

A Study of the Washback Effects of a Standardised Test on the EFL Context

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Abstract

This study determines the washback effects of the TOEIC on EFL learning and instruction in South Korean hagwons or private cram schools. It uses a sequential mixed-method design involving both quantitative and qualitative components. Firstly, a quantitative survey was conducted on a sample of 103 students and 22 teachers. The teachers and students were given separate questionnaires comprising Likert-style items with possible responses on a scale of 1 to 5. The sample of participants was selected using a non-random convenience sampling method. All the participants were selected from the researcher's professional and personal networks. The survey was followed by in-depth qualitative interviews of seven students and six teachers who consented to be interviewed. The results of the survey were codified and the percentage of affirmative, neutral, and negative responses were calculated. These quantitative results were triangulated with the themes that emerged from the analysis of the qualitative interviews. Consequently, this study provided several insightful observations about the positive and negative washback effects of the TOEIC on EFL learning and instruction. In particular, it was found that EFL teachers in Korean private schools or hagwons tend to "teach to the test" instead of aiming to improve the students' overall competence in English. The students also spend most of their time practicing those areas of the EFL course that are emphasized by the TOEIC. Lastly, some suggestions were put forward to eliminate the negative washback effects of TOEIC on EFL learning in South Korean private schools.

Keywords: Washback, Standardised Tests, English for Academic Purposes, Second Language (L2), TOEIC, EFL Context

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The popularity of standardised English proficiency tests has increased exponentially all over the world in the twenty-first century due to the rise in global mobility (Hall, 2016). According to Benson (2021), the number of IELTS test-takers worldwide almost doubled from 1.7 million to 3 million between 2011 and 2017. While about 3 million people across the world took the TOEIC in 2003, the number skyrocketed to 7 million by 2018 (Chapman, 2003; Chaisuriya and Shin, 2019). Consequently, the rising popularity of these tests could have a significant influence on individual teaching as well as learning styles. In particular, South Korea's rapid economic growth during the last few decades has given rise to a strong emphasis on education. As the opportunities for social mobility increased, so has the pressure on South Korean students to perform well in examinations and move up the social ladder. English language skills are highly coveted across the country since English is a gatekeeper for higher education, employment, and upward social mobility (Buschfeld and Kautzsch, 2020). Millions of students in South Korea's "testocracy" strive to perform well in standardised English proficiency tests to secure admission in elite schools or land a position in a reputed organisation abroad (Booth, 2018, p. 1). Test like the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), and the local Korean TEPS (Test of English Proficiency) have assumed great significance vis-a-vis the demand for EFL¹ (English as a Foreign Language) courses.

South Korea's test-oriented teaching and learning cultures could pose a significant threat to students' proficiency in using English effectively in real-life situations. Choi (2008) has recognised that English proficiency tests in South Korea result in several unwanted effects on learning, mainly because students tend to spend more time developing test-taking strategies instead of acquiring English skills for real-life communication. Nevertheless, the test still has had significant positive effects on the motivation levels of EFL learners in many parts of the world. For instance, it has been found that the test improves motivation levels for English learners in countries such as Japan and Thailand (Nguyen and Habók, 2021; Kanazawa, 2012). Hence, the increasing popularity of the TOEIC has given rise to a need for studies such as the current one, which focuses on the washback effects of the TOEIC.

One of the most reputed English proficiency tests is the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), which was introduced in 1979 by the ETS (Educational Testing Service). Test-takers from across Europe, Asia, Latin America take the test as a prerequisite for seeking employment abroad. Besides, reputed multinational corporations and government agencies often rely on the TOEIC score as an indicator of English proficiency while recruiting employees (Lougheed, 2018). The TOEIC was introduced in South Korea in 1982 and has subsequently gone on to consolidate its status as one of the most sought-after proficiency tests in the country (Kim, 2021). The number of South Korean TOEIC test-takers in 1999 was 1379. However, by the middle of the second decade, this number had swelled to around 400,000 (Kim, 2021, p. 117). The increase in the number of TOEIC test-takers in South Korea and the rest of the world has been accompanied by a concurrent proliferation of private institutes and study materials that teach students test-taking strategies and random

¹ EFL (English as a Foreign Language): EFL refers to English language learning in a country where English is not the first language.

guessing skills instead of real-life communication skills. Hence, learners tend to do well in the test if they master these strategies without an in-depth understanding of the language. However, there is a growing realisation among some test-takers in South Korea that the TOEIC score is not an adequate indicator of real-life English proficiency (Kim, 2021). An investigation of the washback effects of the TOEIC in South Korea can reveal the myriad views on the test's influence on English learning and instruction.

1.2 Purposes of the study

English language tests (ELTs) are of various types depending on their purpose. For instance, placement tests are conducted before the learner takes up a course in an institution. These tests are designed to determine the appropriate English course or level of instruction for the learner (Hyland and Shaw, 2016). If the objectives of the English learning course are clearly specified, the developer of the placement test designs the test in multiple levels based on the course objectives. The level of competence of the learner for each criterion helps determine a suitable level of instruction in the language learning course (Bachman, 1990). The placement test is closely related to the diagnostic test. The diagnostic test is designed to determine those areas of English learning in which the learner has significant weaknesses and therefore, needs more targeted instruction (Hyland and Shaw, 2016). Bachman (1990) points out that a placement test “can be regarded as a broad-band diagnostic test” because it separates students who are weaker in English from those with greater proficiency in the language before assigning them to the relevant level of instruction (p. 60). As in almost every kind of language testing, there are significant differences within the category of diagnostic tests as well. For example, these tests could be designed based on the content of a particular program, or they could test general proficiency in the language (Bachman, 1990).

