way of judging (by comparison) the validity of the test. Criterion relatedness considers how the scores achieved in the assessment tool being examined compare with other scores. This "typically takes one of two forms: (1) examining differences in the test performance among groups of individuals at different levels of language ability, or (2) examining correlations among various measures of a given ability" (Bachman, 1990, p. 248). In the first case, test validity is established if students of more advanced language ability are able to score higher on the test than the students of lower language ability. This seems like a reasonable approach but as Bachman (1990) argues, "we must carefully examine the basis on which we assume one group to be more proficient than another" (p. 248). It is important to be sure that what is meant by language ability, as established by the comparison statistic, is comparable to the definition of language ability used in the test being validated. The second case involves the "examination of correlations among different measures of the ability in question" (Bachman, 1990, p. 249). Bachman points out that the second case is more common than the first case. What this involves is comparing how students perform on other measurements of language proficiency in comparison to the test being validated. If there is a high correlation, then this helps establish that a test score is representative in relation to other tests designed to measure similar language ability. However, this is only a measure of validity in so much as the other measurements are assumed to be valid and
relevant to the assessment purposes. Messick (1980) argues that while this is a helpful tool in the process of establishing validity it cannot possibly establish validity on its own as it does not consider the intrinsic nature of either the test being validated or the comparison tests.

The last aspect of construct validity is predictive utility, which is "how well test scores predict some future behaviour" (Bachman, 1990, p. 250). Often the goal of a test is to decide whether a person is fit or ready to move to a higher level or take on a new job. Part of the equation for test validity then must include a study of how useful the test is as a measure of predicting how well a person will do in those future tasks. For example, part of determining the validity of a standardised test like the TOEFL would include examining how well students are able to cope with the demands of English after they had been admitted to universities.

Consequential validity

Consequential validity deals with the ethical or social ramifications of a test. When people approach a test it is always from a certain perspective. Every stakeholder has an opinion as to what the purpose of a test ought to be. Sometimes one stakeholder's purpose or perspectives on what the test should be is in stark contradiction with what other stakeholders envision as the purpose of the test. For example, teachers may see the test as a way of gauging students' progress in a course, whereas school administrators may view the test as a way of categorizing and ranking students. A government agency may want the test to be a standard measurement that proves students are learning the prescribed curriculum and educational standards are being maintained. The goals and purposes of every stakeholder can often not be incorporated into a single test and thus
ultimately the most powerful stakeholder will prevail and the other stakeholders' needs will have to be subservient. As Messick argues:

Each model not only constitutes a different definition of fairness but also implies a particular ethical position. Each view is ostensibly fair under certain conditions, so that arguments over the fairness of test use turn out in many instances to be disagreements as to what the conditions are or ought to be (Messick, 1980, p. 1021.)

The TOEFL represents an extreme example of how differences in stakeholders' needs may cause serious tensions in determining validity. This tension is evident when considering different types of stakeholders, for example teachers and students versus Educational Testing Services (ETS) and university registrars, as well as between different groups within one type of stakeholder. I will show later, Asian students may have special testing needs that other non-Asian students do not. Thus it is important to consider the impact that the test will have on the persons involved in it.

**Washback**

One very important and widely discussed issue in consequential validity is 'systemic validity' or washback. For some educators this is the most important aspect of test validity. "holding that a test's validity should be gauged by the degree to which it has a positive influence on teaching" (Messick, 1996).

In its most simple form, washback can be defined as the influence that a test has on what is taught in the classroom. Bailey defines washback in the following way:

There is a natural tendency for both teachers and students to tailor their classroom activities to the demands of the test, especially when the test is very important to the future of the students, and pass rates are used as a measure of teacher success. This influence of the test on the classroom (referred to as washback by language testers) is, of course, very important; this washback effect can be either beneficial or harmful (Bailey, 1996, p.258).
However, Messick (1996) warns against such a strict definition of washback. He argues that the impact on a classroom from a test may have as much or more to do with the educational system and other forces on that classroom than from the actual test itself.

A test might influence what is taught but not how it is taught, might influence teachers' behaviours but not learners' behaviours, or might influence both with little or no improvement in skills. Hence, washback is a consequence of testing that bears on validity only if it can be evidentially shown to be an effect of the test and not of other forces operative on the educational scene (Messick, 1996, p.242).

Messick argues that in order to understand the washback influence of a test we cannot merely focus our attention on what is occurring in the classroom but "instead on the properties likely to produce washback – namely, authenticity and directness" (Messick, 1996, p. 242). Thus Messick believes that washback should be seen as a function of content relevance.

Messick (1996) argues that since classroom behaviour is affected by factors outside the test, one cannot rely on a simple view of washback in judging test validity. However, when positive washback does not occur, even when the influences are mainly from an exterior force such as the educational system, this still calls into question the validity of the test:

A validated proficiency test can be subverted by test preparation practices or coaching emphasising testwiseness strategies that might increase test scores without correspondingly improving the skills measured by the test. Although this would not compromise the validity of the uncoached test in general, the validity of the interpretation and use of the coached scores would be jeopardised. (Messick, 1996, p.246)

A test can have all the properties for validity but if it is abused by people in the educational system, through poor preparation activities and test mastering techniques, then the scores that are produced from that test are not a valid representation of the
students' level, and thus the test is not valid. As I will consider later, the justifications for using a test, even one that is as widely used as the TOEFL, must be considered within a sociocultural framework. While the test may be valid for some groups, given the educational system that they have been acculturated into, its validity may be compromised for others. This is why I want to look particularly at students' attitudes towards TOEFL preparation.

Multidimensionality of Washback

Watanabe (1996) conducted a study that examined the washback effect on teachers preparing their students for the English sections of the Japanese University entrance exams. He found that there were significant differences in the degree of washback effect on individual teachers. Two teachers, who were teaching in an identical setting at the same time, preparing relatively comparable students, were not affected by the content and format of the exams to the same extent. Watanabe found at least three significant reasons for this:

The first factor involved teachers' educational backgrounds and/or experiences. Teacher A had majored in theoretical linguistics at the postgraduate level, while teacher B had been a high-school teacher ... Secondly, postobservation interviews revealed differences in beliefs about effective methods between these two teachers ... Third, the timing might have affected the teaching methods of the teachers [they were observed at different times of the year, but the exams are administered in March] (Watanabe, 1996, p.330-331).

The argument that I want to make from this is that washback should not be understood unidimensionally. There are always factors that colour a person's understanding of a test and how it is best prepared for. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) in a study of the washback effects of the TOEFL on TOEFL preparation classes compared two teachers'
approaches to conducting TOEFL preparation classes. They found that there were significant differences between the two teachers in their teaching methodology and attitudes towards the TOEFL.

In fact, we feel that the differences between the two teachers are at least as great as the differences between TOEFL and non-TOEFL classes. To attribute the features of any one class to the presence or absence of the TOEFL test as a goal proves, on these data, too simplistic: individual teacher styles clearly contribute enormously to the nature of the classes we observed (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996, p.290).

What this implies is that the washback phenomena is more dynamic than just a test's influence on classroom behaviour. In fact, there is reason to believe that the TOEFL is only one factor that determines washback.

Brown (1995) explains the process that his team went through when preparing Chinese science students for the TOEFL. They did not begin with a traditional approach to preparing students for the TOEFL: "Instead we took the position that, if we taught the students English for science and technology (EST) (based on a communicative approach), their TOEFL scores would naturally rise" (Brown, 1995 p.241). This innovation involved a willingness to take risks and a belief in the principles of communicative language teaching.

Brown's approach was met with opposition and anxiety from students and administrators who were concerned that the innovative approach would not help them produce the desired results on the TOEFL. As a result, considerable energy was spent on formative evaluations to help change traditional attitudes towards TOEFL preparation and Chinese-style language education in general. Their survey data showed that over time the students' negative attitudes towards the course shifted somewhat as they began to realise results.
Brown (1995) demonstrates that culture can be a significant barrier for producing positive washback in the classroom. Traditional approaches to education are seen as safe and reliable. Students and teachers are very reluctant to go beyond what is familiar and what has been for them the "normal" way of learning. For Brown the sociocultural barriers were the greatest obstacle in changing the way students prepared for the test. Test washback cannot be considered in abstract but only within a concrete framework, one that has many sociocultural factors weighing upon it.

These three studies (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996, Brown 1995, Watanabe 1996) show that the negative washback that may occur in TOEFL preparation classes is multidimensional. Negative washback may occur in these classes because of the attitudes and educational cultures of teachers, administrators, materials developers or students. Brown (1995) demonstrated that negative washback could be overcome, at least to some extent, by challenging sociocultural beliefs about education and testing. Before I go any further with this discussion, I believe that it is important to have an understanding of what the TOEFL is and whom its stakeholders are. This will give a concrete framework in which to view how stakeholders' demands and sociocultural backgrounds influence the way that the TOEFL is perceived and prepared for.

Overview of the TOEFL

The TOEFL is the most widely used and most internationally recognised test of English language proficiency. Since 1965 it has been developed and administered through Educational Testing Services (ETS), an American non-profit organisation, which develops and administers a number of large standardised exams. (I will discuss ETS in further detail in the section on the TOEFL stakeholders.)
While many groups, such as corporations and governments also use it, the TOEFL's primary purpose is to judge the English proficiency of adults who have not been educated in an English dominant country wishing to enter an academic program at an institution of higher education in English-speaking North America:

The purpose of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is to evaluate the English proficiency of people whose native language is not English. The test was initially developed to measure the English proficiency of international students wishing to study at colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, and this continues to be its primary function (ETS. 1999a, p.1)

For many international students, achieving a degree, especially a graduate degree, from a North American university can be a crucial step for academic and business success. Since many universities stringently require a minimum score on the TOEFL for entrance, these international students view the TOEFL as a high-stakes exam (Hamp-Lyons 1998). Many candidates feel the test is an obstacle for their entrance into a North American university, and they view the test with considerable apprehension. For instance, Taylor, Irwin, Eignor and Jamieson (1999) reported that only 38% of students taking the TOEFL achieved a score greater than 550 in the 1995/96 testing year. For comparison, the University of Toronto requires a score of at least 580 to enter any of its graduate programs and a score of at least 600 to enter any of its undergraduate programs.

Alderson and Wall (1993) argue that a language test of significant importance to the learner, and in some cases the teacher (who may be judged by the success of the teacher's students), will affect classroom behaviour. Given its importance for the futures of the test takers, the TOEFL can be expected to have a significant impact on the way students approach language learning. It is within this high-pressure context that I will consider how students' backgrounds may impact on the way they prepare for the test.
TOEFL History and Stakeholders

As discussed in the section on consequential validity, the uses of the TOEFL cannot be demarcated in the abstract. This is because each stakeholder approaches the test with different needs, values and limitations. For example, the registrar at a large university needs a test that demonstrates, and is a reasonable predictor of, a candidate's level of academic English proficiency. However, registrars have a limited amount of time and human resources to spend on determining each student's English proficiency, thus they require scores which are simple and easily interpreted. For the sake of efficiency, a single score is desirable to represent each student's English proficiency (though language proficiency is obviously much more complex than a single number could represent). It is from this context that the registrar views the TOEFL.

Each stakeholder has differing needs and thus will try to impose their own values and limitations onto the test: "Test takers, test developers, and test users all have value systems, and in a given testing situation, these systems may coincide completely, overlap to some degree, or be antithetical to each other" (Bachman 1996, p.281). It is important then to understand who the stakeholders are in TOEFL, since it is ultimately the test takers who must conform to these demands.

The major stakeholders of TOEFL include: ETS; The College Board; The TOEFL Policy Committee and its Committee of Examiners; individual universities that use the TOEFL to determine English proficiency; TOEFL preparation materials developers; institutions that offer TOEFL preparation classes; teachers of TOEFL; and TOEFL examinees.
Historical Perspective

It is helpful to look at the first three stakeholders from a historical perspective. That is why I have included the history of the TOEFL with this section on the TOEFL stakeholders. The TOEFL began in 1961 as a project of the College Entrance Examination Board (The College Board) as a way to standardise English proficiency exams in North America. The purpose for establishing the test was to have one test "that could meet the needs of all US colleges and universities who were considering the admission of foreign students" (Spolsky, 1995, p.217). The test was implemented in 1964 but suffered from a lack of financial support. In an attempt to gain funding for the test it was decided that ETS would be given considerable control of the project (Spolsky, 1995). This was done because ETS had already established itself as a leader in testing design and administration. In 1965 ETS was given joint control with the College Board and then in 1975 ETS took over the whole TOEFL project and has maintained its control ever since. Throughout his book Spolsky (1995) argues that affordability and standardisation have been and still are the foremost concern of ETS for the TOEFL.

Policy Committee

Within the TOEFL program there is a Policy Committee, which is responsible for advising ETS and the College Board on issues pertaining to TOEFL. One of the standing committees of the Policy Committee is the Committee of Examiners. Their role as defined by ETS "is to establish overall guidelines for the test content, thus assuring that the TOEFL test is a valid measure of English language proficiency reflecting current trends and methodologies in the field" (ETS, 1999a, p.5). However, as Spolsky argues "their lack of access to central management and absence of decision-making power kept
their potential influence for change to a minimum" (Spolsky, 1995, p.314). That being said, the Committee of Examiners has in recent years been taking an active role in attempting to improve the TOEFL.

**TOEFL 2000 Committee**

Under the initiative of the Committee of Examiners the TOEFL 2000 Committee was established in 1993. The goal of the TOEFL 2000 Committee was to create a new battery of tests that improve the validity of the TOEFL as a test of language proficiency for an academic setting. The test designers are being encouraged to temper construct validity with consequential validity (Spolsky, 1995). The new test is being developed in three stages, the first two of which are now completed (ETS. 1999a).

**1995 - Paper-based TOEFL**

In 1995 the TOEFL test was revised. The paper-based test (revised 1995) consisted of three equally weighted sections – listening, structure, and reading. All questions were in a multiple-choice format. The emphasis placed on structure and the single dimensional nature of the testing format caused many to question the validity of the test: “Some teachers of ESL and EFL are concerned that discrete-point test items, and exclusive use of traditional, multiple-choice items to assess receptive skills, have a negative impact on instruction” (ETS. 1999b. p.2).

**Computer-based TOEFL**

A new TOEFL test administered through computer, referred to as the computer-based TOEFL, was formally introduced in North America and select other countries in June
1998, following a general policy directive at ETS to administer all their major tests in computer media.

The computer-based TOEFL incorporates four significant improvements over the old paper-based TOEFL. They are: the incorporation of the Test of Written English (TWE) into every TOEFL test (The TWE is now called the TOEFL Essay); the introduction of an adaptive listening and structure section; the reduction of weight given to structure and written expression questions; the creation of question types that more realistically resemble the academic tasks expected of university students; and more careful consideration to ensure that the reading passages “are similar in topic and style to academic texts used in North American colleges and universities” (ETS, 1999b, p.12).

The present computer-based TOEFL (introduced June 1998 in North America) is considered by ETS as an interim test. Within the next few years ETS promises a new test of greater content relevance and construct validity. The new test will aim to measure the English proficiency for academic purposes of university candidates with even greater accuracy. A motivation for developing the test is to improve consequential validity. It is hoped by many that this test will also impact on the classroom, helping to facilitate positive washback. However, this will depend on whether the other stakeholders, such as teachers, students and materials developers, are willing and able to adjust their attitudes and beliefs towards the TOEFL and the preparation for it. This is why it is helpful to understand how sociocultural backgrounds influence test preparation practices.

Having discussed the relationship between ETS, the College Board, the TOEFL Policy Committee, the Committee of Examiners and the developers of the new tests (the TOEFL 2000 committee). I would now like to turn my attention to the other stakeholders.
Registars

The registrars at the individual universities are powerful TOEFL stakeholders. Ultimately, it is their decision as to whether and how to use the TOEFL for their institute and what the minimum scores should be. According to ETS “TOEFL is used by more than 3000 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada as part of the undergraduate and graduate admissions process” (ETS. 1998. p.1). ETS recognises that institutions have varying dynamics and needs (e.g., level of education being offered and background of candidates seeking admission) and suggests that each school should carefully consider the validity of using the TOEFL for their situation. Registrars should be sensitive to characteristics of the applicants such as: “instructional language at undergraduate institution, secondary instructional language at secondary or undergraduate institution, length of time in the United States, Canada, or other English-speaking country, native language, length of instruction in English” (ETS. 1998, p.5).

TOEFL Teachers and Materials Developers

Teachers who prepare students for the TOEFL, the materials developers who design the test books used for preparation classes, and the test-takers themselves make up the dynamic relationship of TOEFL preparation. To understand how students’ sociocultural backgrounds affect the way they prepare for the TOEFL one must consider how the attitudes and beliefs of teachers and expressed in preparation manuals might affect students in a classroom.

Traditionally, TOEFL preparation classes “(a) generally consist of test-taking strategies and (b) mastery of language structures, lexis, and discourse semantics that have been observed on previous TOEFLs” (Hamp-Lyons, 1998, p.332). Alderson and Hamp-
Lyons (1996) found that the TOEFL preparation classes they studied were non-communicative, but their sample group was restricted to one setting. In the study they conducted, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons found when comparing the TOEFL classes to non-TOEFL classes that some negative washback existed in TOEFL preparation courses. For example, teacher talk as a percentage of class time in a TOEFL class was 72% which was higher compared to 50% in a non-TOEFL class, and pair work in the TOEFL class made up .6% of the time compared to 15% in the non-TOEFL class (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996, p.289). In traditional TOEFL classes, especially those that work on a pre-1998 model, it is generally accepted by teachers and students, especially when they follow the format of the commercially developed TOEFL preparation materials, that the three skills tested (reading, listening, and structure) are best practiced by continuous review of simulated test questions. The vast majority of TOEFL preparation classes use commercially developed materials that are marketed towards students’ preparation for the TOEFL. In a telephone survey I conducted of 8 language institutes in Toronto, 100% of the schools that taught TOEFL stated that they used TOEFL preparation books (Roberts, 1999, p 18). These preparation books strongly reinforce a non-communicative approach to TOEFL preparation (Hamp-Lyons. 1998).

TOEFL Preparation Manuals

Go to any major bookstore and you will find a large section designated for TOEFL preparation manuals. Some popular titles include: Cambridge preparation for the TOEFL Test, Barron’s how to prepare for the TOEFL, Peterson’s TOEFL success, and ETS: complete TOEFL kit, etc.
*The Cambridge preparation for the TOEFL test* (Gear, & Gear, 1998) (hereafter referred to as the manual) is, in my opinion, one of the better TOEFL manuals. As a teacher, I have used this book and I know that it is the book of choice for the ESL section of the Continuing Education Department of the University of Toronto. For the most part, however, it is a typical representation of TOEFL preparation manuals. I will review this book in order to give an understanding of the format of traditional TOEFL preparation curricula.

The format of the book follows the format of the TOEFL test. The goal of the manual is to provide students with every possible question type that they could be asked and to show them how to practice those question types. To do this the book is divided into four parts. One part is for each of the four sections on the TOEFL (Listening Comprehension, Structure, Reading Comprehension, and a very short part for the TOEFL Essay).

The first part is the listening section. Over the years TOEFL materials developers have discovered that there are recurring themes in the TOEFL, such as understanding inference or listening for quantity, time, comparison, opinion, etc. As well they have discovered particular skills that are needed for the TOEFL, such as identifying correct sounds, predicting the topic, or how to focus on the details of what is being said. They used these themes and skills to organize the listening section. Then the manual uses TOEFL type questions to give students practice in these skills and themes.

Section two is Structure and Written Expression, the longest section in the book. This is somewhat imbalanced, considering the score for this section is worth much less than the other sections on the computer-based TOEFL. The structure of this section is similar to the listening section. The students are given a short explanation of a grammar rule and
a practice question that is answered and explained, then 10 to 15 practice TOEFL
questions which specifically test that grammar rule in a very analytical way. It is my
opinion that studying this section may improve students’ ability to answer questions on
Section two of the TOEFL but beyond that it provides little benefit to students’ language
learning for other contexts of communication. In fact many students have developed an
ability to identify the correct answer or error (depending on what the case may be)
without even reading the questions. Students of mine at a high intermediate level of
English proficiency can often answer the questions on Section two quicker than I can,
and do it relatively well. When I inquired how they were able to answer so quickly, a
student explained that I have to read and comprehend the questions but students like
herself just look at the grammar.

The third part of the manual is the Reading Comprehension Section. Once again, the
manual provides a series of TOEFL-type readings and practice questions. Some advice is
given on how to answer specific types of questions that will be asked on the TOEFL.
There is some focus on developing vocabulary in this section but only by getting students
to identify synonyms from a multiple-choice list. Students often complain, and I agree,
that these pseudo-authentic readings are boring and often on obscure topics.

The final section is the TOEFL Essay. The TOEFL Essay can be one of the most
difficult sections for the learners. However, the manual only provides a twenty-five-page
introduction to writing. They provide lessons on brainstorming, outlining, and writing
paragraphs. The other TOEFL manuals that I have used simply provide a few example
essays for students to emulate plus a series of practice essay topics to write on. I think
that it is questionable to believe that this simplistic treatment of the writing section can lead to any real benefit in students’ development of writing skills.

Essentially, what the TOEFL preparation manual does is provide students with an opportunity to practice questions similar to those that will appear on the TOEFL. This manual allows students to become more comfortable with the test: as well it provides them with many test-taking tricks. However, the manual provides students with very little authentic language input, merely systemic and contrived listening and reading passages, and no opportunity for authentic output. (Except for the TOEFL Essay, all questions are multiple choice).

Test Takers

Ultimately the test takers are the stakeholders with the most personal and profound stake in the TOEFL. As argued above, achieving a satisfactory TOEFL score is often a necessary requirement for them to pursue their academic studies or professional careers. Given this value, it is essential to the consequential validity of the TOEFL that the test takes into account the needs and attitudes of the test takers. This is a fundamental reason why I believe it is important to understand test takers’ attitudes and beliefs towards the TOEFL and TOEFL preparation.

According to Taylor, Irwin, Eignor and Jamieson (1999) 740,279 examinees took the TOEFL in the 1995-96 testing year, making it the “most widely used test of its kind” (ETS. 1998, p. 1). While the test is taken by examinees throughout the world, the largest concentration of students is in Asia. Taylor et al. (1999) report that 46% percent of the students took the test in Asia, 32% percent in Canada and the United States, 11% in Europe, about 4% in both the Near East and Latin America, and just less than 1% percent
in the Pacific Islands, Australia, and New Zealand combined. Of course a certain percent of the test takers who took the test in Canada and the United States were visitors who came to study English and/or enter a North American university.

Of the test takers 19.4% are native speakers of Japanese, followed by Chinese speakers at 18.7%, then Korean with 12%, and Thai at 6%. Thus well over half of the examinees were from these four Asian societies. Spanish speakers represent 5.2% of the examinees. French 2.8%, Hindu/Urdu 2.4%, German 1.9%, and the remaining 26.6% from all other languages combined. Given their dominance in terms of numbers of test takers, a relevant study of cultural influences should include representation from these major Asian groups. This is one reason that I have chosen Korean participants in my study. Representing 12% of all people who take the test, the Korean test-takers are a large enough stakeholder group to merit a study that focuses on their attitudes and beliefs about TOEFL and TOEFL preparation.

Culture

Reflecting on culture itself is a useful way of discovering how it affects the ways in which students approach language education and language testing:

Culture both liberates and constrains. It liberates by investing the randomness of nature with meaning, order, and rationality and by providing safeguards against chaos; it constrains by imposing a structure on nature and by limiting the range of possible meanings created by the individual (Kramsch, 1998, p.10).

People are always educated within a cultural context. However, as each culture and thus each education system is constrained within a "socially and historically situated discourse community" (Kramsch, 1998, p.10) our understanding of what it means to be educated is
also constrained within this historical framework. This historical framework is always understood through a language or languages.

Cortazzi and Jin (1996), as briefly discussed above, offer the term “cultures of learning” as a way of understanding that education happens within a culture that is historically based. Through this historicity the conception of what it means to be educated is shaped: “Any particular culture of learning will have its roots in the educational, and, more broadly, cultural traditions of the community or society in which it is located” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1998, p.169).

What constitutes successful learning and acceptable learning practice are acquired though this educational historical context. Declaring a learning practice, such as rote memory, as educationally indefensible is a culturally defined opinion. Many cultures value such learning as it shows respect for the words of the teacher. Whereas the ability to apply knowledge is often seen as a goal of education and indeed language education in the west, as seen through the development and general acceptance of communicative competence and proficiency models of language education, this may not be taken for granted in an Asian culture. Cortazzi and Jin point out that foreign teachers of English in China, who often stereotype Chinese students as being poor language learners, also do so from a cultural perspective:

Native speakers of English who adhere to the first culture of learning strongly reinforce the process of viewing the Chinese culture of learning in terms of deficit. Therefore students are ‘weak in communication’, ‘shy’, or ‘passive’. But this is a little one-sided. It does not take into account Chinese culture of learning, or students’ achievements and expectations. For example, it is not unusual for students to memorize extensive lists of English words: we met a dozen or more students who could recite the whole of a good-sized dictionary by heart (Cortazzi & Jin, 1998, p.185)
Cole (1996) adds to the understanding of culture by presenting the idea that culture, while being historically rooted, is also "that which surrounds". For Cole every person is part of an embedded context which shapes who we are and how we think about the world: "Context is defined as 'the whole situation, background, or environment relevant to a particular event', and "environment" is defined as "something that surrounds" (Cole 1996, p.132). In Cortazzi and Jin's example above, the Chinese students and their Western teachers come from very different educational environments and thus each see and judge the other in terms of that which has traditionally surrounded them. Being removed from a culture of learning can be compared to the analogy of trying to see through someone else's eyes. Just as it is only possible to see the world through one's own eyes, it is also only possible to understand educational values from within one's own culture of learning.

The ideas of what constitutes good TOEFL preparation are thus also situated within a belief system of what is educationally acceptable and what is not. Hamp-Lyons' (1998) critical judgement of the TOEFL preparation manual as educationally indefensible is an opinion formed from within a western tradition of language education. Such a tradition may be quite foreign to others who have been socialised in other traditions.

I am not creating a defence for non-communicative language learning; my point here is just that we must be sensitive to the historicity of language learners. The argument that a form of education is acceptable because it is culturally rooted would imply that culture is a static and unchanging 'institution'. Both Cole (1996) and Kramsch (1998) argue that culture is in fact not static, but rather it is always changing and developing.

Culture mediation implies a mode of developmental change in which the activities of prior generations are cumulated in the present as the
specifically human part of the environment. This form of development, in turn, implies the special importance of the social world in human development (Cole 1996, p.145).

Thus it is not that what constitutes good language learning in one culture of learning is antithetical to good language learning in another culture of learning, it is just that how we consider such questions is rooted in our historical context. This thesis looks at how sociocultural backgrounds shape how students approach TOEFL preparation; it is not an attempt to justify them. Change must be mediated from within a culture, not imposed upon it from without. It is for this reason that the test users and developers must be sensitive to the historical, sociocultural backgrounds of the test takers preparing for the TOEFL.

Gardner (1985) develops a socio-educational model of language learning. In this model he argues that cultural influences have both a macro and micro effect on language learning. How much value is placed by the community on learning the language will affect not only how much time and energy are put into language learning but also will shape the way the language is learned. A group that values the learning of a foreign language, for example, for use in the tourism industry may have significantly different goals for and approaches to language learning than a group that values language learning for academic applications:

A central theme of the model is that second language acquisition takes place in a particular cultural context. It proposed that the beliefs in the community concerning the importance and meaningfulness of learning the language, the nature of skill development expected, and the particular role of various individual differences in the language learning process will influence second language acquisition. For example, it is argued that if the cultural belief is that it is very difficult to learn a second language, the general level of achievement will be low (a self-fulfilling prophecy) ... If on the other hand, it were expected that most individuals would learn a
second language, the general level of achievement would be high. (Gardner, 1985, p.146)

Gardner argues that individual motivation and anxiety are factors that contribute to both how well learners learn a language and the approaches that they take to language learning. These factors are greatly influenced by the cultural beliefs of the community (Gardner, 1985). Since in many cultures success on language tests is often the main motivation for language learning the two go hand-in-hand (Wadden & Hilke, 1999).

Wadden and Hilke (1999) provide a good example of the importance of understanding the sociocultural backgrounds of students when considering why test takers act the way they do when preparing for important examinations. They illustrate that students’ attitudes and beliefs about a particular test cannot be explained just in terms of the importance of the test itself, but must also take into consideration an understanding of students’ culture of learning:

Japan, for instance, like several other East Asian countries, possesses a veritable culture of testing with roots stretched back to the imperial examinations of 12th-century China. Even today in Japan, results on a wide array of tests largely determine the course of one’s life – success on tests smooths the way for everything from entrance to the right kindergarten to lifetime employment in a prestigious corporation. The psychological dimension of these pervasive cultural practices can scarcely be overestimated (Wadden & Hilke, 1999, p.269)

This example clearly shows that different cultures place varying degrees of importance on examinations. In the present study I tried to understand how students from a particular cultural/educational background, namely Korea, prepare for the TOEFL, and see if there are consistent similarities amongst them. I then considered the role that the participants’ cultural/educational background plays in creating these similarities.
CHAPTER 2

Design and Methods

In this chapter I consider the main research questions of this thesis. I begin by explicitly stating the research questions. I then consider the context and procedures used to collect the data. I describe the participants and comment on how they were selected for inclusion in the study. I then discuss the procedures I used to analyse the data.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to address the following research questions.

1. How do a sample of Korean English language learners, studying in Toronto, prepare for the TOEFL?
   a) What trends and themes emerge from focus groups as the participants discuss how they study for the TOEFL?
   b) Do the data from private interviews indicate that the participants tend to act very similarly or do there appear to be differences in the way individuals prepare for the TOEFL?

2. What are the overall attitudes towards TOEFL preparation of a sample of Korean language learners studying in Toronto?
   a) What trends and themes emerge from focus groups as the participants discuss their attitudes towards TOEFL preparation?
   b) Do the data from private interviews indicate that the participants tend to act very similarly or do there appear to be differences in individuals’ attitudes towards TOEFL preparation?
Context and Procedures

The data collected for this study consist of attitudes and opinions of adult learners. The data were collected through participation in focus groups and structured interviews. The focus group sessions lasted one hour, and the structured interviews lasted thirty minutes. The research was conducted in two phases during the months of May and June, 2000.

Phase One

Phase one consisted of focus groups. Participants in groups of three to five were asked to comment on a series of questions that dealt with how they prepared for the TOEFL and what their attitudes were towards TOEFL preparation in general. The purpose of this phase was to generate an overview of the attitudes and beliefs towards TOEFL preparation of a sample of Korean students in Toronto. Verification was achieved by conducting four sets of focus groups over a period of two months with participants who had no connection with the previous group of participants. See Appendix A for the focus group questions.

The focus group sessions were audiotaped as well as videotaped. The audio recordings were transcribed but the video recordings were only used to identify speakers and when necessary to verify audio-recordings, so that a congruent transcript could be produced. A total of fourteen participants were involved in this phase of the research. From each group, I asked one or two participants to be involved in phase two, as described below in the section, Elicitation of Data.
Phase Two

Phase two consisted of structured interviews. The structured interview consisted of each participant answering a series of questions about how they prepare for the TOEFL and their attitudes towards the TOEFL. These lasted for about thirty minutes each. The questions in the structured interview were considerably less open-ended than the questions for the focus group. The purpose of the structured interview was to draw out more detailed information about the attitudes and belief towards TOEFL preparation from the participant to help support and enrich the data that were gathered in the focus groups.

Since the interviews were one-on-one there was no chance of my not being able to identify the speakers, so the structured interviews were only audio recorded. The audio recordings were then transcribed. There was a minimum of one participant from each of the focus group interviewed. Five structured interviews were conducted in total. See Appendix B for the structured interview questions.

Participants

With the exception of two people, the participants were solicited from two large private language institutes in Toronto, which provided administrative permission for the research (Appendix C & D). These institutes offer English as a second/foreign language training mainly to students who come to Canada as visitors for the purpose of studying English with the future intention of either immediately returning to their home counties or pursuing an academic degree at a North American university. These schools were chosen because of my personal and professional contact with the administrators of the schools.
The two participants who were not from these schools approached me by telephone and volunteered to participate after having spoken with one of the other participants. I spoke with each of them on the telephone for several minutes and found them suitable for the focus groups. Both participants were attending an advanced TOEFL class at a private language institute in Toronto, which I had personally visited on a prior occasion, and both offered unique qualities and genuine enthusiasm. As one participant was over the age of thirty and the other had lived in Canada for almost two years, I decided that they would make excellent additions to the focus group.

The 14 participants were adult Korean learners of English, who were preparing for the TOEFL at private language institutes in Toronto. They were all enrolled in either an intermediate or advanced TOEFL preparation class. (Beginner TOEFL preparation classes are not generally offered). For the most part, the participants were visitors to Canada who had come here specifically to study English and/or prepare for entrance into a North American university. Only one of the fourteen participants was planning to live in Canada as a landed immigrant. In total eighteen people volunteered for the study, however four participants choose to drop from the study for non-specified reasons.

Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym for themselves that preserved only their ethnicity and gender. Then they were asked to fill in a background information sheet (Appendix E). Table 2.1 summarizes the participant's background information. Individual participant's profiles appear in Appendix F.
Table 2.1
Summary of participants' backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Factor</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 20</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 31</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total ESL/EFL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 6 years</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full-time ESL/EFL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 5 months</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 11 months</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 2 years</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full-time employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4 years</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 6 years</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 6 years</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time spent in English-speaking Country</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 months</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 5 months</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 11 months</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 2 years</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Factor</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason for Preparing for the TOEFL¹</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enter a university or college in Canada or the United States.</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve English proficiency.</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enter a Korean university</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enter a company in Korea</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To teach English in Korea</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future plans for English¹</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business with native speakers</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business with speakers of other languages than English</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying at an English speaking university</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching English</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live as a Canadian Immigrant</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The percentages add up to more than 100% because the participants were able to choose more than one option.
The participants were approached via a letter of invitation (Appendices G & H). The letters were bilingual (English and Korean). Willing participants were asked to sign a consent form and commit to joining in the study (Appendices I & J). In the case of the two students who did not receive a letter of invitation in advance, I allotted them ten minutes before entering the focus group meeting room to read the letter of invitation and sign the consent form.

_Elicitation of Data_

I began each focus group by giving a brief overview of my study and why I believed it to be important for research and development in the area of TOEFL preparation. I then gave the participants a few minutes to ask me general questions about my study and my academic, teaching, and personal background. In general, I found the participants to be articulate and competent enough to express their beliefs and opinions in English. I encouraged them to speak freely and not to worry about errors in grammar.

Five participants were selected for the structured interview so that a reasonable representation of the larger group was interviewed. Even if a dominant group were to have existed, I would not have chosen a larger number of students from that group. The reason for doing this was to ensure that the study was as inclusive as it could be of the general population. I paid special attention to participants' background information sheet to ensure that people with various backgrounds and future goals were selected, using criteria such as gender, age, level of English, years having studied English, work experience, time spent in a foreign country, reasons for taking the TOEFL, and reasons for studying English.
Immediately following the focus group session, I invited one or two participants to participate in a structured interview. I reminded them that they were free to change their minds and withdraw from the study at anytime if they chose. All participants who were asked to come for a second interview chose to participate.

**Research Instruments**

The purpose of the research instruments was to elicit the participants' ideas, attitudes and beliefs about the TOEFL and TOEFL preparation in order to answer the two main research questions guiding the thesis research.