McNamara (2002) has identified two other types of tests based on the purposes they serve - achievement tests and proficiency tests. Achievement tests assess “the quantum of language skills acquired by a learner” at the end of a course (Sharma, 2002, p. 180). These tests help to ascertain the effectiveness of language instruction and whether the learner has progressed according to the goals of language learning (McNamara, 2002, p. 6). Achievement tests are closely linked to progress tests, in which the assessment process is undertaken during the course of language instruction to determine the progress the learners are making (Alderson, Clapham and Wall, 1995). Both placement and achievement tests are based on the syllabus of the specific course for which they are designed. These tests are closely related to the language learning and teaching context. However, Phakiti (2014) also points out that these tests are usually not based on clear theoretical constructs. Consequently, the test scores do not have much generalizability. The TOEIC is not based on the syllabus of any English learning course and cannot be classified as an achievement or progress test.

In contrast to achievement tests, proficiency tests are not based on any specific course. Stranzy (2013) points out that proficiency tests “attempt to measure how well a learner can use a language regardless of the circumstances in which it was acquired” (p. 876). The test scores of high-stakes proficiency tests are often appropriated by universities and companies in English-speaking countries as gatekeepers to entry for students from non-English-speaking countries (Stranzy, 2013). The TOEIC is a proficiency test which is not based on any English course.

2. Findings and Implications

The results of the survey and the interview are presented with relating them to each other. The implications of these results also are discussed.

Regardless to the attitudes towards mock tests, 14 out of 22 (64%) teachers responded with “agree” or strongly agree when they were asked whether they tend to give less importance to those skills that are unlikely to be tested in the TOEIC (See Table 1). 6 respondents (27%) responded with “strongly disagree” or “disagree”, while 9% gave a neutral response. These responses are consistent with the responses to question 9 of the teacher’s questionnaire, which is closely related to it. In response to question 9, 13 teachers (59%) strongly agreed that they align their teaching objectives with the objectives of the TOEIC. However, 7 of the remaining responses (32%) were neutral (See Table 1). Only 2 teachers disagreed that the TOEIC objectives determine their teaching objectives. These responses indicate that there is a marked tendency among EFL teachers to “teach to the test.”

Teachers and students seem to agree regarding the areas of the English language taught in the institution. Just like their instructors, most of the students agreed that they were taught only those aspects of English that are likely to be tested during the TOEIC (See Question 23 of the students’ questionnaire). While 69 students (67%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement, 31 (30%) either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.” The remaining 3 students gave neutral responses. The high percentage of affirmative responses to this question lends further support to the conclusion drawn from the teachers’ surveys that EFL teachers in South Korea have developed a practice of “teaching to the test.” Furthermore, in one of the interviews, student C pointed out that her teacher “spends around half the class duration talking about the TOEIC and how to perform well in the test with minimal effort.” Student D also remarked that her teacher often “avoids discussion on those areas of English that are not crucial for the TOEIC.” Reluctance among teachers to spend time on aspects of English learning unrelated to the TOEIC is a significant negative washback effect of the TOEIC.

A question in the teacher’s questionnaire was meant to investigate whether teachers “tend to focus more on communicative competence rather than grammar because of the TOEIC test.” If the “strongly disagree” and “disagree” responses to this question are added, 16 out of the 22 (72%) teachers claimed that they did not adopt a more communicative approach towards EFL instruction as a result of the TOEIC. Out of the remaining six teachers, 5 (23 %) responded with “agree” or “strongly agree”, which implies that they did focus more on communicative competence in class to ensure that the students are well-prepared for the TOEIC. Further insight into these responses can be gained if they are compared with the responses to question 12. Interestingly, when asked to describe their EFL teaching methods, 14 out of the 22 respondents (63%) answered that they follow the grammar-translation method. While 3 of them (14%) employ the audio-lingual method, the remaining 23% claimed that they have adopted the communicative language teaching (CLT) method (See Table 2). As Cheung, Said and Park (2014) have pointed out, the grammar-translation method is the traditional method of English language instruction in South Korea. The results of the study indicate a marked reluctance to depart from the traditional grammar-translation method despite the rising popularity of the TOEIC.

During the qualitative interview sessions with the teachers, most of the teachers had something interesting to reveal about this preference for grammar-translation method. Teacher B claimed that the grammar-translation method “is a time-tested method that should

work regardless of the nature of the exam”. Teacher D commented that “communicative competence is impossible to achieve if the student does not have good command over grammar”. Teacher E also emphasized that the grammar-translation method is “the most effective” teaching method. These responses reveal a general trend that teachers do not feel the grammar-translation method has become outmoded despite the TOEIC’s emphasis on communicative competence at the workplace. Dailey (2010) has also identified this general unwillingness among South Korean teachers to teach communicatively. The reasons for this hesitation will be explored in the discussions sub-section (See the discussion under Q.1 in section 5.3).

When students were asked regarding their EFL instructors’ teaching methods, 78 out of 103 (75.7%) students either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their teachers encourage them to participate more in class as a part of the preparation for the TOEIC (See Question 26 in the student’s questionnaire). When students were asked about classroom participation during the interviews, four of the five interviewees answered that classroom participation comprised an insignificant part of the time spent in class. These answers were consistent with the survey responses.

| Item Number in the Teacher’s Questionnaire | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Item 7 | The teacher spends majority time conducting mock tests in class | 1 | 4 | 12 | 3 | 2 |
| | | 4.5% | 18% | 54.5% | 14% | 9% |
| Item 8 | The teacher focuses on teaching those language skills that are likely to be tested in the TOEIC | 4 | 11 | 1 | 5 | 1 |
| | | 18% | 50% | 4.5% | 23% | 4.5% |
| Item 9 | The teacher seeks to align teaching objectives with TOEIC objectives | 2 | 11 | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| | | 9% | 50% | 32% | 9% | 0% |
| Item 10 | The teacher tends to focus more on communicative competence than grammar because of the TOEIC | 4 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 6 |
| | | 18% | 5% | 5% | 45% | 27% |
| Item 11 | The teacher tends to give less importance to those skills that are unlikely to be tested in the TOEIC | 4 | 10 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| | | 18% | 45% | 14% | 14% | 9% |