**Preparation Practices – First Research Question**

The first research questions asks, “How do a sample of Korean English language learners, studying in Toronto, prepare for the TOEFL?” I addressed this research questions by asking about: a) participants’ general preparation practices; b) participants’ beliefs about which language skills are important for TOEFL; c) preparation time that the participants allotted to individual TOEFL sections; d) participants’ attitudes towards TOEFL preparation manuals; e) participants’ openness to alternative forms of TOEFL preparation; and f) participants’ preferences for native versus non-native TOEFL preparation teachers.

An initial problem that I had with section b was defining what constitutes a language skill. Stern (1992) defines language skills as listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, since the TOEFL specifically tests grammar as a separate section from the other skills and to a lesser extent treats vocabulary separately, I have included these as language skills. While the vocabulary section was removed from the TOEFL in 1995 as
a section unto itself. It was embedded into the reading section and there are specific discrete point questions that require test-takers to identify vocabulary through synonyms and antonyms.

Thus following the components of the TOEFL, I have defined language skills as reading, listening, writing, grammar (or structure), and vocabulary. Speaking could be a language skill but since it is not part of the TOEFL and as I expected, no participant indicated that it was important for TOEFL. I have left it off.

In section e the participants were asked if they were open to alternative or non-traditional approaches to TOEFL preparation. By traditional, I am referring to TOEFL preparation manuals and the standard approach that uses these materials.

Section f explored whether participants preferred an intralingual or crosslingual approach to language education for their TOEFL preparation as defined by Stern (1992).

Intralingual and intracultural refer to those teaching techniques which remain within L2 and use it as the sole frame of reference. Crosslingual and cross-cultural describe the group of techniques which use L1 or another language as points of comparison or reference. Translation is a principal technique of the crosslingual strategy, while the absence of translation is a critical feature of an intralingual strategy. (Stern, p. 279)

It is important to note that the participants and I assumed that a Korean TOEFL teacher would not be fluently bilingual. While there are exceptions, this assumption can be taken as the norm in Korea.

Attitudes Towards TOEFL Preparation – Second Research Question

The second research question asks, "What are the overall attitudes towards TOEFL preparation of a sample of Korean language learners studying in Toronto?" I explored this question by asking about: a) importance of the TOEFL for the participants; b)
participants' perceptions of which TOEFL sections were most difficult; c) TOEFL preparation and general language ability; d) participants' attitudes towards TOEFL as a test of language proficiency; and e) participants' overall satisfaction with their TOEFL preparation methods.

In section c the participants were asked if they felt that they were improving their general language ability by preparing for the TOEFL. The initial problem was defining general language ability. In discussion with the first focus group, we decided that we would define general language ability as the language that one uses in their everyday life. This would include, but not be limited to, such things as interacting with native speakers through speaking or writing, watching television and listening to radio programs. What were excluded were activities specifically related to the TOEFL.

**Analysis**

The data from each focus group and structured interview data were transcribed into Microsoft Word. In the transcribed data, I made some grammatical and stylistic changes to the participants' comments in order to better communicate their opinions in the written form. My goal was to transcribe the data as authentically as possible, that is as close as possible to the participants' own words, but at the same time ensure that participants' comments are intelligible in the thesis. I standardized much of their grammar and English usage, but I did not attempt to make the participants' comments sound native-speaker-like, as I believed this would jeopardise their authenticity. For reference I have included a full transcript of Focus Group 1 (Appendix K).

All the data were sorted by question and compiled into one Microsoft Word file for the focus groups and one for the structured interviews. I then read through the data to
look for trends and differences. The data were then grouped into sections related to each of the two main research questions. Where applicable, I have provided statistics in the form of percentages. All statistical summaries are supplemented with statements from the participants.

A significant portion of the data from this study is qualitative in the sense that it is derived from participants' comments and responses to structured questions. The focus group participants were often asked direct questions and then asked to defend or explain their answers or choices. For example the participants were asked, 'Do you think a TOEFL preparation teacher should be a native speaker of English? Why?' I analysed the focus group data then grouped the participants' responses to the questions into simple statistics. For instance, in the case of the above example, five possible answers were identified: 1) Yes, 2) Yes but with qualification, 3) No, 4) No but with qualification, 5) It doesn't matter. This method of grouping participants' answers was necessary because the participants tended to give very straightforward answers, though it required some interpretation on my part. Verification was achieved by having an independent researcher (another graduate student in second language education) repeat the process of grouping the responses from 30% of the questions. Inter-rater reliability was 95% with a standard deviation of .04 (see Appendix L).
CHAPTER 3

Findings

This chapter presents the findings from both research instruments organized into the pattern established in the previous chapter – six sections for the first research question and five sections for the second research question. Since the intention of the structured interview data was to enrich the data of the focus groups. I felt it appropriate to integrate the findings from the two research instruments to form a congruent presentation of the research data.

*TOEFL Preparation Practices*

The first research question focuses on the actual preparation practices of the participants. I will present the data in six sections: a) participants' general preparation practices; b) participants' beliefs about which language skills are important for TOEFL; c) preparation time that the participants allotted to individual TOEFL sections; d) participants' attitudes towards TOEFL preparation manuals; e) participants' openness to alternative forms of TOEFL preparation; and f) participants' preferences for native versus non-native TOEFL preparation teachers.

*General Preparation Practices*

The participants were asked to give general comments on how they prepared for the TOEFL. The key findings from this section were that: i) almost all participants reported that they prepared for the TOEFL at private institutes and on their own; ii) TOEFL preparation manuals were an important part of the participants' preparation practices; iii) some participants used TOEFL preparation manuals written in Korean while others used
preparation manuals in English only; iv) some participants said that authentic English materials were part of their preparation practices but others did not indicate this; and v) the participants were, for the most part, aware of the issues facing them in preparing for TOEFL. For instance, one participant observed:

I prepare for the TOEFL two ways. One is that I am at the language institute taking the TOEFL program. Then, I study individually using the TOEFL references books that I have bought in Canada. I had bought some TOEFL books in Korea that use the Korean language. They were easy for me to understand but I took the practice test here and I felt that the Korean books were very different than the actual test. By using the books and CD Rom I bought in Canada, I can learn more about the actual test. (Chang-ho)

In comparison with the other participants, Chang-ho’s comments represent fairly typical TOEFL preparation practice in that he studied both at a private institute and on his own. In his opinion, English-only preparation manuals are better for preparing for the TOEFL. This opinion was shared by many of the participants. While none of the participants indicated that they did not use English-only preparation manuals, several, like Suk-gu, indicated that they used a combination of English-only and Korean-English TOEFL preparation manuals. For example,

I attend the TOEFL classes and I also study by myself. I use the Korean textbooks to study on my own. These give me the explanations in Korean and the questions in English. The book I use is a translation of the ETS book into Korean. I also bought the Barron’s Preparation Book. I use it as a way to simulate the test. I use it to get use to the TOEFL system. (Suk-gu)

While the participants considered TOEFL preparation manuals important, many indicated that they do not exclusively stick to preparation manuals for after school preparation. Some participants indicated they used other outside materials in their daily
TOEFL preparation routines. For example, Mi-na indicated that she included authentic listening and reading materials as a part of her TOEFL preparation practice.

I am taking TOEFL classes at school and also I am studying this book (Longman’s). This is the most famous book in Korea. This has both practice tests and skills and strategies. So this one give me some information about the TOEFL. Also after school I try listening to the radio and I also try reading newspapers and magazines. I find the newspapers and magazines are good for preparing for the reading section. (Mi-na)

An important finding here is that the participants raised many of the issues that the other sections of the research instruments were to deal with later in greater detail. To me this demonstrates that the participants seem to be aware of the important issues in TOEFL preparation.

Beliefs about Which Language Skills are Important for TOEFL

The participants were asked to comment on which language skills they believed most important for TOEFL preparation. Three findings in this section seemed noteworthy. The participants tended to believe that; i) listening is a very important skill for TOEFL; ii) grammar is less important than listening but still important for success on the TOEFL; iii) and writing is not an important skill for success on the TOEFL.

In the focus groups the participants were asked to indicate which language skill they believed most important for TOEFL preparation, and in the structured interviews participants were asked to rank six language skills from most important for the TOEFL to least important.

Figure 3.1 shows that 50% of the focus group participants indicated that listening was the most important skill for TOEFL, followed by 29% for grammar, 7% for reading and
vocabulary, and 0% for writing. 7% of the participants indicated that all skills are of equal importance.

Figure 3.1 – Opinions of which language skill is most important for the TOEFL.

Table 3.1 shows the mean ranking of language skills by the structured interview participants. 1 indicating most important and 6 indicating least important. The majority of participants indicated that listening skills were most important for TOEFL preparation, with a mean ranking (M) of 1.6 and a small standard deviation (SD) of .55. Reading skills were ranked second and grammar skills were ranked third. The large SD of 1.92 in the grammar skills ranking indicates that there was very little agreement amongst the structured interview participants as to the importance of grammar skills, with no two participants ranking grammar skills the same. Vocabulary skills were ranked fourth and writing skills were ranked fifth. A mean of 4.6 and a SD of .89 indicated that there was considerable agreement amongst the participants that writing skills were not very important. As I expected, conversation skills were ranked as least important.
Table 3.1  
Structured interview participants' mean ranking of language skills important for the TOEFL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance (Ranked by Mean)</th>
<th>Language Skills</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most Important</td>
<td>Listening Skills</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Reading Skills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Grammar Skills</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Vocabulary Skills</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>Writing Skills</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Important</td>
<td>Conversations Skills</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both the focus group data and the structured interview data indicate clearly that listening was seen as an important skill for TOEFL preparation. The participants tended to agree that listening is the only skill that cannot be mastered simply by studying TOEFL preparation manuals.

Listening is the most important for me because in grammar part or reading part my score gradually increased by studying myself but the listening section is very difficult. Even though I listen to the audiotape everyday, my listening score is not good. for that reason listening is very difficult for me. (Sung Chul)

The argument that several of the participants made was that it is reasonable for them to improve reading, grammar and vocabulary by studying on their own, however they believed that listening skills are much more difficult to acquire without authentically participating in the language. For example, Chang-ho argued that even though he studied English for 12 years in Korea his listening skills remained much lower than his non-aural skills.
I think the listening comprehension is the most important skill. Even though I have studied English for 12 years, and I can communicate what I want, and understand what I read, I cannot listen very well. I think that listening is important for using all other skills. If you can understand what people say, then you can learn English very quickly. (Chang-ho)

Chang-ho's comment about the importance of listening seemed to be a commonly held belief amongst the participants. Many participants expressed their frustrations at not being able to comprehend oral communication, whether in conversation with native speakers of English or when listening to oral media such as TV or radio.

While the structured interview data do not bear exactly the same results, the focus group data indicate that grammar is viewed as an important skill for TOEFL. The focus group participants gave two main reasons for rating grammar as an important skill for TOEFL. The first reason is that some of the participants believed that grammar is so mechanical that if they study it intensely they can achieve a perfect score in the grammar section. In their opinions this technique allows them to artificially inflate their TOEFL scores. Suk-gu's comments typify this practice:

I think grammar is most important for TOEFL. I think that you can improve your grammar score more easily than your listening and reading score. So for that reason I think grammar is most important for TOEFL. If we study grammar hard we can get a perfect score in the grammar section and make our total score high. (Suk-gu)

The participants indicated that memorizing grammar rules, to help increase their TOEFL scores, is facilitated by the commercial TOEFL products. Dong-wook explains that the commercial textbooks make mastering the structure section very reasonable:

I think that the rules are fixed and explained in many books. If you memorize the grammar rules you can do well in the grammar section and you can put up your mark. It is an easy way to increase your mark even if your English level is very low. (Dong-wook)
The second reason that the participants gave for rating grammar as an important section was quite different than the first reason. The two women who had been living in Canada for an extended period of time argued that grammar is the only skill that they cannot learn naturally (i.e., outside of the context of formal instruction) and so its importance is specific to the TOEFL. Min Sue’s opinion seems typical of those participants that had been living in Canada for an extended period of time:

For me, I think the grammar is the most difficult because I lived here for two years and I am always watching TV and listening to the radio and something like that, so when I listen to the TOEFL it is not as difficult as grammar. Because when I was Korea I did not study English very hard. So, since before I didn’t study grammar it is very difficult for me to get a good score in grammar. (Min-sue)

Not all participants indicated that they believe that grammar is an important skill for TOEFL. The participants that ranked grammar skills as having lower importance tended to do so because they believed that the grammar section of the TOEFL was not that demanding.

I don’t think so. There are some rules and types. Once you have memorized them you do not have to memorize anything else. TOEFL has a certain set of grammar that it uses. Once you know the types then you don’t need to learn that much more. (Chang-ho)

There seems to be three main beliefs about grammar skills among the participants. Some participants found grammar skills easy so they study grammar to achieve a high mark on the structure section of the test, some found grammar easy so they ignore it, while a few others believed that grammar skills are difficult for them so they needed to study for the structure section of the test.

The participants perceived writing as an unimportant skill for the TOEFL. No participants from the focus group rated it as the most important skill for TOEFL, and the
structured interview participants tended to rank it very low. It seems that the reason for this is that the participants do not realise the importance of writing for the computer-based TOEFL. For instance.

Before I came here, I didn’t know that I would have to write on the real TOEFL test. I only knew the fact that I would have to write when I came here. So when I was in Korea, I never practiced writing exercise for the TOEFL test, so it is also very difficult for me to write an essay.

(Dong-wook)

Dong-wook’s comments indicate that there is still some confusion for students surrounding the change from the paper-based TOEFL to the computer-based TOEFL in regards to the latter requiring the TOEFL Essay.

Preparation Time Allotted to Individual TOEFL Sections

The participants were asked questions concerning the amount of time they spent studying for each section of the TOEFL. The findings in this section support the findings previously reported. The most salient findings are that: i) the participants tend to spend the most amount of time studying for the listening section; ii) some participants spend a lot of time studying grammar whereas others do not; and iii) the participants do not spend much time studying for the TOEFL Essay.

The focus group participants were asked to indicate how much time they spend studying for each TOEFL section per day, and the structured interview participants were asked which section they spent the most amount time studying for and which section they spent the least amount of time studying for.

The focus group data, summarized in Figure 3.2, show that 64% of the participants spent one to two hours a day studying for the listening section and 28% of the participants spent two to three hours studying for the listening section. This makes the
listening section the most studied for section of the TOEFL. The structure section is the second most studied for section, with 50% of the participants studying one to two hours and 21% of the participants studying two to three hours a day. The reading is the third most studied for section, with 43% of participants studying one to two hours a day and 14% of participants studying two to three hours a day. The data demonstrate that the participants spent the least amount of time studying for the TOEFL Essay. Only 7% of the participants indicated studying between one and two hours a day and 14% indicated that they studied two to three hours a day for the TOEFL Essay.

![Figure 3.2 - Time spent studying for each TOEFL section: focus group participants](image)

The structured interview findings, summarized in Table 3.2, seem atypical in comparison to the larger group participating in the focus groups: 4 out of 5 of the participants indicated that they spent the most amount of time studying for the listening section and the least amount of time studying for the structure section. One participant indicated the opposite.
Table 3.2
TOEFL sections most and least studies: structured interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Section Most Studied</th>
<th>Section Least Studied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suk Jin</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dong Wook</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suk-gu</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chang-ho</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi-na</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data from both the focus groups and the structured interviews confirm that
listening is the section that the participants spent the most amount of time studying. The
participants view this section as both important and difficult. The participants also said
they tend to use TOEFL preparation manuals to study for the listening section. For
example, a typical comment about this topic was:

I spend the most amount of time studying for the listening section. First I
listen to the passage and answer the questions then I listen again. After
that I read the script and then check for vocabulary that I do not know. I
spend at least 2 hours a day on the listening section. (Chang-ho)

The structure section was the second most studied for section as indicated by the focus
groups. As I indicated previously, there are two reasons for this. Some participants feel
that grammar is easy, so they attempt to gain a perfect score in the structure section of the
test. Some find grammar difficult so they feel they need to study the structure section in
order to do well in the TOEFL. For instance.

I spend the most amount of time studying the grammar section because it
is the easiest section. If I try I can get a high score in this section. (Mi-na)

On the other hand, the structure section was studied the least amount by some
participants because they find the grammar easy so they do not feel that they need
to spend much time studying for the structure section.

I spend the least amount of time with the grammar. First the grammar is
not worth very much on the computer-based test, so we do not need to
worry too much about grammar. Also I am very good in grammar so I do not need to improve. So at most I spend 45 minutes a day on grammar section. Usually, less than 30 minutes. (Suk-jin)

In sum there seems to be considerable variation in the participants’ beliefs about preparing for the structure section of the TOEFL.

The focus group data show that the participants do not spend much time studying for the TOEFL Essay. In fact it is the only section that a majority of the participants indicated that they spent less than one hour a day studying. Also it is the only section of the TOEFL that participants indicated that they do not spend any time studying.

Attitudes Towards TOEFL Preparation Manuals

The participants were asked whether they believed that commercially produced TOEFL preparation manuals are a good way of preparing for the TOEFL. The most distinctive finding from this section is that all (100%) of the participants believed that TOEFL preparation manuals are a good way of preparing for the TOEFL. They said they believe that the manuals help them to learn necessary language skills and master test-taking strategies. They also believe that the manuals provide a good indication of test readiness.

The participants gave three main reasons for using TOEFL preparation manuals. They believe that the manuals help them: i) learn the language skills necessary for the TOEFL; ii) master the specific TOEFL test-taking strategies; and iii) gauge their level or readiness for the TOEFL. There is a common belief that the manuals are an indispensable part of TOEFL preparation. For example Suk-hyun’s comments represent a typical understanding of the importance of the manuals for TOEFL preparation:
I think they are good. If there were no TOEFL preparation manuals then maybe we could not study for the TOEFL. We could study but we could not prepare properly. (Suk-hyun)

Some of the participants indicated that the manuals are a good way of learning the necessary language skills for the TOEFL. The manuals offer a lot of practice with the grammar, reading and listening skills that the test focuses on, and the participants believed that this is an efficient way of learning these appropriate language skills. For example,

I think that there are a lot of good TOEFL preparation books, especially the books from ETS. I think TOEFL preparation manuals are good because I can concentrate on what I need for the TOEFL: grammar, reading, listening. (Jin)

The participants seem aware that the TOEFL is not a test of general language ability but rather a test of specific aspects and skills of the English language. They see the preparation manuals as helping them to become able to focus on the relevant aspects and skills.