Table 1: Teacher’s perspective of the washback effects of the TOEIC on teaching methods

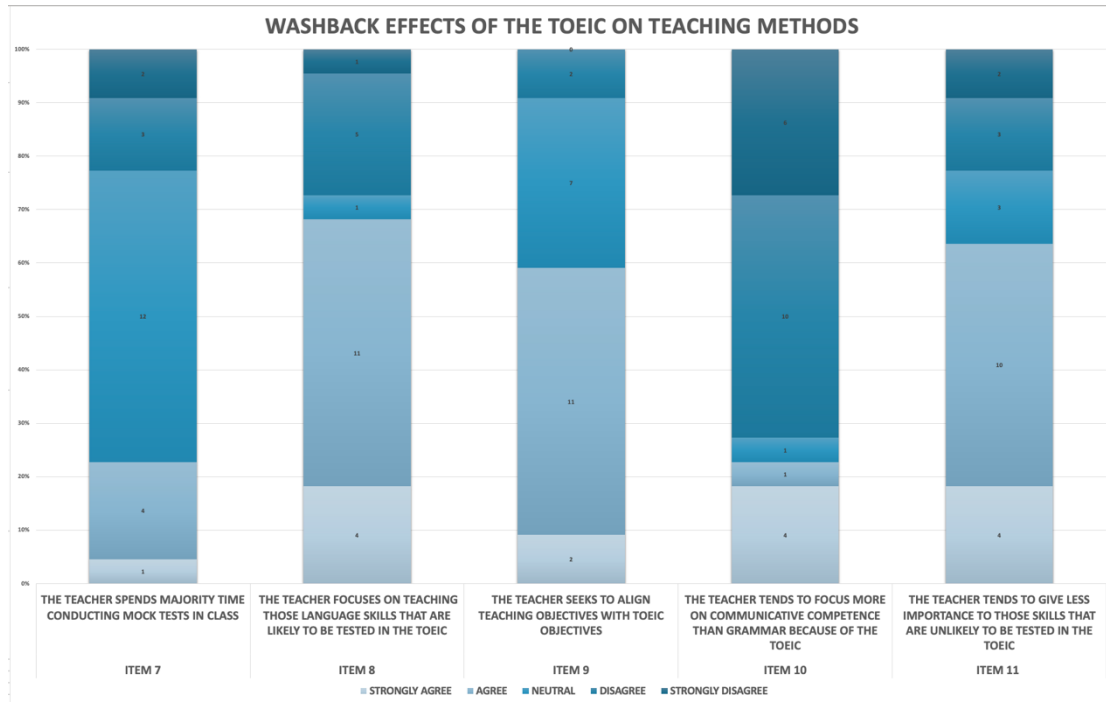


Figure 1: Washback Effects of the TOEIC on Teaching Methods

| Topic | Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 | Option 4 |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| EFL Teaching method | Grammar-translation method (GTM) | Audio-lingual method (ALM) | Communicative language teaching (CLT) | Task-based learning (TBL) |
| No. of teachers | 14 | 3 | 5 | 0 |
| | 63% | 14% | 23% | 0% |
| Factors influencing teaching methods | Employer's expectations | Peer's expectations | Learner's expectations | Proficiency test requirements |
| No. of teachers | 2 | 0 | 11 | 9 |
| | 9% | 0% | 50% | 41% |

Table 2: More results on teaching styles

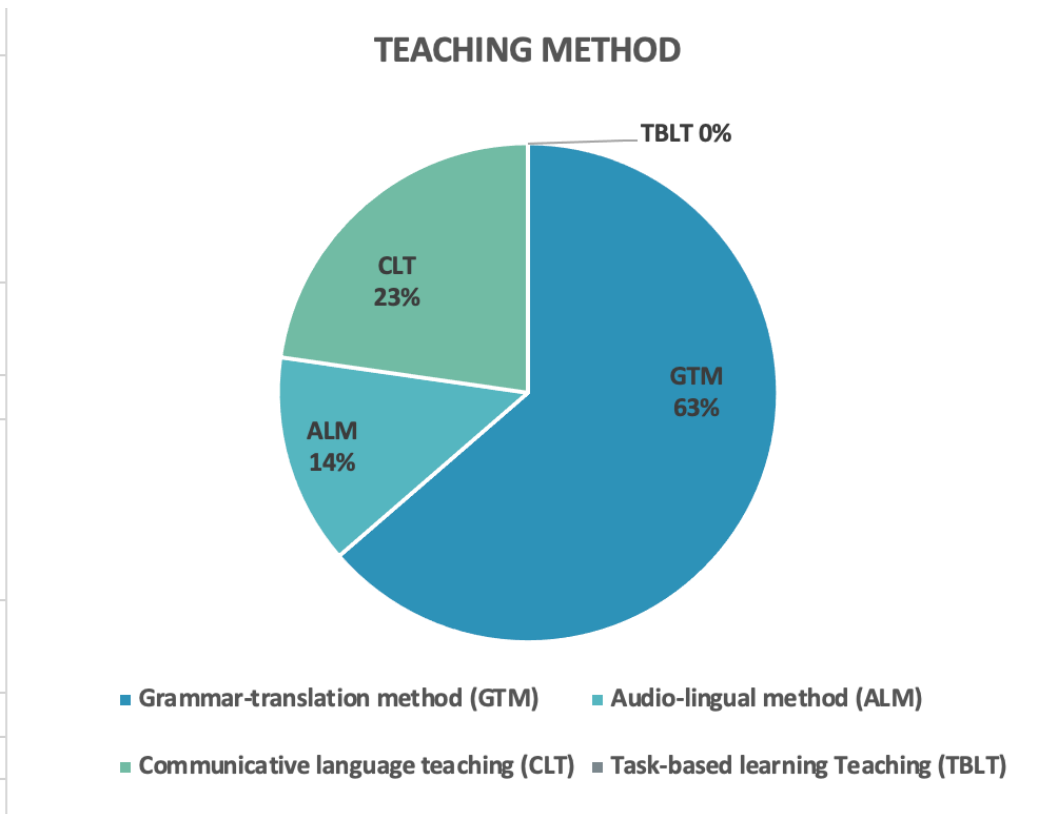


Figure 2: Teaching Method

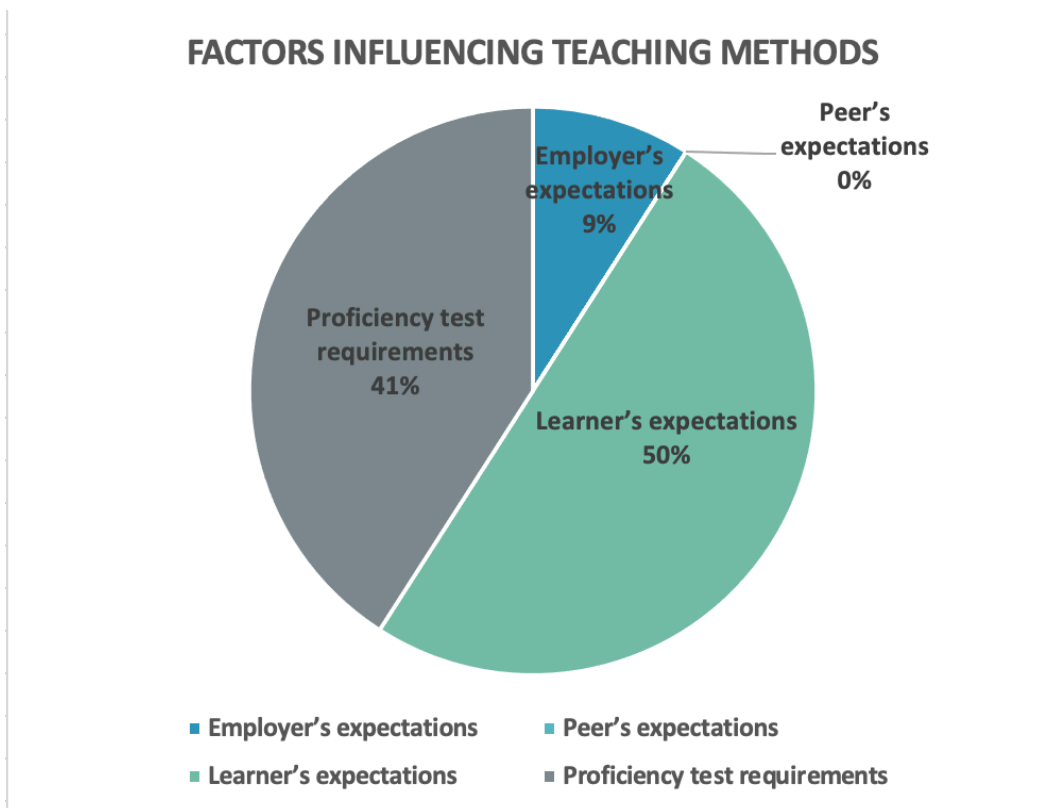


Figure 3: Factors Influencing Teaching Methods

One of the most crucial questions to determine the effect of the TOEIC on students' learning attitudes was Question 11 in the students' questionnaire. The question asked the students to

respond to whether they would take English learning less seriously if the TOEIC did not exist. In reply, 48 students (46.6%) agreed, and 10 students (9.7%) strongly agreed that they would have indeed taken EFL learning less seriously if the TOEIC did not exist (See Table 3). A much smaller proportion of students would have learnt English if the TOEIC had not existed. While this finding might appear to indicate that the TOEIC serves as a motivator for English learning, it also has as a negative washback effect. Hidri (2018) has argued that language assessments “should not be viewed as an end in itself, but rather as a fundamental element of the learning process” (p. 191). In South Korean private language schools, proficiency tests like the TOEIC make students regard EFL learning as a mere gateway to educational and employment opportunities. Hence, they do not learn the language with the objective of improving their real-life communication skills.

Interestingly, when the teachers were asked the aforementioned question in the survey, most of them refused to agree or disagree. 17 out of 22 teachers (77%) gave a neutral response when they were asked whether South Korean students learn English only to secure high scores in tests such as the TOEIC (See question 21 in the teacher’s questionnaire). During the interview, Teacher B remarked that “it is difficult to predict what students would have done if the TOEIC would not have existed.” Although most agreed that the TOEIC is a motivating factor, they were hesitant to claim that there were no other motivating factors besides the test. Consequently, the large number of neutral responses is indicative of the teachers’ aversion towards making predictions about students’ behaviors.

| Type | Item | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---------|---------|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Student | Item 11 | The student would have taken English learning less seriously if not for the TOEIC | 10 | 48 | 12 | 30 | 3 |
| | | | 10% | 47% | 11% | 29% | 3% |
| Student | Item 21 | TOEIC encourages the student to take learning more seriously | 13 | 52 | 6 | 29 | 3 |
| | | | 13% | 50% | 6% | 28% | 3% |
| Teacher | Item 22 | TOEIC has increased the motivation levels of students | 1 | 2 | 17 | 1 | 1 |
| | | | 4.5% | 9% | 77% | 4.5% | 4.5% |