Many participants indicated that the manuals are a good way of mastering the TOEFL test-taking skills and strategies. The participants believed that by learning how to answer the TOEFL type questions they can improve their scores. For instance,

They have a lot of strategies for taking the test and show us how to expect the questions that are going to be on the test. In this book I learned how to eliminate the impossible answers and then choose from the possible answers. These and the other strategies are helpful for increasing my score. (Mi-na)

The participants also said they believe that understanding the format of the test is a useful way to improve their score. For example understanding how much time they are allotted for each listening section helps them pace themselves to ensure that they have an adequate amount of time to finish all of the question:
Yes. I think that they give us good information. The system of the test is so important. Actually I think that if you memorize the format of the test then you can get a much better score than if you don’t. I found that after I used the preparation books my score jumped up a lot. So it is very important to use these books (Suk-gu).

One participant also argued that understanding the test design and format helps the test-takers become more comfortable and as a result less nervous when taking the actual TOEFL:

Yah for me. TOEFL preparation manuals are very important because when we take a TOEFL test we might get very nervous and we don’t know how to manage our time. So I practice those kinds of skills, so that during the actual TOEFL test I don’t get nervous. So I think that they are very important (Min-sue).

The participants find the manuals a useful way to gauge their test readiness. Many participants reported that they take the simulation tests on a regular bases so that they can see if their score is improving. For example:

I used the TOEFL manuals to test myself … every two days I took a sample test for myself with the TOEFL materials. So they are very useful and I especially use the listening comprehension section. (Dong-wook)

The participants viewed the preparation manuals as an important tool in their TOEFL preparation practices. However, the participants indicated that they did not believe that all manuals are of equal value. While the participants were not asked to rate the quality of manuals they did offer comments that indicate what they believe are important aspects for a good TOEFL preparation manual. Chang-ho provided an especially useful commentary:

I use TOEFL Success 2000 and AVRO. I bought both of these in Canada ... I also bought a Korean book. The Korean book is the worst. It is for people whose language skills are much lower. It is kind of for beginners. I think AVRO is the best because it gives a lot of detailed information on how to prepare for the TOEFL. It gives many TOEFL test-taking strategies and a good explanation of the grammar and listening sections. I
think that it has been very helpful for me. TOEFL Success is not very good because it has very brief descriptions and then it is just a practice of the test. So we just answer the questions and see if we got the right answer. It does not explain why we may get the wrong answers. AVRO explains why we got the wrong answer. I think that this is very important (Chang-ho).

*Openness to Alternative Forms of TOEFL Preparation*

The participants were asked if they used authentic materials in addition to TOEFL preparation manuals to help them prepare for the TOEFL. The participants were somewhat divided on this issue. While the majority of the participants used authentic materials, a significant percentage of the participants did not. The participants who used authentic materials indicated that they do so to: i) improve their reading speed; ii) increase their vocabulary; iii) improve their listening skills; and iv) become aware of topics presented in the reading section. The participants who did not use authentic materials tended to view using authentic materials as an inefficient way of improving their TOEFL score. I first consider the comments of the participants who use authentic materials: then I consider the participants who do not use authentic materials.

The focus group participants were asked if they believed a person should read and/or listen to many authentic materials in order to do well on the TOEFL. Figure 3.3 shows that 64% of the participants indicated that they believed it was useful to use authentic materials and 36% of the participants indicated that they did not believe that using authentic materials was useful.
Figure 3.3 - Beliefs about usefulness of authentic materials to do well on the TOEFL.

The participants that use authentic materials gave four main reasons for doing so. They believe that reading authentic materials helps them improve their reading speed, which they argue is very important for success on the TOEFL:

Yes, the newspaper is good for increasing our reading speed. (Chang-ho)

Yes, because the articles in TOEFL are more like authentic materials. So I think that if we read magazines and articles we can increase our reading speed and learn a lot of the vocabulary that is in the TOEFL reading section. (Mi-na)

Some of the participants indicated that they understand the TOEFL reading passages when they have an unlimited amount of time to study them but find it difficult when they are under the time pressures of a TOEFL test. They believe that reading authentic materials is a way of improving their reading comprehension skills when reading at a quicker pace. For instance,

I think that we cannot understand when we have to read fast in the TOEFL test unless we have been reading a lot of other materials, like articles and books. So I think it is very important to read other materials. In the TOEFL test we don’t have much time, so the best way is to read as many English materials as possible (Suk-hyun)
Some of the participants indicated that their teachers do not spend much time helping them to develop their reading skills. Reading, which is often assigned as homework, usually includes a combination of authentic materials and preparation manuals. The participants mentioned newspapers, magazines and journal articles, and novels as their sources of authentic reading materials:

Yes, through magazines and newspapers I can improve my reading speed and learn a lot of new vocabulary. Usually in ESL schools, they don’t teach about the reading section. They just give us some materials and assign them as homework. So we have to study alone. So I use authentic materials to help me improve my reading section. My teacher said that if you want to improve reading skills you should concentrate on reading these types of materials (Suk-Jin)

To improve in the Reading Section I read novels. My private tutor recommends novels to me and I read those. I find that reading these books improves my reading speed. It helps me read faster on the TOEFL test. (Dong-wook)

The participants who used authentic materials tended to see them as a good way of increasing their vocabulary. The quotations from participants above mentioned that they believe that reading authentic materials not only helps to increase reading speed but also it is a good way of gaining new vocabulary. Some participants also indicated that using authentic materials is a good way of developing skills for dealing with new and difficult vocabulary. They develop ways of either guessing what a word means or skipping a word without losing the meaning of the passage:

If you get used to reading articles you develop a skill for guessing the meaning even if there is a word that you do not know. So this is important for TOEFL. Even though you get a difficult article you can guess the main idea if you are experienced in doing this. (Hee-seung)

The third reason participants gave for using authentic materials was to improve their listening skills. Some participants use the TV as a way of improving their listening skills.
They argued that even if they could not understand an entire show they could follow along. They felt that this gradually improved their listening skills, for example:

Firstly, to improve my listening comprehension I watch television, especially CityCom and movies. Actually I didn't understand all of them. but some parts of the shows I can understand. Whenever I understand a part of a show I am very happy. I feel that my English skills are getting better. (Dong-wook)

Other participants listened to radio programs as a way of developing their listening skills. One participant pointed out that he believes the radio is superior to TV for developing TOEFL skills because the radio announcers tend to have better enunciation:

In my case, the radio programs are very helpful. Sometimes I do not know what they are saying but I can guess the main idea of what they are saying. This is very helpful for TOEFL listening. I find that radio announcers speak very clearly and correctly so that is why radio is better for me than TV. (Chang-ho)

One participant indicated that listening to authentic materials is the only method that she uses to improve her listening skills for the TOEFL. However, her comments were atypical of the participants as a whole. Perhaps this is because she had lived in Canada for an extended period of time:

For me I do not listen to any cassettes or listening things for TOEFL. I just listen to the radio and watch TV everyday. I think that this is better than listening to the TOEFL cassette for preparing for the TOEFL. Once you know the tricks of the TOEFL listening then it is better to just listen to radio or TV. This improves both my general listening and my TOEFL listening score. (Mi-na)

Another reason given for using authentic materials was that authentic materials help develop awareness of the TOEFL reading and listening topics, which are generally bound in a North American cultural setting. The argument was raised that familiarizing oneself with the North American culture, through authentic media, is a helpful way of preparing for the TOEFL.
I think that it is helpful to know about the topics that are on the TOEFL. I think that if I am familiar with the topics then it is much easier to understand the TOEFL reading. If I have read about something in the newspaper before I see it on the TOEFL then I can understand it much better. In the TOEFL there are topics like art or science that we should know about. If we don’t know about those, then it is much harder to take the TOEFL. (Jin)

In sum, the data show that even though 65% of the participants indicated that they use authentic materials to help them develop their language skills for the TOEFL, they do so for a variety of reasons and with a variety of goals in mind. The 36% of the participants who do not use authentic materials gave reasons that were often in stark contradiction to the reasons that were given for using authentic materials.

The most typical reason given for not using authentic materials for TOEFL preparation is that TOEFL preparation manuals are a more efficient way of increasing a TOEFL score quickly. Sung-jin’s comments represent this position well:

I never read magazines or newspaper because I don’t have time. I want to get my TOEFL mark soon. So I think that the fastest way is to just use the TOEFL books. Maybe they [authentic materials] are good but it is not the fastest way. (Sung-jin)

Other participant took issue with the idea that authentic materials are a good way to become familiarized with the TOEFL topics. They argued that there are such a limited number of topics in the TOEFL that the preparation manuals are able to cover them all.

I think that we can get more familiar with the TOEFL test just by using the preparation books. I think that there are not that many topics so the best way is to read all the TOEFL readings. This is much quicker. (Chul-soo)

Another participant went further to argue that the topics that one can find in authentic materials such as newspapers and magazines are so different than the TOEFL topics that they are not useful at all for TOEFL preparation. The argument is that the only way to
ensure that one is covering all TOEFL topics and vocabulary is to use the commercial TOEFL preparation manuals:

I think that the reading in the TOEFL is very different from the reading that we can find in authentic materials. So I don’t think that these are the best way to improve our TOEFL score. Even though you may improve your reading skills the meaning and vocabulary is very different. On the TOEFL test the articles are mostly about American history, and some about science and biology, so I think that these are very different from magazines and newspapers. So I think that it is better to just find as many TOEFL readings as you can and practice with them. (Chang-ho)

In sum, the findings of this section of my inquiry reveal that the participants were quite divided in their attitudes towards using authentic materials as a way of preparing for the TOEFL. Even those who reported using authentic materials tended to offer different and, at times contradictory reasons for doing so.

Preference for Native Versus Non-Native TOEFL Preparation Teachers

The participants were asked if they thought it was better to have a native English-speaking TOEFL preparation teacher or a Korean TOEFL preparation teacher, who would assumingly not be fluently bilingual (as is the general case in Korea). A majority of the participants agreed that a Korean TOEFL teacher would be better than a native English speaking TOEFL teacher.

Figure 3.4 shows that 58% of the participants believed that it would be better to have a Korean TOEFL preparation teacher rather than a native English-speaking one. An additional 21% of the participants believed that for the most part they would prefer a Korean TOEFL preparation teacher but that a native English-Speaking teacher would be helpful in a limited way. Thus 79% of the participants indicated that a Korean TOEFL preparation teacher is better than a native English-speaking teacher. Conversely, 14% of
the participants believed that for the most part a native English-speaking teacher is better, however, in some areas a Korean teacher would be preferable. No participants argued that a Native English-speaking would be better, without exception, than a Korean teacher. In additions. 7% of the participants said that it does not matter whether the teacher is Korean or English-native speaking.

Figure 3.4 – Beliefs about native speaking versus non-native speaking TOEFL preparation teachers.

The participants who preferred a Korean teacher without qualification offered two reasons for their belief. The first reason was that they felt they benefited from a crosslingual approach to TOEFL preparation. The participants indicated that they find it easier to understand vocabulary and grammar rules when they are explained in Korean and that English-only explanations are often too complex to understand. For instance,

I think that the TOEFL teacher should not be a native speaker because when I take the TOEFL classes in our school sometimes I didn’t understand my teachers explanations, so I asked her why the answers is [correct]. Even though I heard her explanation, I sometimes I did not understand perfectly. So, at that time I thought that I need a Korean English teacher. (Dong-wook)
No, they don't need to be native speakers. Korean students do not understand all the details that the English teacher gives us but when a Korean teacher teaches us we can understand perfectly. (Suk-gu)

The second reason that participants gave for preferring a Korean TOEFL preparation teacher is that Korean teachers know how to prepare for standardized language tests much better than native English speaking teachers do. This is because they believe the Korean education system prepares people to take standardized tests in a way that the North American education system does not. Participants believed that they benefit from their teachers' experience as a language test-taker:

When we go to a private school to take a TOEFL class we want to improve our score, so the teachers, especially the Korean teachers, give us special skills to help us improve our TOEFL score – like how to solve problems. Native speakers do not need to take the TOEFL test, so I don't think that they have enough information about the skills. Korean teachers have been studying for years so they can give more information than native speakers. (Mi-na)

The participants argued that even though native speaking teachers are more proficient in the language, they are unfamiliar with how to master a standardized test. Some participants believed that people they know with less language proficiency are achieving higher TOEFL scores than they are because of the skill of their Korean TOEFL preparation teachers:

I think, after going back to Korea, I will take a TOEFL class in a Korean private school … Korean teachers know about the skills of TOEFL and for that reason I think that there is an advantage. Some of my friends who speak almost no English have gotten scores of almost 600 with the help of Korean teachers. (Sung-chul)

For the most part, the participants who prefer a Korean teacher, but with some exceptions, did not disagree with the above opinions. Some indicated that they felt a native speaking teacher would be beneficial in studying for the listening section:
I think to prepare for the listening part the teacher should be a native speaker. For the other parts I think that a Korean teacher is better because sometimes I can’t understand what the native speaking teacher says when they are explaining the vocabulary or grammar. So I think that a Korean teacher is better for this. (Sung-jin)

Other participants indicated that they felt a native speaking teacher is important in preparing for the TOEFL Essay:

I think that we only need a native speaking teacher for the writing section. For the rest of the test I think that Korean teachers can use the materials and teach better than Canadian teachers but they cannot help us with our writing. Most Korean teachers cannot really write in English very well and they don’t have a [feel] for the language. (Sun-hee)

While no participants believed that it was unconditionally better to have a native speaking TOEFL teacher than a Korean TOEFL teacher, some participants indicated that for the most part, they preferred an English native speaking TOEFL teacher. Three arguments were made for this opinion. First it was argued that there are serious limitations to learning vocabulary through a crosslingual approach:

When I was in Korea my teachers could not explain exactly some of the vocabulary, but here the teachers always knows the vocabulary and can explain it well. Also I think that it is helpful to learn the English explanations of vocabulary instead of just the Korean word. Sometimes here are four or five words in English that have only one word in Korean, so this is very confusing. (Jin)

The second argument is that having a native-speaking teacher is better for developing listening skills:

The problem is the listening part. Korean teachers can teach grammar and reading but the listening part is very difficult for them. Before I had native speaking teachers, I could not understand what a person said even when I knew the word. So I think having a native speaking teacher is very good for the listening section. (Chang-ho)
The third argument is that non-native teachers do not have the necessary cultural familiarity to explain the correct meaning of vocabulary items or to explain the context of situations found in the listening section:

I think that language is from the culture and so Korean teachers do not really understand some expressions and ideas that are in the TOEFL. I think that if a native speaker has some skills on how to teach Koreans students to prepare for the TOEFL, then he is much better than a Korean teacher because he can explain exactly what the meaning is, when to use it and how to use it. But the Korean teacher usually only explains how to get the right answer. (Chang-ho)

It is important to note that all of the participants who felt a native-speaking teacher was better than a Korean teacher had been in Canada for a relatively long period of time.

In sum, the findings from this section indicate that the participants believed that they benefit from having a Korean teacher prepare them for the TOEFL. Their beliefs seem to stem from the perception that Korean teachers can do a better job at giving them the necessary test-taking skills and strategies to achieve a high TOEFL score.

Attitudes Towards TOEFL Preparation

The second research question examines the participants' overall attitudes towards TOEFL preparation. I will present the data from the research instruments in five sections: a) importance of the TOEFL for the participants; b) participants' perceptions of difficulty; c) TOEFL preparation and general language ability; d) participants' attitudes towards TOEFL as a test of language proficiency; and e) participants' overall satisfaction with their TOEFL preparation methods.
Importance of the TOEFL

The participants were asked questions concerning how important the TOEFL was for their futures and why they were taking the TOEFL. The key findings from this section were that: i) achieving a high score on the TOEFL is very important for most of the participants; and ii) the participants were taking the TOEFL for a variety of reasons.

Figure 3.5 shows that 72% of the participants believed that a high TOEFL is very important for them. 14% believed that a high TOEFL score is somewhat important for them and 14% believed that a high score is not very important for them.

![Figure 3.5 - Importance of a high TOEFL score.](image)

The participants indicated four purposes for taking the TOEFL. Figure 3.6 shows that 36% of the participants were taking the TOEFL to enter a university in North America. 21% indicated that they are taking the test to enter a university in Korea. 29% of the participants said that they need a TOEFL score to get a job in Korea, and 14% said that they were taking the TOEFL to improve their general English language ability. The results from this question in the focus groups were confirmed by the results from the identical question in the background information sheet. The only difference between this
question and the question from the background information sheet is that the participants could choose more than one answer when filling out the background information sheet question. Appendix M compares the results of these two data sources as a way of internally verifying the findings of this study.

![Pie chart showing reasons for taking the TOEFL](image)

**Figure 3.6** – Reasons for taking the TOEFL.

The participants that indicated that a high TOEFL score was very important for them gave several reasons for needing a high TOEFL score. All of the participants that indicated that they wanted to go to a North American university were amongst those that said a high TOEFL score was very important for them. For example.