Table 3: The influence of the TOEIC on motivation levels for English learning

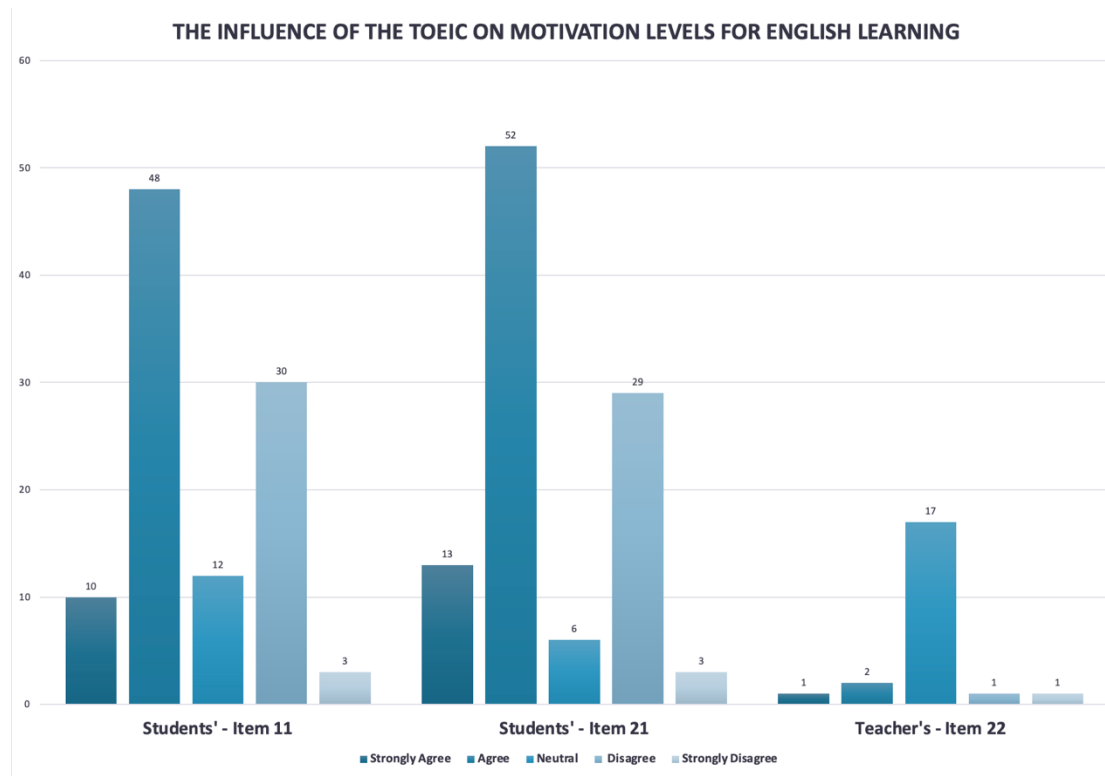


Figure 4: The Influence of the TOEIC on Motivation Levels for English Learning

A separate section of the teacher’s questionnaire was dedicated to exploring the washback effects of the TOEIC on EFL course content of private English schools in Korea. 4 teachers (18%) strongly agreed and 11 of them (50%) agreed that they “include only those teaching content that are relevant to the TOEIC and exclude the rest.” In comparison to the total of 68% affirmative responses, only 18% (4 out of 22) gave a negative response, i.e., “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” 3 of the responses (14%) were neutral (See Table 4).

During the interviews, the teachers’ opinions were generally consistent with the survey results. Teacher A denied leaving out course material unrelated to the TOEIC but admitted that she usually spends maximum time on TOEIC-specific content in class. Teacher C also expressed a similar opinion when he remarked that giving tasks not related to the TOEIC is futile “because students do not take them seriously anyway.” However, most of the teachers claim that they wouldn’t have modelled their course content on the TOEIC in the absence of external pressures.

| Item Number in the Teacher's Questionnaire | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Item 15 | The teacher excludes teaching content unrelated to the TOEIC | 4 | 11 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| | | 18% | 50% | 14% | 9% | 9% |
| Item 16 | The TOEIC helps teachers discover problems and inadequacies in course materials | 1 | 4 | 13 | 3 | 1 |
| | | 4.5% | 18% | 59% | 14% | 4.4% |
| Item 17 | The teacher spends less time on course content that is not likely to be covered in the TOEIC | 6 | 12 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| | | 27% | 55% | 0% | 9% | 9% |
| Item 18 | The teacher makes students do classroom exercises that are closely modelled on the TOEIC | 6 | 11 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| | | 27% | 50% | 0% | 14% | 9% |

Table 4: Teachers' views on the washback effects of the TOEIC on course content

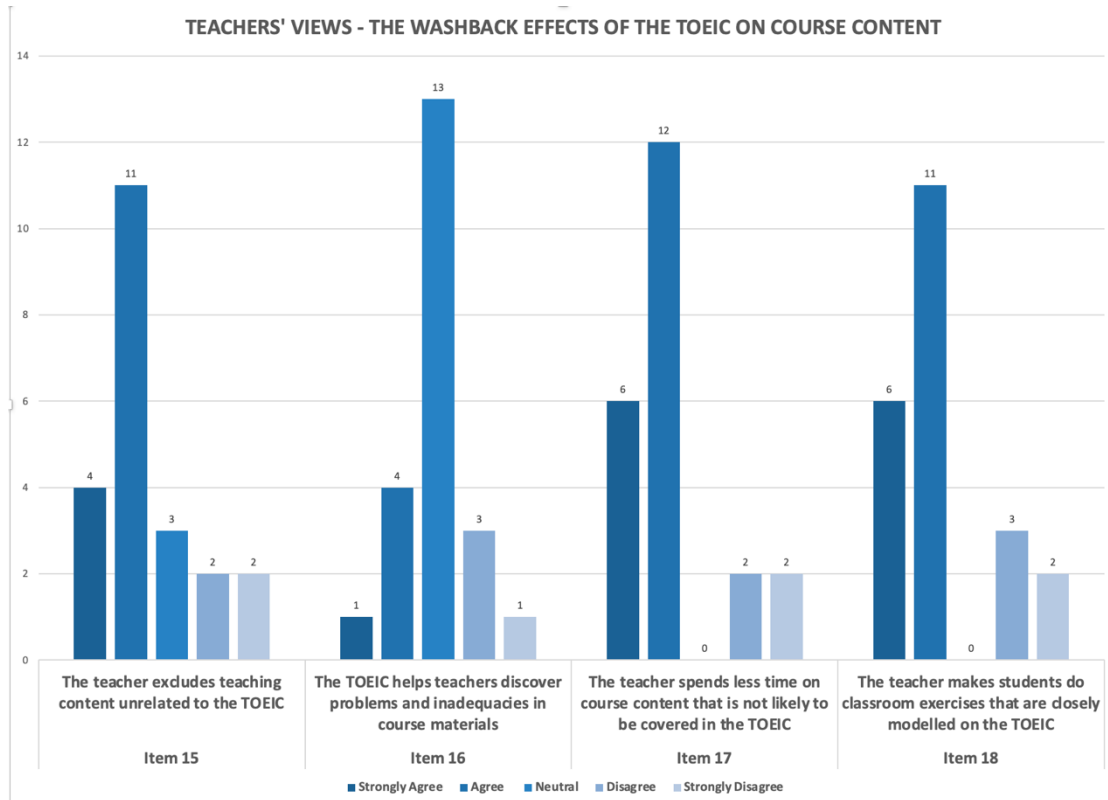


Figure 5: Teacher's Views – The Washback Effects of the TOEIC on Course Content

Although a majority of the students claimed that they would not have learnt English if the TOEIC hadn't existed, 86 of them (83.5%) recognized the need to work further on their English skills even after taking the test (See question 13 in the student's questionnaire). Only 17 out of the 103 students (16.5%) felt that they need not improve their English further. While this finding might appear to be surprising, the interviews reveal that retention of English skills in the workplace is a major reason why South Korean EFL learners continue to develop their English skills after taking a proficiency test. For instance, Student A declared that "I learnt a lot of English skills while preparing for the TOEIC, but I could lose all these skills if I don't work on them in the future." Hence, these results indicate that the TOEIC is a strong motivator to learn as a foreign language, but students tend to continue working on their English skills even after taking the test.

When the teachers were surveyed, they were asked whether students learn English with the only objective of performing well in the TOEIC. Most teachers do not believe that students have no other objective besides performing well in the TOEIC. Only 1 teacher (4.5%) chose the "strongly agree" option, while 3 chose "agree" (14%). In one of the qualitative interviews, Teacher B shed more light on this aspect of EFL learning in South Korea. He argued that "performing well in the TOEIC is not an end in itself for the students." Rather, it has gained popularity among South Korean students because it "serves as a gatekeeper for job opportunities abroad." These results show that students continue to work on their English skills after taking the TOEIC because the test is not the only objective behind learning English.

| Item | Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---------|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Item 7 | The student spends more time on the sections of the course content that are relevant to the TOEIC | 21 | 54 | 15 | 10 | 3 |
| | | 20% | 52% | 15% | 10% | 3% |
| Item 8 | The student tends to focus on multiple-choice questions in listening exercises | 22 | 50 | 3 | 20 | 8 |
| | | 21% | 49% | 3% | 19% | 8% |
| Item 9 | The student tends to focus on multiple-choice questions in reading exercises | 23 | 46 | 3 | 22 | 9 |
| | | 22% | 45% | 3% | 21% | 9% |
| Item 11 | The student would have taken EFL learning less seriously in the absence of the TOEIC | 48 | 10 | 12 | 30 | 3 |
| | | 46% | 10% | 12% | 29% | 3% |
| Item 12 | The TOEIC has helped the student set concrete goals | 13 | 37 | 1 | 38 | 13 |
| | | 13% | 36% | 1% | 37% | 13% |