The reason I am taking the TOEFL is to get into a university in Canada. So for me it is very important to get a high mark so that I can go to university. So I have to get the minimum score to get into a university. Usually the university wants us to get a 600. (Suk-gu)

I want to study more in the United States and they require that I speak English. They want me to get a minimum 600 points on the TOEFL. So, for me it is very important. (Chang-ho)

Most of the participants who said they were planning to attend a university in Korea believed that a high TOEFL score is very important for them. For instance.
I need a TOEFL score to go to college in Korea. So it is very important (Min-sue)

I think it is really important because I want to go to graduate school in Korea after I finish my university. The graduate school that I want to go to needs a really high TOEFL score. (Young-hee)

Most of the participants that would be using their TOEFL scores to get a job in Korea, also said that a high TOEFL score was very important for their careers. For example,

Getting a high score is very important for me because I want to enter a company in Korea. The first thing that I need to get a job is to pass the document test. One of the most important things for me to have is a high score on the TOEFL. If I get a high score on the TOEFL I will have a good chance to get a job in Korea. (Chul-soo)

In my case getting a high mark on the TOEFL test is absolutely important. If I get a low mark I can’t survive in Korea because I can’t get a good job. (Sung-jin)

The participants that indicated that a high TOEFL score was somewhat important were those who could benefit from a high TOEFL score but would not necessarily be excluded from their career path without a high score. For instance,

The reason that I prepare for the TOEFL is because I want to be an English teacher in Korea I need to pass the special exam. If I have a 600 score in the TOEFL then I can get extra points on that exam. [Her exam score will somehow be averaged into her TOEFL score, producing a higher mark.] (Mi-na)

The 14% of the participants who said that they were taking the TOEFL to improve their language ability are, in fact, the same 14% who said that it was not very important for them to achieve a high score on the TOEFL. For example,

I don’t need the TOEFL right now, so I just want to improve my English. I am just taking it to find out where I am now but I am sure that it will help me a lot in the future. (Jin)

In sum, the data from this section indicate that a high TOEFL score was important for most of the participants in my study. In addition they show that only 36% of the
participants were taking the exam to enter a North American university; the other 64% of the participants were taking the TOEFL for other reasons.

*Perception of Difficulty*

The participants were asked to rank order from most difficult to least difficult the four TOEFL sections and discuss why they chose to rank the section the way they did. The salient findings from this section are that: i) the listening section was considered the hardest section of the TOEFL; ii) the TOEFL Essay was ranked the second hardest; and iii) the structure section was ranked easiest.

Figure 3.7 shows that the listening section was ranked the overall most difficult section, with 50% of the participants ranking it most difficult and 22% of the participants ranking it second most difficult. Thus in total 72% of the participants ranked the listening section as above average difficulty.

The TOEFL Essay was ranked the second most difficult section, with 28% ranking it most difficult and 44% ranking it second most difficult. Thus 72%, an amount equal to the listening section, ranked the TOEFL Essay as above average difficulty.

The structure section was ranked the easiest section of the TOEFL. Sixty-four percent of the participants ranked the structure section as the easiest section. and 22% of the participants ranked the structure section third most difficult. Thus 86% of the participants found the structure section below average difficulty.
Figure 3.7 – Ranking of the four TOEFL sections by difficulty.

Overall, the participants indicated that the listening section was the most difficult section of the TOEFL. They pointed out that even though they spend a great deal of time studying this section they still find it very difficult. For instance.

The listening part is the most difficult. I find that I practice listening a lot but it is very difficult for me. (Suk-hyun)

However, the listen section is still very difficult. If I look at the transcript I can understand everything but they speak to quickly or in a relax way so I cannot understand their pronunciation. So now I study listening comprehension for about two hours a day. It is certainly the hardest for me. (Chang-ho)

The most cited reason for this is that some participants felt that their oral comprehension skills are the skills most neglected in the Korean education system:

I think listening is most difficult. Before I came here I couldn’t understand anything that I heard. (Chul-soo)

For me the listening section is the hardest. I am not good at listening skills. I have never studied for the listening section. Because when I went to high school there was no listening section on the entrance exam. So it was very difficult at first for me to do the listening section of the TOEFL. (Dong Wook)

Several participants felt that parts of the listening section were more difficult than other parts. At several points during the focus groups, participants mentioned that they
found the third part of the listening section, the mini-lectures, more difficult than the first two parts. For example.

I think listening part. I find that the third section of the listening is really difficult for me. In the third section we have to listen for a long time. I find that very difficult. (Young-hee)

The participants also rated the TOEFL Essay as a difficult section of the TOEFL. A lack of writing experience was cited as a main reason for this opinion. Some participants indicated that in Korea they had absolutely no practice to writing in English. For instance.

When I study in Korea I never had to write anything. I just had to pick the answer from the questions. So I had no experience in writing English ever. Maybe in high school or university, I never even wrote one full sentence in English. So that is why I think it is the most difficult. (Suk-gu)

In addition to having no experience writing, some participants indicated that they are intimidated by writing because they believe that writing incorporates many other language skills. They believe that before one can write well, they must have mastered a level of vocabulary and grammatical competence. For instance.

I think that the writing section is the hardest. I think that writing is everything about English. Reading, vocabulary and also grammar are important for writing. For me writing an essay is very difficult. Having enough variety of vocabulary is very difficult for me. Also I find that I do not know what to write about some topics because I have never thought about that topic before, so I think that it is a little unfair. (Sun-hee)

The other reasons why the participants said they find the TOEFL Essay difficult are because they find that they do not necessarily have an opinion about every TOEFL Essay topic and several participants indicated that 30 minutes were not enough time to write a TOEFL Essay. This seems to be an area of some frustration for the participants:
I think writing is the most difficult part. I can get better in the other areas by studying. But for the writing I have to write an essay in 30 minutes and it is really a lot of pressure and it is difficult for me to do. If I have no idea about the Topic then it is really hard to write. Sometimes, I just have no opinion about the writing question because maybe I think that it is a stupid question and not very important but still I have to write an essay about it. I think that this is really hard. (Mi-na)

The participants rated the structure section the easiest section of the TOEFL. The main reason cited was that they have had extensive exposure to English grammar in their educational backgrounds. The participants pointed out that the Korean educational system places great emphasis on the development of grammatical skills from middle school through to the university entrance exams:

I think that the grammar section is the easiest section for me. In the Korean university entrance exam, I just studied grammar and vocabulary. So I think that all Korean students who study for the TOEFL agree that grammar is the easiest. (Dong-wook)

The structure section is the easiest. From middle school, high school and university I studied grammar. So it is very easy for me. But this is all we learned in high school. The grammar section was really almost worth about 60% of the university entrance exam. (Chang-ho)

In addition to having extensive practice with grammatical skills it was also pointed out that the study manuals help make mastering the structure section fairly easy:

I think the grammar section is easiest. If you just study you can increase your score easily. (Sung-jin)

In sum, the findings from this section of the research show that the participants believed that the listening section is the most difficult section of the TOEFL, the TOEFL Essay is the second most difficult section, and the grammar section is the easiest section of the TOEFL.
TOEFL Preparation and General Language Ability

The participants were asked if they felt that their general language ability, as defined in Chapter 2 of this thesis (see p.36), was improving by preparing for the TOEFL. All participants believed that they are improving their general language ability at least somewhat. However, the extent to which each participant felt that their general language ability was improving varied greatly among the group.

Figure 3.8 shows that 36% of the participants indicated that they believed their general language ability was improving. In contrast, 64% of the participants argued that they were improving their general language ability only in specific language skills.

![Pie chart showing opinions about improving general language ability](image)

Figure 3.8 – Opinions about improving their general language ability by preparing for the TOEFL.

Figure 3.9 illustrates that of the 64% of the participants that indicated that they were only improving in specific language skills, 44% said they believed they were improving their reading skills. 22% believed that they were improving their listening skills. 22% believed they were increasing their vocabulary, and 22% believed that their writing skills were improving.
The participants who felt that they were improving their overall general language ability tended to be the participants that had been in Canada for a relatively longer period of time. In general, they tended to believe that the TOEFL gives them a goal or a reason for studying English and as such they benefit from the concentrated effort that they place in studying for the TOEFL:

Yes, I think so because even if it is for the TOEFL I should study grammar, vocabulary and listening. Even though it is a little different from the newspapers and TV, for me it is a foreign language and so it is helpful. Most importantly is the vocabulary. I think that I am learning a lot of new and useful vocabulary by studying for the TOEFL. (Chang-ho)

I think that my general language ability is being improved a lot. I think that we study so much for the TOEFL, so our ability is being improved in listening and reading and even speaking. It helps us to study English harder I think. We have a goal. Also I think that I speak much more grammatically correct now that I have been studying for the TOEFL. Before I just concentrated on saying what I wanted but now I can speak using the right grammar. (Jin)

Improvement in reading skills was mentioned by many of the participants, both from the group that felt they were improving their overall language ability and the group that felt they were only improving in specific language skills. This following comment is taken from a participant that indicated that his overall language ability was improving:

Now, I find that I can read the newspaper much better. I used to hate reading the newspaper because it was too hard but now I can read the
paper much better because I have learned a lot of new vocabulary. Also I think that my listening is improved a lot. (Chang-ho)

In contrast this comment is from a participant who believes that TOEFL preparation is only helping her to improve her reading and grammar skills:

I think that TOEFL doesn’t do anything for speaking. I have improved my reading and grammar but except that TOEFL doesn’t really do anything. (Suk-hyun)

These next three quotations exemplify how participants indicated that TOEFL preparation is only helping them improve specific language skills:

I write an essay every other day and that is helpful for me. But just that one. I think that the other parts don’t really help my language ability. (Young-hee)

I think that it helps my structure but I don’t think it is helping me with anything else. (Sun-hee)

In my case. the writing and listening are being improved by taking the TOEFL test but the other things, well I don’t know. (Chul-soo)

As the above quotations indicate that while overall the majority of the participants felt that they were improving their general language ability at least somewhat, they also felt that any improvement in their language ability was limited to specific skills development. Less than half of the participants felt that TOEFL preparation improved their overall language ability.

TOEFL as a Test of Language Proficiency

The participants were asked if they believed that TOEFL is a good measure of English language proficiency. The majority of participants indicated that they believed the TOEFL was a good test of English for academic purposes.
Figure 3.10 shows that 57% percent of the participants believed that the TOEFL is a good test of English for academic purposes, and 7% believed at the TOEFL was a good judge of language proficiency in general. Thus 64% of the participants would agree that the TOEFL is a good indicator that a candidate has the necessary English language ability to function in a North American university. Only 36% of the participants felt that the TOEFL was not a good test of language proficiency.

![Diagram showing beliefs about the TOEFL](image)

**Figure 3.10** – Beliefs about the TOEFL as a measure of language proficiency.

The follow example comment summarizes very well the opinion of the majority of the participants who believed that the TOEFL is a good test of academic readiness but a rather poor judge of English proficiency for the other purposes that it is used for:

Yes. I think it is very good for improving language proficiency. Since people who take the TOEFL are planning to study at a university and the university lectures are different from the everyday life talking. In order to understand what the professor are saying and to get a good score at university we have to study TOEFL, to make ourselves more proficient in English. But besides studying in a university it is not useful. I know that both in Korea and Canada people have to take a TOEFL test sometimes to get a job, like when they are a professional in their country and they want to get a job here. When they start the job they don’t study at the university they just do the job, so I think they should add more speaking, rather than writing or grammar (Min-sue)
Other participants indicated that since the TOEFL covers the areas of academic reading, listening and writing that it is a good test of English proficiency for academic purposes:

I am preparing for the TOEFL to study in an American or Canadian university, so I need a high score in TOEFL. They want to check my ability to study at the university, my ability to listen to professor’s lecture, or read the textbooks, and write the homework assignments. So, in TOEFL there are four sections. So I think it is good for that since academic English is different from common English. (Chang-ho)

The participants seemed to be aware that there is a difference between academic English and everyday practical English. They believe that the TOEFL is a good measure of academic English but not of practical everyday English. For instance,

I think TOEFL is just good for studying at the university. I think to study we need reading skills, which are the most important, so to study at the university you need to understand the difficult materials, and think that it is different from everyday English. I think that the TOEFL is good for measuring the skill of reading and listening to show if someone can study that the university or not. (Mi-na)

More than one participant was under the impression that speaking is not a necessary language skill for success in a North American university, and as such the TOEFL is an adequate measure of language ability. For example,

I think that it is a good test. I think that in the university students don’t need to be able to speak English well when they start university. They can learn to speak while they are here. But the students must know how to read and write and listen to the lectures. So I think that TOEFL is a good test for this. I think that it is difficult but it is important for students who want to go to graduate school. (Young-hee)

Not all of the participants believed that the TOEFL is a good test of academic language proficiency. They offered two main reasons for this belief. The first reason given is that some of the participants believe that a high score on the TOEFL does not necessarily indicate that a person has achieved a sufficient level of English language
proficiency to succeed in a North American university. It was pointed out that many Korean students achieve a high TOEFL score with out being able to speak or write in English:

I don’t think so. In Korea many students who get a good score but they can’t not speak English at all and they can’t really write very well. The TOEFL is helpful but not good enough. (Chul-soo)

In contrast, it was also argued that speaking is an important skill at the university level and that the lack of a spoken English component to the TOEFL makes it a poor test of academic readiness:

I don’t think that the TOEFL is a good test. I don’t think that after we have a good score in the TOEFL that we would be able to do well in a lecture in a university. The problem is that if we cannot speak and understand English well then we cannot communicate with others at the university. (Suk-hyun)

The other reason for the belief that the TOEFL was not a good test of language proficiency is that some participants felt that it is unfairly difficult. The argument was made that a person could in fact have an appropriate level of language proficiency even if they cannot achieve a high TOEFL score:

The TOEFL test is not very good. I think that the vocabulary is too difficult, even for university students. (Sung-jin)

I don’t think so. The TOEFL test is too rushed. Even if we know the answers we may not get the questions right because we do not have enough time. If I had a little more time I would do much better. I would like to read a little slower. I think that TOEFL is more about learning the skill of answering the questions fast than it is about knowing English. People with the skill can do much better than others, even is their English is lower. (Hee-seung)

In sum. the findings from this section show that most of the participants tended to believe that the TOEFL is a good indication of English for academic purposes. Those who did not believe the test is a good measure of English for academic purposes either
argued that the test is flawed in respect to speaking abilities in English or that the test is too difficult.

*Overall Satisfaction with TOEFL Preparation Classes*

The participants were asked if they were satisfied with the methods they use to prepare for the TOEFL. The main findings from this section of the research are that: i) the participants were clearly divided as to their satisfaction with their TOEFL preparation methods; ii) motivation was the primary distinguishing factor between those who were happy and those who were not happy; and iii) participants believe that their study methods are significantly influenced by the TOEFL.

The participants who were unhappy with the way they prepare for the TOEFL argued that they would prefer a method of TOEFL preparation that helped them not only increase their TOEFL score but also helps improve their overall language ability. On the other hand, the participants that were happy with their current method of TOEFL preparation felt that they were using the most expedient method for achieving a high TOEFL score.

Figure 3.11 shows that 50% of the participants indicated that they were not happy with their method of TOEFL preparation. 43% of the participants indicated that they were happy with their method of TOEFL preparation and 7% indicated that they did not have sufficient information to form an opinion on this question.
Yes, I am happy

No, I am not happy

I don't know

50%

43%

Figure 3.11 – Overall satisfaction with TOEFL preparation methods.

The participants that were not happy with the way they were preparing for the TOEFL indicated that TOEFL classes tend to put a great deal of effort into memorizing and mastering test-taking skills and little energy into become more proficient in English. They argued that while their preparation method may be an effective way to improve their TOEFL score they are disappointed that there efforts are not translating into greater language proficiency. For example,

No. I am not happy. I think that the problem for me is that I need to improve my real ability of English. I think that in my TOEFL class we try to get a higher score just through practice. I want to improve my real English ability to help improve my TOEFL score. Sometimes my teacher says, don't listen to the whole sentence; just try to pick the main words. Then they show us which words to listen for and which to not listen for. They teach just how to pick the right answer. But I would like to learn how to understand everything and then I would really know the answer. So, if I just want a score then the method I use is very effective. But I need to learn English too, so that method is not very good. (Sung-chul)

I am not happy with this way. I like English and I want to speak English very well. But preparing for the TOEFL is very different. I don’t know Korean grammar perfectly and I am Korean. (Chul-soo)

Other participants pointed out that their method of TOEFL preparation is boring. They argued that while they enjoy studying English they find TOEFL preparation a real chore. For instance,
I have been in a TOEFL class for two months, and these days I am really getting bored. We just go to the same classroom and just play the tape. It is very difficult to stay in the class for one hour. (Min-sue)

Just less than half of the students said that they were satisfied with the approach they use to prepare for the TOEFL. This could be due to any number of factors including teaching and learning styles. However, the participants cited as the main reason for being satisfied with their method of TOEFL preparation that they were improving their scores on the TOEFL in a relatively short amount of time:

For me, I am satisfied with my approach because I've just studied TOEFL for three months but my TOEFL score is getting better. But sometimes when I see something that is helping another person improve their score I try to use it in my own studying. I try to mimic the way that other people study to see if it will help me. For example, I read novels to improve my reading. Also, I use the audio desk at the library, which was a recommendation from my friend. (Dong-wook)

It was also argued that the nature of the TOEFL (i.e. its assessment methods) dictates the method that should be used to prepare for it. Since it is possible to get a high score in the TOEFL by using test-mastering techniques the participants argued that they should exploit these methods. For example,

I think that unless the TOEFL is changed then I am happy with my way, which is to use the manuals because the TOEFL has a particular format and if we get use to it then we can do very well on the TOEFL. So if I study skills and strategies, I believe I can get a high mark. (Mi-na)

It was also argued by several participants that their method of studying for the TOEFL is the fastest way to achieve a high score. They were engaged in their present TOEFL preparation method because they do not have time to gain 'true' English language proficiency. For instance,

Yes, because in my case, I don't think that I have enough time to really improve my English so I am trying to improve my score by learning the TOEFL techniques. I think that if I had time, I would like to improve my
English and then just take the test. But I need the score soon, so I am trying to study this way. (Hee-seung)

In sum, participants' satisfaction with their method of TOEFL preparation seems to depend greatly on their expectations of a TOEFL preparation class. Those who see TOEFL preparation as simply a vehicle to achieving a high TOEFL score tended to be satisfied. Those who expected to improve their overall language proficiency were less satisfied. In addition the participants indicated that their preparation methods are significantly influenced by the nature of the test itself.
Chapter 4

Discussion

The goal of this chapter is to discuss the principal findings of the research. To accomplish this, the trends and differences that emerged from the findings in the third chapter of the thesis are examined in light of the three main topics raised in the first chapter of the thesis. To recapitulate, the three main topics from the first chapter include: the concept of test validity; the TOEFL and stakeholders involved in the TOEFL; and sociocultural influences on language learning. The discussion will be presented in six sections for the first research question and five sections for the second research question as established in chapters two and three.