Table 5: Students' views on the effect of TOEIC on English learning

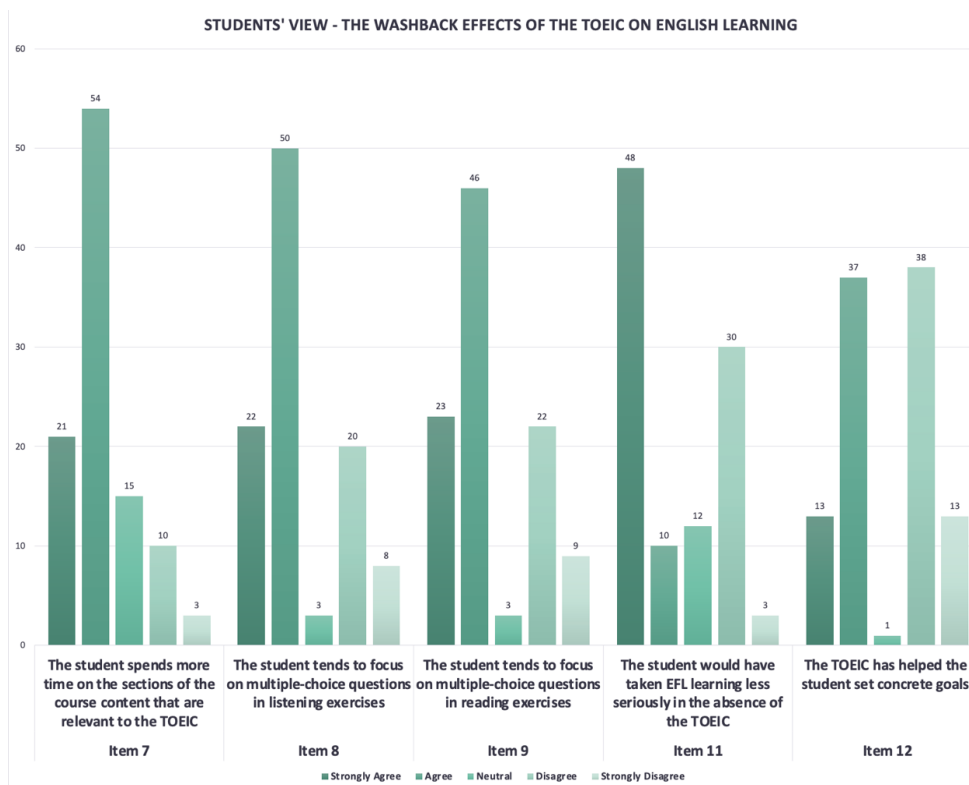


Figure 6: Students' View – The Washback Effects of the TOEIC on English Learning

Students were also asked whether they focus more on multiple-choice questions to perform well in the TOEIC reading and listening test. 67% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they tend to focus on multiple-choice questions in their reading exercises. 30% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, while the rest gave neutral responses (See Table 5). In the interview, student B opined that practicing multiple-choice questions is “a great way to learn for the TOEIC because “one can find the correct answer by a process of elimination even if there is some uncertainty” This opinion indicates that the TOEIC also encourages students to take the easiest possible route to success at the cost of communicative competence. According to Green (2013), the over-emphasis on multiple-choice questions is an example of negative washback because it atomises knowledge and dilutes the quality of EFL instruction.

Along similar lines, most teachers agreed (50%) or strongly agreed (27%) that the classroom exercises they give the students “are closely modelled on the kind of questions that are asked in the TOEIC.” Only 23% of the teachers who participated in the survey gave a negative response to the question. These responses suggest that EFL teachers in South Korea tend to emphasize practicing those kinds of questions that are most likely to be tested in the TOEIC. They also imply that teachers emphasize multiple-choice questions in reading and listening exercises because of the format of the TOEIC reading and listening test. In the qualitative interview, the teachers were asked questions regarding their preference for multiple-choice questions. Teacher B explained that “the [institution’s] management insists on making students practice only those kinds of questions that are a part of the TOEIC. This view indicates that teachers tend to encourage practicing TOEIC-specific questions, albeit under pressure from the students and the management.

When asked whether the TOEIC has had an overall positive impact on EFL learning in South Korea, the students and the teachers had contrasting opinions. 73 out of the 103 students

(71%) agreed that the overall impact of the TOEIC on English learning is positive. On the other hand, only 8 out of 22 (36%) teachers replied “yes” when they were asked the same question. Also, when asked which standardized proficiency test is the best option for EFL learners, only 2 teachers (9%) selected TOEIC. 11 of the remaining 22 (50%) chose IELTS, 7 (32%) chose TOEFL iBT, and the remaining 2 (9%) chose “others.” The responses to this question suggest that IELTS and TOEFL iBT are more popular than TOEIC in South Korea, ostensibly because of the negative washback effects.

During the qualitative interviews, all the teachers were highly critical of the TOEIC’s multiple-choice format for the reading and listening tests. Teacher A claimed that it would encourage students to take the “easier route to a high score.” Teacher E also mentioned that “one-word answers would have been a better indicator of the student’s listening and reading skills.” Teachers tend to be more perturbed than students about the long-term negative washback effects of the TOEIC on English language learning.

3. Conclusion

This research study was one of the rare studies investigating the washback effects of the TOEIC on South Korea’s private education system. It was also reasonably comprehensive as it mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. However, the study had notable limitations too. This concluding chapter will highlight these limitations before suggesting avenues for future research.

3.1 Limitations of the study

As the study on TOEIC washback focused only on private language schools, the results cannot be extrapolated to EFL teaching and learning in South Korea in general. Furthermore, the generalisability of the study was reduced by the fact that a non-random convenience sampling method was used (Gitsaki and Coombe, 2016). Since the participants were drawn from the researcher’s personal and professional networks, no claims can be made about the sample’s representativeness of a larger population of EFL teachers or students in South Korean private language schools. The results of the study are applicable only for the teachers and students of the two chosen institutes. A larger sample and the use of random sampling in the time and logistical constraints could have helped draw inferences about the effect of TOEIC on English learning in South Korean private language schools.

In addition to the generalisability issues, the quantitative component of the study did not involve a control group. A control group is a group of participants that are not subjected to a specific condition present in the experimental group. Control groups help eliminate the possibility of exogenous or confounding variables that could yield the same results (Lune, Pumar and Koppel, 2010). The absence of a control group in a survey compromises its internal validity, thereby making it difficult to draw inferences about cause-and-effect relationships (Bryman, 2015). Therefore, this study remains inconclusive as to whether the TOEIC alone caused the aforementioned washback effects. Although a few targeted questions on the TOEIC were asked in the survey questionnaire, the possibility of confounding factors contributing to the survey results cannot be completely ruled out. For instance, another proficiency test or some other aspect of the Korean education system could also be responsible for the washback effects determined in this study. In a more detailed analysis, a control group could have been formed comprising EFL students not preparing for the TOEIC and EFL teachers who do not train students for the test. Such a study could have

conclusively determined the washback effects of the TOEIC in the context of South Korean private language schools.