Preparation Practices

In general, the findings from the first research question suggest that these Korean adults tend to prepare for the TOEFL in a fairly similar manner. However, in several respects there were significant differences in the way that individual participants indicated that they prepared for the TOEFL. The next six sections of this chapter will examine the similarities and differences in the way that the participants said they prepared for the TOEFL, consider why trends do or do not seem to exist, and where relevant, discuss the significance of these similarities and differences in light of the relevant literature discussed in the first chapter of the thesis.
General Preparation Practices

For the 14 Korean learners of English I can conclude that: i) TOEFL preparation goes beyond the classroom; and ii) my research instruments were relevant to the participants’ activities in preparing for the TOEFL.

On the whole, the participants tended to indicate that a significant portion of the time that they spent studying for the TOEFL was outside the context of a formal classroom. This is an important finding because in previous studies of TOEFL preparation (specifically Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Brown, 1995; Hamp-Lyons, 1998) the focus of the research has been on classroom activities. It seems then, that a study with participants such as these, which examines the washback effects from the TOEFL on TOEFL preparation should bear in mind that students preparing for the TOEFL may often do a considerable amount of extracurricular studying.

When asked to discuss how they prepare for the TOEFL the participants raised many of the issues that the research questions then asked in more specific detail. By raising these issues the participants not only demonstrated that they were aware of the various issues involved in TOEFL preparation but that the research instruments I had devised were asking questions relevant to their situations. This helps to verify the validity of the research instruments.

Beliefs about Which Language Skills are Important for TOEFL and Preparation Time Allotted to Individual TOEFL Sections

The findings that emerged from participants’ beliefs, about which language skills are important for TOEFL and the preparation time they allotted to individual TOEFL sections, are noteworthy for three reasons. First the findings help establish that there are
trends and patterns in the way the participants study for the TOEFL. Second, the findings raise questions about the TOEFL as a direct assessment of English language proficiency. The other issue that the findings raise relates to the seeming lack of washback from the addition of the TOEFL Essay to the TOEFL.

The participants indicated that they believed listening was the most important skill for TOEFL and similarly indicated that they spent the most time studying for the listening section. Grammar was rated second most important for the TOEFL and likewise structure was the second most studied for section of the TOEFL. The participants considered writing an unimportant skill for the TOEFL and spent a relatively small amount of time studying for the TOEFL Essay. I believe that the parallel findings from these two sections of my research indicate that a pattern exists in the way the Korean learners study for the TOEFL.

The participants tended to agree that listening was the most important skill for TOEFL because they view listening as very demanding and felt that they were lacking listening skills. This also seems to be the reason why they tended to study the most for the listening section. They also seemed to agree that listening was a skill that was lacking in their English education in South Korea. The reason for participants focusing on listening may be tied to their culture of learning. This idea is also supported by the fact that those participants who had been in Canada for an extended period of time, and as a result had had more exposure to aural language, tended to view listening as a less important skill and spent less of their time studying for this section of the test.

The participants' comments on why they consider grammar an important skill for TOEFL and spent a relatively large amount of time studying the structure section raise an
issue of test validity. It seems that the participants tended to study grammar because they believed that they could easily inflate their TOEFL score by mastering the structure section of the TOEFL. This raises the question of whether the methods of the TOEFL are direct assessments of English language proficiency. If the participants were engaging in activities that they thought helped increase their score without increasing their language proficiency then the TOEFL may not be effective as a direct assessment of language proficiency. I will return to this issue throughout the discussion in this chapter as other research findings also raise this and similar issues of test validity.

The lack of importance placed on writing skills by the participants and the relatively small amount of time they spent preparing for the TOEFL Essay is a rather disturbing trend. The participants seem uniformed of the importance of the TOEFL Essay in the TOEFL. In Chapter 1 I mentioned that there is very little emphasis placed on the TOEFL Essay by the writers of the commercially produced TOEFL preparation manuals. Since the research findings show that the participants place great emphasis on these manuals this may help explain why these students do not place much importance on the TOEFL Essay. In addition, participants also stated that writing was not part of their educational background in Korea. A lack of experience with writing may have made the participants feel that they are ill equipped to handle the writing section so I might speculate that as a result they shied away from it.

This finding is disturbing because it raises doubts as to the effectiveness of making improvements on the TOEFL for the purpose of creating positive washback. In the literature review I pointed out that one of the reasons why ETS (ETS 1999b) gave for developing the computer-based TOEFL was to create positive improvement on TOEFL
instruction. Indeed, the addition of the TOEFL Essay is the most obvious difference between the paper-based and computer-based TOEFL. However, the participants suggested that this change has made virtually no impact on their TOEFL preparation practices. Thus, at least for these participants, the introduction of the TOEFL Essay has had very little washback effect.

**Attitudes Towards TOEFL Preparation Manuals**

The fact that all participants reported using TOEFL preparation manuals is an important finding for this study and raises two issues. The first issue that is raised is the source of the participants' patterns and trends for TOEFL preparation. The second issue returns to test validity.

As observed, there are patterns and trends to the way that the participants prepare for the TOEFL. While these patterns tend to fit the participants' cultures of learning, they also fit the format of the TOEFL preparation manuals. The participants' TOEFL preparation practices match very closely with the format of TOEFL preparation manuals described in the first chapter of this thesis. I believe that this finding demonstrates, at least for these participants, the importance that preparation manuals play in the design and structure of TOEFL preparation instruction, and as such they affect the test's washback.

One of the main reasons why the participants indicated that they use TOEFL preparation manuals is that the materials help them develop testwiseness strategies. They believe that these skills are crucial for success on the TOEFL. As indicated in Chapter 1, Messick argues that "a validated proficiency test can be subverted by test preparation practices or coaching emphasising testwiseness strategies that might increase test scores"
without correspondingly improving the skills measured by the test” (Messick, 1996, p.246). If the participants are using these manuals to help master the test method and not the test content, this is an issue of test validity. I will return to this issue again when I discuss participants’ preference for Korean TOEFL preparation teachers.

**Openness to Alternative Forms of TOEFL Preparation**

Findings about participants’ openness to alternative forms of TOEFL preparation reveal that participants’ individual choices, preferences, and experiences affect the way they prepare for the TOEFL. Before conducting this study, I had assumed that most of the participants would not be open to using alternative methods for TOEFL preparation. My assumption was based on the perception that participants would be more comfortable, given their educational backgrounds, using traditional approaches to TOEFL preparation such as commercially produced TOEFL preparation manuals. While some participants did not believe that going outside the traditional methods of TOEFL preparation was useful for them, the majority believed that using authentic materials in addition to TOEFL preparation manuals was a good way of improving their TOEFL score. What makes these findings even more interesting is that the reasons and motivations of the participants for using authentic materials for TOEFL preparation varied considerably from one participant to another.

Openness to alternative forms of TOEFL preparation may have to do with participants’ personal experiences and the style of teaching that they have been exposed to both in Canada or in Korea. It seems that, for these participants, the acceptance of non-traditional methods of TOEFL preparation has very much to do with their personal experience, educational exposure and the personal motivations.
Preference for Korean TOEFL Preparation Teachers

This topic raises two significant issues. The first is that the participants’ tendency to prefer Korean TOEFL preparation teachers seems to stem from the belief that the traditional Korean methods of English language test preparation are the most effective way to achieve a high score on the TOEFL. The second is that these preparation practices have an impact on the consequential validity of the TOEFL.

About half of the participants tend to believe that since the Korean education system prepares people to take standardized tests, Korean teachers know how to prepare for standardized language tests better than do native English-speaking teachers who have not been educated in this type of test-taking culture. In addition, most participants believed that they benefit from their teachers’ experience as a language test-taker. They argued that even though English-native speaking teachers are more proficient in the language, they are unfamiliar with how to prepare for a standardized test. In this respect the participants seem to be influenced by the culture of learning that they were educated in.

At least to some extent, the preference for Korean teachers arose because the participants were actively trying to master the TOEFL. Several of the participants indicated that they would probably take more TOEFL preparation classes when they return to Korea. Again this raises the issue of the extent to which the TOEFL is a useful measure of English language proficiency for this group of participants. If the participants and their teachers are successfully subverting the test (by attending to issues of test method different from those intended by the test designers) then the value of their TOEFL scores as a measure of English language proficiency is called into question.
Attitudes Towards TOEFL Preparation

The data about attitudes towards TOEFL preparation reveal that the participants tended to be slightly less similar in their attitudes towards TOEFL preparation than they were in their actual TOEFL preparation practices. While several common attitudes towards the TOEFL emerged from the data, there were also a number of differences in the participants’ attitudes.

Importance of the TOEFL

The findings concerning the perceived importance of the TOEFL raise two important issues. First the findings re-affirm that the TOEFL is considered very important for the participants’ future academic and work careers. The second issue has to do with the content relevance of the TOEFL for these participants, in so much as the majority of the participants are taking the test for purposes other than entrance into a English speaking North American university.

In Chapter 1 I argued that the TOEFL was fundamentally a high stakes test for the test-takers. This is an important issue for consequential validity, since it is assumed in the literature that washback effects occur in tests which are perceived as important by candidates. The research findings from this study confirm that TOEFL is perceived as a very important test for the participants.

Nearly two-thirds of the participants indicated that they were taking the TOEFL for other reasons than to enter a university in North America. However, the primary purpose of the TOEFL is to assess English for academic purposes, and thus its content may not be relevant to uses outside of North American universities. Indeed, it is an open question as to whether the TOEFL may be a valid measure of English language proficiency for some
of the purposes the participants are being required to take it for (e.g., employment, study at universities in Korea).

*Perception of Difficulty*

The participants' perception of which sections of the TOEFL are most difficult confirm the patterns and trends that emerged in respect to their beliefs about which language skills are important for TOEFL and the preparation time they allotted to individual TOEFL sections. This raises further questions as to the validity of the TOEFL for these participants.

The participants ranked the listening section most difficult, which confirms the findings that listening skills are the most difficult and listening is the section most studied for. On the other hand, the participants indicated that they believed grammar was an important skill for the TOEFL and they spent a relatively large amount of time studying for the structure section of the test. It seems then that because the structure section was rated the easiest section of the TOEFL some participants are actively using the structure section to inflate their TOEFL scores. Some participants openly admitted to these practices.

The participants tended to rank the TOEFL Essay as a difficult section of the TOEFL. Even though the participants believe that the TOEFL Essay is a difficult section of the TOEFL, they rate writing skills as relatively unimportant and tend to dedicate less study time to the TOEFL Essay in comparison to the other TOEFL sections. This attitude raises questions as to the effectiveness, in terms of washback, of the addition of the TOEFL Essay to the TOEFL.
**TOEFL Preparation and General Language Ability**

The participants were quite divided as to the extent to which they believed that studying for the TOEFL was improving their general English ability. While some participants believed that preparing for the TOEFL was a good way to improve language proficiency, the majority felt that it was of limited value. This raises an ethical issue surrounding TOEFL preparation.

My findings concerning the amount of time participants spent on each section of the TOEFL show that most participants were preparing for the TOEFL full time. If the consequences of the TOEFL are that students spend a considerable amount of time studying for this test but do not perceive that they are deriving benefit from their time spent studying in terms of improving their English language ability, then it can be argued that the test, or at least the preparation practices that are being encouraged for the test, are misdirected.

**TOEFL as a Test of Language Proficiency**

Participants' opinion of the TOEFL as a test of language proficiency raise, in my opinion, an ethical issue for TOEFL preparation. Nearly two-thirds of the participants said they believe that a high TOEFL score indicates that a candidate has achieved a sufficient level of English proficiency to function at a North American university. My personal experience as well as several studies that have been conducted show that even with the required TOEFL score ESL university students often do not enter university equipped with a sufficient level of English proficiency (Elson, 1992; Fletcher, & Stern, 1989; Graham J., 1987; Spack, 1997; Waters, 1996; Zamel 1995). One reason for this, as Elson argues, is that the content of the TOEFL is not an accurate representation of the
English that the candidates are required to use when they enter university. Elson argues that “if a test [referring to the TOEFL] is isolated from the reality that the student will experience as a learner, it becomes accordingly less relevant as an assessment tool” (Elson, 1992, p. 116). Reviewing the literature in this area, Graham (1987) points out that the type of language proficiency which can be ascertained from the TOEFL is only one factor that affects foreign language students’ success at an English speaking university. Fletcher & Stern (1989) concluded that:

> Even after students are accepted, their integration into the university community must become a matter of urgency. Clearly, the more effectively they develop their English skills – other things being equal – the more satisfied they will be with their university experience, and the more useful their stay in Canada will be to all concerned (Fletcher & Stern, 1989, p.306)

In a long term case study of a Japanese university student studying at an American university, Spack (1997) found that even though the student had achieved a mark of 640 on the TOEFL, a score “which indicates that she could do work at the same level as U.S.-born speakers of English” (Spack, p. 5), she lacked many of the necessary English language skills needed to perform at a university level. In general, all of the above studies agree that achieving the necessary score on the TOEFL does not unambiguously indicate academic readiness in terms of English language proficiency.

This is an ethical issue because the participants may be misled in their own perceptions of their English ability by the high status given to the TOEFL. They believe that since the primary purpose of the TOEFL is to evaluate the English proficiency of international students wishing to study at a North American university (ETS, 1999a), and it is used for these purposes by most university registrars, that it is in fact a good indication of language proficiency for academic purposes. The question is then whether
universities' reliance on the TOEFL as a sole judge of language proficiency is appropriate given the perception that this gives to the candidates.

**Overall Satisfaction with TOEFL Preparation Classes**

The participants' attitudes towards their TOEFL preparation methods depended on their motivation in studying for the TOEFL. Those who saw TOEFL preparation as a means of achieving a high score on the TOEFL seemed to be more satisfied than those who wished to gain a language education from the efforts they place into TOEFL preparation. The participants' comments tended to support the idea that the outcome of TOEFL preparation is an improvement in TOEFL score rather than an increase in English language proficiency.

**Limitations of the Study**

**Sample Group**

The sample group chosen in this study is a unique group of individuals. First, their learning experience is quite different than other Korean students who have not traveled abroad. Second, they had to have enough confidence in their language ability to volunteer for a study being conducted in English. In comparison to other Korean adults of similar age whom I have taught, my impression was that the majority of the present participants were above average English language students. It seems probable to me that this group of participants are more risk-taking and creative in their approach to TOEFL preparation.
Language Barriers

Many of the participants indicated to me that they were not personally satisfied with the quality of the comments that they gave during the focus groups or structured interviews. They believed that having the interview conducted in English was a barrier to expressing the fullness of their thoughts. Future studies would be enhanced by having the interviews take place in the participant’s native language and then translated by a knowledgeable researcher into English.

Limited Knowledge

The participants were students who were preparing to take the TOEFL. Thus their attitudes and beliefs about TOEFL preparation are certainly subject to change as they complete the test and move into the situations in which they will be asked to apply the language proficiency that their TOEFL score indicates they have achieved. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study to the present one that looks at people who have successfully completed the TOEFL and also after some years of study at a university in North America.

Conclusions and Implications of the Study

The findings from this thesis lead to four conclusions. First, the participants’ culture of learning seem to have an effect on the way they prepare for the TOEFL, but individual motivation and experiences also affect these processes. Second TOEFL preparation manuals influence the way the participants said they prepared for the TOEFL. Third, the participants were engaging in certain TOEFL preparation practices that seem to subvert the utility of the TOEFL. Fourth, participants’ preparation practices were significantly
affected by the test methods of TOEFL; i.e. there is a washback effect in such areas as grammar, reading, and listening.

It seems that the participants tended to share very similar TOEFL preparation practices, which do seem to be in keeping with their culture of learning. The participants tend to prefer Korean TOEFL preparation teachers because they believe that the ‘Korean’ system of test preparation is an effective way of increasing one’s score on the TOEFL. They indicated that they spent a great deal of time studying listening because their educational background lacked aural/oral communication skills. They also indicated that they felt they were able to do very well on the structure section of the test because of the emphasis placed on grammar by the Korean public education system.

The importance of TOEFL preparation manuals on the TOEFL practices of the participants seems to be a major finding from this study. The participants said they rely on these textbooks as their main source of information about the TOEFL and study material for TOEFL preparation. The influence of these books should not be underestimated. The participants’ study habits seem to parallel the structure of the TOEFL manuals I described in Chapter 1.

The findings indicate that these participants are studying for the TOEFL in a way that presents challenges to the validity of the test. The participants believe that an important part of their TOEFL preparation education is to learn the test-taking skills that help improve test scores without necessarily improving their language proficiency. These practices seem to subvert the TOEFL as a direct test of English language proficiency.

There seems to be a definite washback effect from the TOEFL. The fact that the participants are willingly studying English full time in a manner that many of them argue
is not improving their general language ability is proof that their language learning activities are significantly affected by the nature of the TOEFL.

The issues raised in this study present some implications for the TOEFL stakeholders. For ETS and its test developers, I believe that the lack of washback from the introduction of the TOEFL Essay on participants' attitudes and practices in terms of developing writing skills is an indication that consideration needs to be given to publicity and orientation when making improvements to the format of the TOEFL. As ETS prepares to introduce the next generation of the TOEFL, dissemination of the structure of the test seem necessary if positive washback on test preparation is a goal of the next TOEFL.

Registrars at universities should be aware that students might be engaging in activities that allow them to increase their TOEFL scores without having the English language proficiency necessary to perform at an academic level. Moreover, registrars should be aware that stringent reliance on the use of TOEFL scores as an indication of language proficiency might be negatively effecting the way students approach language learning.

The writers and publishers of commercially produced TOEFL preparation manuals should be aware that they are considered an authority, at least by the participants in my study, on how to successfully prepare for the TOEFL. The participants relied heavily on these manuals for not only the content of their language studies but also for information on the structure of the test.

Teachers of TOEFL preparation to Korean learners should be aware that the participants indicated that listening was a skill for which they felt they needed more practice, whereas writing is a skills that the participants found difficult yet unimportant for success on the TOEFL.
References


Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

TOEFL Preparation Practices

1. How do you prepare for the TOEFL?

2. Which language skills are most important for TOEFL? Why?

3. Do you think TOEFL Preparation manuals are a good way to prepare for the TOEFL? Why? (How do you use them, and how do you think you benefit from them, give some examples)

4. Do you think a TOEFL preparation teacher should be a native speaker of English? Why?

5. Do you think in order to do well on the TOEFL a person must read and listen to many authentic materials, such as magazines, newspapers, textbooks, novels, TV, or radio?

6. The following data will be gathered through discussions and then a show of hands from the participants.

a) How much time do you spend studying for the structure section of the TOEFL?

b) How much time do you spend studying for the listening section of the TOEFL?

c) How much time do you spend studying for the reading section of the TOEFL?

d) How much time do you spend studying for the writing (TWE) section of the TOEFL?

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6.1 How would you rank the four sections (Listening, Structure, Reading, Writing (TWE) in terms of difficulty?

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6.2 How do you prepare for each section of the test?

Attitudes towards the TOEFL

1. Do you think the TOEFL is a good test of English language proficiency? Why or why not?
2. How important is getting a high mark on the TOEFL for you? Why?
3. What do you want to do with your TOEFL score? (Why are you taking the TOEFL?)
4. Are you happy with the way you prepare for the TOEFL? Or would you prefer a different approach?
5. Do you feel that you are improving your general language ability by preparing for the TOEFL? If so, in what way?
Appendix B

Structured Interview

Attitudes towards TOEFL Preparation

1. The following are seven language skills. Which of these skills are most important for the TOEFL. Rate these skills from 1 to 7 (1 being the most important, 7 being the least important for the TOEFL). Why do you believe this to be true?

   a) ___ Reading Comprehension
   b) ___ Conversation skills
   c) ___ Writing skills
   d) ___ Listening comprehension
   e) ___ Understanding the rules of grammar
   f) ___ Learning new vocabulary

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

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. Which section is the hardest for you? Why?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

4. What about test taking strategies? Do you think that it is helpful to try to practice test-taking strategies, or do you think you can rely on your knowledge of English?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

5. Do you find studying for the TOEFL similar to or different from the way you studied language in high school in your own country?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
6. Do you enjoy studying for the TOEFL? Why / Why not?

Approaches to TOEFL Preparation

1. Do you think that a person must memorize a lot of vocabulary in order to do well on the TOEFL? Why / Why not?

2. Do you think that a person, to do well in TOEFL, must speak with native speakers of English often? Why / Why not?

3. Do you think that a person must memorize many grammar rules in order to do well on the TOEFL? Why / Why not?

4. Do you think that it is important to read or listen to many authentic materials, such as TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, and novels? Why / Why not?

5. How helpful is listening to English radio and TV programs in preparing for the TOEFL?

6. Do you use TOEFL preparation manuals? Which one? What is your opinion of this TOEFL preparation manual?
7. Do you think that this manual is an ideal way of preparing for the TOEFL?

________________________________________________________

8. Which section do you spend the most amount of time studying? Why?

________________________________________________________

9. Which section do you spend the least amount of time studying? Why?

________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Letter of Invitation to Administration

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Michael Roberts. I am a Masters student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE / UT). I am conducting research for my Masters thesis on how students prepare for the TOEFL and what their general attitudes are towards the TOEFL. Since I have experience teaching in Korea, I have chosen to do my study with Korean students studying for the TOEFL here in Toronto.

Understanding students’ attitudes towards the TOEFL and how they prepare for the test is important for both the people who design the test and for the universities that use the test. When their beliefs and attitudes are known, positive changes can be made in the way the test is administered and used. Koreans are the third largest group of TOEFL test takers. However, in past research they seem to be underrepresented. Most studies seem to be on Japanese and Chinese students. This study would bring to the foreground the unique attitudes and beliefs of Korean students.

What would you be expected to do?
I only ask that you allow me to recruit Korean students from your institute to volunteer for this research. All students will be asked to sign a consent form and will be free to withdraw at any time for any reason. Please see the attached letter of invitation to the students and the consent form that they will be asked to sign.

I will need to:
   a) Place a poster in the classrooms where TOEFL is taught.
   b) Distribute letters of invitation to the Korean TOEFL students
   c) Speak with the students who participate in the study, outside of regular class time.

I will not need to:
   a) Disrupt the students during class time.
   b) Interfere in any way with any of the classes at the institute.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.
Thank you.

Michael Roberts
Student Researcher
928 - 6518
miroberts@oise.utoronto.ca

Dr. Alister Cumming
Thesis Supervisor
923 - 6644, ext. 2538
Appendix D

Administrative Consent Form

Dear Sir or Madam:

I agree to allow Michael Roberts, a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), to recruit Korean students from this institute for the purpose of conducting research that will be used as part of his Masters thesis.

I understand that any student who volunteers will sign a letter of consent and may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. I understand that the name of this institute will not be mentioned in the research. This institute will only be referred to as a language institute in the city of Toronto.

The purpose of this study is to develop a descriptive account of the attitudes and beliefs of Korean students towards preparation for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). When my Masters degree is complete you will be able to access the thesis at the following web address, http://www.esldirect.com

I understand that my students' participation is completely voluntary and that they may withdraw my support for this study at any time and for any reason. I understand that this institute will not receive any financial reward for participating in this study.

________________________
Name of Institute

________________________
Name of Administrator

________________________
Position within the Institute

________________________
Signature

________________________
Date
Appendix E

Participants' Background Form

In each of the following questions fill in the blank or circle the answer that best describes you.

1. What country are you from? 

2. Are you: ___ male ___ female

3. How old are you?
   18 to 20  21 to 25  26 to 30  31 and over

4. How many years in total have you studied English for? (Include elementary, middle, high school, 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. How long have you been doing full-time English studies? (full-time: more than 3 hours a day)
   Less than 2 months  2 to 5 months  6 to 11 months  1 to 2 years  more than two years

6. In total, how long did you spend working (full-time) after you completed your schooling? (full-time: more than 6 hours a day)
   Not at all  Less than 1 year  1 to 2 years  3 to 4 years  5 to 6 years  more than 6 years

7. How much time have you spent in an English speaking country? (i.e. Canada, The United States, The United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand)
   Less than 2 months  2 to 5 months  6 to 11 months  1 to 2 years  more than two years
In the following two questions indicate with a check (√) all choices which are true for you.

8. Why are you taking TOEFL?

___ To enter a university or college in Canada or the United States
___ To receive a professional qualification in Canada or the United States
___ To enter a company in my home country
___ To improve my English.
___ Other (please explain)

9. In what ways do you think you will be using English in the future?

___ Business with native speakers
___ Business with speakers of other languages than English
___ Studying at an English speaking university
___ Teaching English
___ Travel
___ Other (please explain)
Appendix F

Participants' Profile

Kim Min-sue is a Korean woman in her late 20s. She has studied English for more than 6 years and has engaged in full-time English studies for 1 to 2 years. After leaving post-secondary education she worked for 3 to 4 years. She is currently living in Canada and has been here for almost two years. She needs to take the TOEFL because she hopes to enter a graduate school here in Canada and then plans to live here as a landed immigrant.

Lee Dong-wook is a Korean man in his early 20s. He has studied English for more than 6 years and has spent a little over six months studying English full-time. He has never worked full-time. He came to Canada almost immediately after he finished his post-secondary education and has been here for a little over six months. He needs the TOEFL, as it is a requirement to enter a company in Korea. He also feels that studying for the TOEFL is a good way to improve his language skills. In the future he will be using English to do business with native English speakers, business with speakers of languages other than English, and for travel.

Lee Sung-chul is a Korean man in his late 20s. He has studied English for more than 6 years and has been studying full-time for the past eight months. He worked for less than one year full-time after completing his post-secondary education. He has been living in Canada for the past eight months. He is taking the TOEFL to improve his English. In the future he believes that he will be using English to do business with speakers of languages other than English.
Lee Chang-Ho is a Korean man in his 30s. He has been studying English for more than 6 years and has been studying full-time for a little more than 6 months. He was employed full-time for more than 6 years after his post-secondary education. He has been living in Canada for a little more than 6 months. He needs to achieve a high score on the TOEFL in order to enter a university in Canada or the United States, and so he believes that his primary use of English will be to study at an English-speaking university.

Kim Mi-na is a Korean woman in her early 20s. She has studied English for more than 6 years and has been studying full-time for the past year and a half. She has no full-time work experience and has been living in Canada for the past year and a half. It is not essential for her to have a high TOEFL score but it is useful. If she achieves a high score on the TOEFL, she can receive an exemption from the English proficiency exam that is required to become an English teacher in Korea. She believes that she will use her English to communicate with native speakers and to teach English.

Han Suk-gu is a Korean man in his early 20s. He has studied English for more than 6 years and has been studying English full-time for more than two years. (He is the only participant to indicate that he studied English full-time while living in Korea.) He has spent less than one year working full-time after his post-secondary education and has lived in Canada for the past 6 months. He hopes to enter a graduate school in North America. He believes that in the future he will use English to study at an English-speaking university as well as to do business with native-English speakers.

Kim Hee-seung is a Korean female in her late 20s. She has studied English for more than 6 years and studied English full-time for the past 5 months. She worked for 5 years
after completing her post-secondary education. She has been living in Canada for the past 5 months. She requires a high score in the TOEFL to enter a university in North America. In the future she believes she will use English to study at an English speaking university, do business with native speakers of English, and teach English in her home country.

Lee Young-hee is a Korean woman in her early 20s. She has studied English for more than 6 years and has been studying English full-time for 6 months to a year. She spent one year working after completing her post-secondary education. She has been living in Canada for 2 to 5 months. She needs a high TOEFL score to enter graduate school in South Korea. In the future she believes she will use English to travel and to do business with native and non-native speakers.

Kim Chul-soo is a Korean man in his late 20s. He has studied English for more than 6 years and has been studying English full-time for 2 to 5 months. He has never worked full-time and has been studying in Canada for 3 to 5 months. He needs a high TOEFL score to enter university in his home country. In the future he believes he will use English to conduct business with native speakers of English.

Min Sung-jin is a Korean man in his late 20s. He has studied English for more than 6 years and has been studying English full-time for 1 to 2 years. He spent less than one year working full-time after completing his post-secondary education and has been living in Canada for 6 to 11 months. He needs a high TOEFL score to enter a company in his home country. In the future he believes he will use English to do business with speakers of languages other than English.
**Kim Jin** is a Korean man in his early 20s. He has studied English for more than 6 years and has been studying full-time for 6 to 11 months. He spent 3 to 4 years working after completing his post-secondary education and has been living in Canada for 1 to 2 years. He is taking the TOEFL to enter a company in his home country and to improve his English.

**Han Suk-hyun** is a Korean woman in her late 20s. She has studied English for more than 6 years and has been studying English full-time for 6 to 11 months. She has not spent any time working full-time and has been in Canada for 6 to 11 months. She needs a high TOEFL score to enter university in Canada. In the future she believes that she will use English to study at an English speaking university.

**Park Sun-hee** is a Korean woman in her late teens. She has studied English for more than 6 years and has been studying English full-time for 6 to 11 months. She worked full-time for less than a year after completing her schooling and has been in Canada for 6 to 11 months. In the future she believes she will use English to do business with native and non-native speakers of English.
Appendix G

Letter of Invitation to Participants

Dear TOEFL preparation students.

My name is Michael Roberts. I am a Masters student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE / UT). I am conducting research for my Masters thesis on how students prepare for the TOEFL and what their general attitudes are towards TOEFL. Since I have experience teaching in Korea, I have chosen to do my study with Korean students studying for the TOEFL here in Toronto.

Understanding your attitudes towards the TOEFL and how you prepare for the test is important for both the people who design the test and for the universities that use the test. When your beliefs and attitudes are known, positive changes can be made in the way the test is administered and used. Koreans are the third largest group of TOEFL test takers. However, in past research they seem to be underrepresented. Most studies seem to be on Japanese and Chinese students. This study would bring to the foreground the unique attitudes and beliefs of Korean students.

What would you be expected to do?

Phase One: You would attend one forty-five minute discussion meeting conducted in English. At this meeting there will be five Korean TOEFL students and myself. I will ask a series of questions that we will discuss as a group. The meeting will be recorded on audiocassette and videocassette.

Phase Two: I will invite one or two people from each group to have a second interview for thirty minutes, so maybe you will not be part of this. This interview will be conducted one-on-one. In this interview, I will ask specific questions about your educational background and your attitudes towards the TOEFL preparation. I will ask people from different backgrounds to participate in the second interview. I will use criteria such as gender, age, level of English, years having studied English, work experience, time spent in a foreign country, reason for taking the TOEFL, and reason for studying English.

You may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. The information you provide will be entirely confidential. Only Michael Roberts, Dr. Cumming and one other OISE professor will have access to the raw data. I will conceal your name and identity in writing up the results of the research by using pseudonyms. Only your ethnicity and gender will be preserved. All video and audiotapes will be erased one year after the thesis has been completed. The transcripts will remain in a locked filing cabinet and then destroyed systematically one year after the thesis is completed. Your present instructors will not have access to the information I collect. For your participation in my study, I will give you a small honorarium of $15.00 as gesture of thanks. I hope you will participate in the study.

Thank you.

Michael Roberts
Student Researcher
928 - 6518
miroberts@oise.utoronto.ca

Dr. Alister Cumming
Thesis Supervisor
923 - 6644, ext. 2538
Appendix H (Korean)

Letter of Invitation to Participants (Korean)

토白领 (TOEFL)을 준비하는 학생들에게
제 이름은 Michael Roberts 입니다. 저는 토론토 대학교, 온타리오 교육대학원 (OISE / UT)에서 석사과정을 하고 있는 중입니다. 석사논문으로서 학생들이 토白领을 어떻게 공부하고 있는지와 그들의 토白领에 대한 일반적인 태도는 어떠한가를 조사하고자 합니다. 제가 한국에서 가르치는 경험이 있기 때문에 연구 대상으로서 토론토에서 토白领을 공부하고 있는 한국학생들을 선택하게 되었습니다.

토白领에 대한 여러분들의 태도와 이 시험을 어떻게 준비하는지를 이해하는 것을 그 시험을 출제하는 기관과 그 시험을 사용하는 대학교의 궁극적 주의가 될 수 있습니다. 여러분들의 생각과 태도가 알려질 때 이 시험의 (TOEFL) 시행을 사용하는데 긍정적인 변화를 가져올 수 있습니다. 한국학생들은 토白领시험을 치르는 여러분들이 음성학생들 중 그 수를 세 번째를 차지하지만 과거의 자료는 연구에서는 한국학생들에 대한 연구를 거의 볼 수 없습니다. 대부분의 연구가 일본인 학생들과 중국인 학생중심으로 이루어져 왔습니다. 그러므로, 저의 이 연구가 한국 학생들의 태도와 생각을 대표하는 기초가 되기를 바랍니다.

이 조사에서 여러분들께서 하는 것들:

부분 1: 여러분들은 사십오분동안의 영어로 이루어지는 인터뷰 형식의 모임에 참여하게 됩니다. 이 모임은 다섯명의 토白领을 공부하고 있는 한국인 학생들과 저 자신으로 구성될 것입니다. 저는 여러분들께 토白领에 관한 여러분의 질문을 하고 여기에 대한 여러분들의 의견을 듣는 것입니다. 이 모임은 비디오 카세트와 일반 오디오 녹음테이프에 녹음이 될 것입니다.

부분 2: 두번째 인터뷰에서는 한 모임의 한명 또는 두명의 학생이 상식분가량의 인터뷰에 초대될 것입니다. 그러므로, 여러분들 모두가 '부분 2'에 참여하게 되는 것은 아닙니다. 이 인터뷰는 개별적으로 이루어지게 될 것입니다. 이 인터뷰에서는 좀더 자세한 여러분의 교육 배경과 토白领 시험 준비에 관한 태도에 관한 질문으로 이루어질 것입니다.

여러분들께서는 언제든지 어떠한 이유로도 이 연구의 참여를 취소할 수 있으며, 이 연구에 주신 여러분들 신상에 관한 정보와 개인에 관한 모든 정보는 완전히 비밀로 보장될 것입니다 (즉, 여러분들의 이름과 학교, 학년 등에 관한 정보). 여러분들을 현재 가르치고 계시는 선생님들께서도 제가 수집한 정보를 일투하하거나 볼 수 없습니다. 제 논문 연구에 참여하는 고마움의 작은 정성의 표시로 여러분들께 작은 선물을 마련했습니다. 여러분들의 많은 참여를 부탁드립니다.

감사드립니다.

Michael Roberts
대학원생 연구원

Alister Cumming 교수님
논문 지도 교수
Appendix I

Focus Group and Interview Consent Form

Dear TOEFL Preparation Student:

Please read the following consent form carefully.

I agree to participate in one or two interviews, which will be conducted in English, on the subject of my attitudes and beliefs about TOEFL preparation.

I understand and agree to the following:

a. The first interview will be conducted in groups of four or five and last approximately forty-five minutes.

b. The second interview will be conducted individually and last approximately thirty minutes.

c. I may not be asked to participate in the second interview.

d. The interviews will be conducted by Michael Roberts, a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), and used as part of his Masters thesis.

e. The information I will provide is confidential and my real name will not be used in the written thesis. Therefore, any contribution I make to this project will remain confidential.

f. The purpose of this study is to develop a descriptive account of the attitudes and beliefs of Korean students towards preparation for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

g. When his Masters degree is completed, Michael Roberts will provide me with access to the thesis at the following web address. http://www.esldirect.com

h. My participation is completely voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

(Please sign the Korean version)
Appendix J (Korean)

Focus Group and Interview Consent Form (Korean)

토플 (TOEFL)을 준비하는 학생들께

아래의 동의서를 주의해서 읽어 주세요.

저는 토플시험 준비에 관한 저의 태도와 생각을 주제로 하는 영어 인터뷰에 한번 또는 두번 참여하는데 동의합니다.

저는 다음의 내용을 이해하고 동의합니다.

a. 첫번째 인터뷰는 다섯명으로 구성되고 약 사십분 동안 이루어질 것입니다.

b. 두번째 인터뷰는 개별적으로 이루어지고 약 삼십분 동안 이루어질 것입니다.

c. 저는 두번째 인터뷰에 참여하도록 요청되지 않을 수도 있습니다.

d. 인터뷰는 토론토 대학교 온타리오 교육대학교(OISE/UT)에서 석사과정 중에 있는 Michael Roberts에 의해서 이루어질 것이며 인터뷰 자료는 석사 논문의 한 부분으로 쓰여질 것입니다.

e. 제가 제공하는 모든 저의 신상에 관한 정보와 개인 사정에 관한 정보는 비밀로 보장될것이며 논문에도 적히지 않을 것입니다.

f. 이 연구의 목적은 토플(TOEFL, Test of English as a Foreign Language) 시험 준비에 관한 한국학생들의 태도와 생각을 설명하고자 하는데 있습니다.


h. 저는 이 연구에 완전히 자발적으로 참여하는 것이며 언제든지 어떠한 이유로도 이 연구의 참여를 취소할 수 있습니다. 저는 이 연구의 참여에 대해 돈이 지불되지 않는다는 것과 하지만, 이 인터뷰에 참석하기 위해 돈을 교환비용은 주어진다는 것을 약합니다.

________________________
성명

________________________
서명

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날짜
Appendix K

Transcript of Focus Group One

Michael Roberts (MR)
Hello and thanks for coming. The first thing I would like you to do is fill out this background information sheet. It's a questionnaire about your background.

{tape stops while students complete background information sheet)

This is a practice for me as it is the first interview. Please take one of these sheets each [list of questions].

This is how it will work. I will ask a question and give you a minute to think about it and then you give me your responses. Please feel free ask me as many questions as you like

First question
How do you prepare for the TOEFL?

Dong-wook
I exercise for listening comprehension section because it takes about one hour. Then I um, I did review about learning from school teacher. assignments or memorizing vocabulary and idioms

MR
Ok. good and Sung-chul

Sung-chul
Yah the same. when I was preparing the TOEFL, and actually my morning class was TOEFL class. and um, I study TOEFL with my TOEFL class. TOEFL teacher, and after the same as this guy, I usually went to the library. to improve my listening part. Especially, I think the Asian country, the Korea and Japan, usually very difficult, especially difficult part is listening. Listening part. I think the grammar section and the reading section we studied ourselves, but listening is very good, and I think we have to listen to the audiotape everyday. everyday. So I try to difficult.. difficult. Ya, still difficult

MR
Sure. it's difficult. And Min-sue, how about yourself

Min-sue
Yah, myself. myself is a little bit different, I take the TOEFL class offered by the Toronto School Board. So there are many immigrant people there, so teacher gives us some kind of test. official test. computerized test, so we prepare TOEFL
With a computerized test

Yes. so I do that and then I prepare at home as well. Yah. what I do.

Take a look at question two. Which language skills are most important for TOEFL? And why? The language skills that I mean are reading, writing, listening, grammar and vocabulary. Which of these are most important for taking the TOEFL test.

Listening is the most important for me because grammar part or reading part, the score is gradually increased by studying myself but the listening section is very difficult. Even though I listen to the audiotape everyday, my listening score is not good, for that reason listening is very difficult for me.

That's interesting, so you are saying that it is not just a matter of studying for the listening section. What about the reading, can you improve the reading section by yourself.

Yah. it is gradually increased because and we gradually know many vocabulary everyday and reading skill is improved.

Yah. I think I agree with his opinion. Um, because when we talk to native speakers, or other languages people, if we don’t understand what he say, or what he want to do, so the most important thing when we want to talk to someone is listening comprehension.

OK. very good.

For me. I think the grammar is the most difficult for me because, I lived here for two years and I am always watching TV and listening to the radio and something like that, so when I listen to the TOEFL it is not as difficult as grammar. Because when I was Korea I did not study hard English so um before I don’t study grammar it is very difficult for me to get a good score in grammar.

So you would say that the amount of time in Canada affects what is more or less difficult.
Sung-chul
Yah I know that if we want to obtain the over 600 score and that time the grammar section is very important.

MR
What about the writing? How do you rate writing in terms of importance?

Dong-wook
Yah before I came here, I didn’t know that I would have to write on the real TOEFL test, I only knew the fact that I would have to write when I came here. So when I was in Korea, I have never writing exercise for TOEFL test, so yah it is also very difficult for me to writing essay, and write an essay.

MR
And it is worth almost 1/6 of the TOEFL, isn’t it?
What about yourself, do you have the same experience?

Sung-chul
Yah, before I came I didn’t know about writing and my friend said to me if you want to take a TOEFL exam, then writing is just your choice. Now in Korea the system is changed, yes we have to take writing exam and many Korean students experience the very difficulty in writing, especially the article, and every student omits the article, because in Korea we don’t have any articles.

MR
And yourself how do you feel about writing, having lived in Canada for a while now

Min-sue
Writing? I just write in my diary, and I write a letter and something like that to my friends. But when I write a letter there is no rules, like a head, body, conclusion like those kind of things. But I was in university in Korea so we use to write essay, so it was very helpful for me to write an essay in TOEFL. So when I take a TOEFL test there is no, no right answer, everyone has a different opinion. So if we just practice how to write, like the rules, there are just certain rules, so if you just follow the rules, and put your opinion then it is easy I think.

MR
So you think that the writing is easy once you know the rules?

Min-sue
Even though you make a spelling mistake, writing is not a big problem.

MR
Well that’s interesting

OK. Next question
Do you think TOEFL Preparation manuals are a good way to prepare for the TOEFL? And why?
Min-sue has a TOEFL manual right here. This is an example of a TOEFL manual. This one is the Longman. How do you use them, and how do you think you benefit from them.

Sung-chul
They are very useful. Actually before coming to Toronto, I didn’t know any TOEFL books, anything like that but when I took a TOEFL class, with my TOEFL teacher, Everyday she gave me lots of TOEFL manuals – Barrons, and Peterson and many different ones. It was very useful for me and through that material, those materials, I learned about many grammar skills and listening skills, and reading skills, very useful.

MR
Do you mean that the manuals taught you the skills, or did you learn the skills by doing the lessons?

Sung-chul
I know what you mean. I think the skill very good. Korean English teachers, they usual gave me the TOEFL skills, just the skills. Even though I didn’t know the answers mean, I didn’t know what was right or what was wrong, I could choose the right answer. Because they taught that skill. Here is different. in Toronto many TOEFL teachers, I think they didn’t know the skill. Just they taught the lesson. They are different Korean teachers and teachers from here. Even though, just I want to achieve a high score, TOEFL score. I think that studying in Korea is very useful.

MR
Actually that is part of another question so we will come back to that.

Dong-wook
I used the TOEFL manuals to test for myself. Because in our school we took a sample TOEFL test, every two weeks, so between the TOEFL test in school, I every two days I took a sample test for myself with the TOEFL materials. So they are very useful and I especially use the listening comprehension section.

Min-sue
Yah for me, TOEFL preparation manuals are very important because when I take a TOEFL test, we might get very nervous and we don’t know how to manage our time, so if I practice at home, like how much time I have, you know. So I practice those kinds of skills, so that during the actual TOEFL test I don’t get nervous. So I think that they are very important.
Do you think a TOEFL preparation teacher should be a native speaker of English? Why?

Dong-wook
I think that the TOEFL teacher should not be a native speaker, because when I take the TOEFL classes in our school sometimes I didn’t understand my teacher’s explanations. so I asked her why the answers is and even though I heard her explanation, I sometimes I did not understand perfectly. So, at that time I thought that I need a Korean English teacher.

Min-sue
For me. I don’t know. it doesn’t matter. as long as someone is very experienced.

MR
So you think it depends on the teacher.

Min-sue
Yes

Sung-chul
I think. after going back to Korea. I will take a TOEFL class in a Korean private institute because I now learned lots about TOEFL. so if I take a TOEFL class when I go back to Korea I will learn about more efficiently. Korean teachers know about the skills of TOEFL and for that reason I think that there is an advantage. Some of my friends who speak almost no English have gotten scores of almost 600 with the help of Korean teachers.

MR
Do you think in order to do well on the TOEFL a person must read and listen to many authentic materials. such as magazines. newspapers. textbooks. novels. TV. or radio? Or things like these. Mi-sue

Min-sue
Before I though of having a TOEFL test. I had already started to read magazines and newspapers. so when I first took a TOEFL test it wasn’t very difficult for me, except for the grammar. since I haven’t really studied English grammar. There are three different kinds of listening tests. which is first general conversation and idioms. second is longer (mini-conversations), and the third one is a little bit tough. I don’t like to watch series shows like documentaries. I just like watching sitcoms. So that is why I am good at the first and second section but not the third section. Also reading magazines and newspapers is also good for the Reading Section. So I don’t really find the reading test difficult.

Sung-chul
Yes, I think it is very useful for speeding up my reading skill. When I took a practice TOEFL test, I relieved that I need more time to complete the reading section. Even though I knew about the article but I don't have enough time. I have to finish quickly. That time, I think the novels and the magazines are very useful to improve the speed. I think the TOEFL exam the speed is very very important.

I don't know about newspapers because they are very difficult compared to magazines and novels. It is because there are too many idioms and slang in the newspapers.

MR
What kind of things are closest to TOEFL reading?

I think magazines.

Dong-wook
Firstly, improving my listening comprehension, I watch television, especially CityCom and movies. Actually I didn't understand all of them, but some part of the shows I can understand. Whenever, I understand a part of the show I am very happy. I feel that my English skill is getting better.
Secondly, to improve in the Reading Section I read novels. My private tutor recommends novels to me and I read those. I find that reading these books improves my reading speed. It helps me read faster on the TOEFL test.

MR
In number six please, fill in this part of the questionnaire on your sheets. What you need to do is indicate how much time do you spend studying for the structure section of the TOEFL? How much time do you spend studying for the listening section of the TOEFL? How much time do you spend studying for the reading section of the TOEFL? And how much time do you spend studying for the writing (TWE) section of the TOEFL?

{Tape is shut off while participants answer question 6.1}

Now I would like you to rank the four sections (Listening, Structure, Reading, TOEFL Essay in terms of difficulty.

{Tape is shut off while participants answer question 6.1}

Now we are going to look at the next set of questions
Do you think the TOEFL is a good test of English language proficiency? Why or why not?

Sung-chul
I think TOEFL is necessary for people who want to study at a North American university, but it does not test practical English skills. So I think I spend too much time studying things that are not necessary for real language use.
But since so many universities and companies in Korea use the TOEFL, I think it is not helpful. TOEFL is really just so-so in these cases.

Dong-wook
In my case, since I am a graduate school student, my motivation for coming here to study English, is that I would like to be a good English speaker and to study for my major (economics) in graduate school. Just I came here for that. So I studying TOEFL and it is very useful for my major and studying. In Korean graduate school, the professors assign us articles that are written in English. In my case I couldn’t understand them all, so I had a lot of difficulties. However, after studying TOEFL, my reading skill is much improved and my listening is also better. I think it is very useful for me. I think it is very useful for students who are studying continuously.

Min Sue
Yes. I think it is very good for improving language proficiency. Since people who take the TOEFL are planning to study at a university and the university lectures are different from the everyday life talking. In order to understand what the professor are saying and to get a good score at University we have to study TOEFL, to make ourselves more proficient in English. But besides studying in a university it is not useful. I know that both in Korea and Canada people have to take a TOEFL test sometimes to get a job, like when they are a professional in their country and they want to get a job here. When they start the job they don’t study at the university they just do the job, so I think they should add more speaking, rather than writing or grammar.

MR
OK. Next question
How important is getting a high mark on the TOEFL for you? Why?

Sung-chul
In my case, a really need a high TOEFL score to get a job in Korea. I could also use the TOEIC but since TOEFL is harder than TOIEC is better for getting a job in Korea.

Dong-wook
In my case the high score is for my satisfaction. I think it is good to show my parents and my friends that I have learned something while I was in Canada. I have no other evidence to show my English skill to my parents, so this is very important for them.

Min-sue
I need a TOEFL score to go to college in Korea. So it is very important.

MR
I see that you have all told me what do you want to do with your TOEFL score so we can move to the next question.
OK.
Are you happy with the way you prepare for the TOEFL? Or would you prefer a different approach? What I mean is if you could would you like to change the way you prepare for the TOEFL or do you believe that you have a good method.

Dong-wook
For me. I am satisfied with my approach because I just studied TOEFL for three months but my TOEFL score is getting better. But sometimes when I see something that is helping another person improve their score I try to use it in my own studying. I try to mimic the way that other people study to see if it will help me. For example, I read novels for to improve my reading. Also. I use the audio desk at the library. which was a recommendation from my friend.

Sung-chul
I think that the problem for me is that I need to improve my real ability of English. I think that in my TOEFL class we try to get a higher score just through practice. I want to improve my real English ability to help improve my TOEFL score. Sometimes my teacher says. don’t listen to the whole sentence; just try to pick the main words. Then they show us which words to listen for and which to not listen for. They teach so just how to pick the right answer. But I would like to learn how to understand everything and then I would really know the answer. So. if I just want a score than the method I use is very effective. But I need to learn English too, so that method is not very good.

Min-sue
I have been in a TOEFL class for two months. and these days I am really getting bored. We just go to the same classroom and just play the tape. It is very difficult to stay in the class for one hour.

MR
OK, this is the last question. Do you feel that you are improving your general language ability by preparing for the TOEFL? If so, in what way? Now you have all talked about this issue before so let’s start with Dong-wook.

Dong-wook
Yes. I think that my language skills are improving, especially in listening and reading.

Min-sue
Yes. after preparing for the TOEFL test, my general language skills in reading have been improved, because I studied a lot of vocabulary that I don’t think I would have learned in other kinds of English studying. So, it is good for me. But I don’t think that it has helped my speaking ability. Because in the TOEFL test there is no speaking section practice.

Sung-chul
To improve general language ability improving, preparing for the TOEFL is useful but I think I would have learned a lot more if I were just taking regular ESL classes. ESL classes are better than TOEFL classes for improving language ability.
The TOEFL class is one-sided. Only the teacher speaks, the students just listen. We hardly speak English. But in the regular class the students speak a lot more. So, I think that this is better.

{Tape shuts off. Informal conversation occurs for perhaps five more minutes}
Appendix L

*Inter-rater Reliability*

There were ten questions from the focus group questions that required an interpretation on my part. In order to help verify the data, I randomly choose 30 percent of the questions and asked a fellow student from the second language program at the OISE/UT to independently interpret the data.

1. Which language skills are most important for TOEFL?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Roberts</td>
<td>Other researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All are equal</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was 100% agreement between the other researcher and myself on which language skills the participants believed are most important for the TOEFL.

2. Do you think TOEFL Preparation manuals are a good way to prepare for the TOEFL? Why? (How do you use them, and how do you think you benefit from them. give some examples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Roberts</td>
<td>Other researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Reaction</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agreement: 93%

There was 93% agreement between the other researcher and myself. The other researcher believed that one of the participants gave mixed reactions as to the usefulness of TOEFL preparation manuals. Below is the comment on which we disagreed:

I think the TOEFL manuals are very good but in my opinion the listening sections are not enough. It is more beneficial to listen to the news on the radio, like 680 News. (Chul Soo)
3. Do you think the TOEFL is a good test of English language proficiency? Why or why not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The TOEFL is a good test</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The TOEFL is a good test of academic proficiency</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The TOEFL is not a good test</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was 93% agreement between the other researcher and myself. The other researcher placed one participant’s opinion into “the TOEFL is not a good test” which I had placed in “the TOEFL is a good test of academic proficiency”. Below is the comment on which we disagreed:

I think TOEFL is necessary for people who want to study at a North American university, but it does not test practical English skills. So I think I spend too much time studying things that are not necessary for real language use. So many universities and companies in Korea use the TOEFL but for this I think it is not helpful. TOEFL is really just so-so in these cases.

Overall inter-rater reliability was calculated by averaging the agreement from the three sample questions.

**Inter-rater reliability** = \((100\% + 93\% + 93\%) / 3 = 95\%\)
Appendix M

*Comparison of Background Information Sheet and Focus Group Responses in Figure 3.7*

The following table compares the information that the participants gave on the background information sheet with the information that was compiled from the focus groups to form Figure 3.7.

The only difference between the two questions was that in the background information sheet the participants were able to indicate more than one choice, which explains why the background information sheet column adds to 128%. However, Figure 3.1 captures only one choice per participant and thus adds to 100%.

It is reasonable to assume that more participants chose ‘improving English proficiency’ on the background information sheet because of the fact that they were allowed more than one choice. The discrepancy in ‘entering a Korean university’ came from a participant who chose both ‘entering a Korean university’ and ‘teaching English in Korea’ on the background information sheet but ‘teaching English in Korea’ during the focus group. Apart from these two discrepancies, the Background Information sheet seems to verify the accuracy of Figure 3.7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Preparing for the TOEFL</th>
<th>Background Information Sheet</th>
<th>Focus Group Responses</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To enter a university or college in Canada or the United States.</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>No difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve English proficiency.</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enter a Korean university</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enter a company in Korea and teach English in Korea</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>No difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