Additionally, there were a few limitations in the survey design. The survey could have been improved further by considering question order effects in greater detail. Although all the Likert-style items were grouped together while revising the questionnaire, the response to the previous item could influence the following response (Lavrakas, 2008). Although it is impossible to accurately predict the question order effects in a given survey, some steps could have been taken to minimise them. For example, the survey items could be randomised and presented in different orders to different participants (Lavrakas, 2008). Moreover, despite the repeated revisions and the pilot study, certain ambiguities remained in the phrasing of the survey items. For example, Question 10 of the student's questionnaire does not elaborate on the exact meaning of the phrase "majority time." Similarly, the phrase "majority time" question 7 in the teacher's questionnaire could have been worded differently to avoid many neutral responses.

3.2 Recommendations

Despite the current study's issues related to generalisability, it can nevertheless be used as a pilot study for more extensive research projects on the washback effects of the TOEIC in South Korean private language schools. The classroom observation could eliminate the personal biases of the participant. On the other hand, the semi-structured interview could shed light on those aspects of TOEIC washback that are amenable to observation. Furthermore, the quantitative component of future research studies on washback effects should have a separate control group for the quantitative part of the study, i.e., the survey. When the findings from the control group are compared with the experimental group results, the direct washback effects of the TOEIC can be distinguished from the spurious ones that are influenced by confounding variables. Lastly, extensive research studies on the topic conducted in the future should involve random sampling methods for more generalisability.

Future research studies on washback effects in South Korea could take into account the experiences of the parents in addition to those of the teachers and the students. Such diversity of perspectives could provide a more in-depth understanding of the washback effects of the TOEIC in the South Korean context.

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Appendix 1: Student's questionnaire

Students' Questionnaire

Dear Student,

Thank you for taking the time to answer this survey. This survey questionnaire is meant to find out your views on the effect of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) English language proficiency test on English learning in South Korea. The questionnaire includes questions about your learning as well as the teaching methods adopted by your teachers in English class. The answers provided will remain fully anonymous in the report.

Background questions

This section of the survey will ask you a few questions about your background.

1. What is your gender?

Male Female

2. What is your age?

15-18 18-21 21-24 24-27 27-30

3. Which of the following proficiency tests do you intend to take? (Select all that apply)

IELTS TOEIC TOEFL IBT Others (.....) [please specify]

4. For how long have you been preparing for the TOEIC proficiency test?

Less than 3 months

3 months to 6 months

6 months to 9 months

9 months to 1 year

Above 1 year

5. What is your highest completed degree?

Middle School

High School

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Doctoral Degree

Impact of the TOEIC on your attitudes towards EFL learning

This section is meant to assess the effect of the TOEIC on your personal English language learning strategies and motivation levels for learning. For Question No. 6, please select the two most relevant options. For Questions 7 to 12, please select which of the five options best reflects your approach towards English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. The response to the last question is either a "yes" or a "no."

6. Which of the following reasons describes your motive(s) for attending English classes? [Select the two most important motives]

To meet parental expectations

To become competent in using English in daily activities

To perform well in English proficiency tests

To secure better job opportunities in the future

To pursue higher studies

Others (.....) [Please specify]

7. I spend more time on those sections of the EFL course content that I feel is relevant to the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. I tend to focus more on multiple-choice questions in listening exercises because the listening component of the TOEIC exclusively comprises multiple choice questions.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

9. I tend to focus more on multiple-choice questions in reading exercises because the reading component of the TOEIC exclusively comprises multiple choice questions.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

10. I spend majority time going through the material taught in class to score better in the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

11. I would have taken EFL learning less seriously if I didn't attempt the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12. The TOEIC test has helped me set concrete goals while learning English.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

13. Do you feel it is essential to work further on your English proficiency after taking the TOEIC?

Yes No

Students' views on the TOEIC test

This section is meant to assess your views regarding the contribution of the TOEIC proficiency test to EFL learning in general. For all the questions in this section, choose the option that best reflects your opinion on the TOEIC.

14. The TOEIC score is a good indicator of the test-taker's proficiency in English speaking and listening?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

15. Students preparing for the TOEIC learn English better than those who do not take the test.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

16. The TOEIC test focuses too much on communication skills in English required at the workplace.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

17. The TOEIC test is inadequate for those who wish to develop their communication skills in English for higher education.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

18. The TOEIC listening and reading tests have to be modified because they encourage me to focus on multiple-choice questions and ignore longer answers.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

19. The TOEIC test encourages me to focus equally on all the four facets of English learning, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

20. The TOEIC test encourages me to take EFL learning more seriously.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

21. Preparation for the TOEIC speaking component helps reduce anxiety in real-life communication in English.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

22. Do you think the TOEIC has had an overall positive influence on EFL learning?

Yes No

Your perceptions of the influence of TOEIC on EFL teaching

The questions in this section will aim to explore students' opinions on the influence of TOEIC on classroom EFL teaching methods. For all the questions in this section, choose the option that best reflects your opinion on the instruction of English by your teachers.

23. My EFL teachers teach only those aspects of the English language that are likely to be tested in the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

24. The EFL course content in my institution is tailor-made for good performance in the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

25. The EFL teachers in my institution encourage students to answer multiple-choice questions in reading or listening exercises to perform well in the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

26. My EFL teachers encourage students to participate more in class to ensure that students are well-prepared for the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Thank you for your response to the questionnaire.

I would like to conduct in-depth interviews to explore the TOEIC in greater detail. If you are available for a short 10-minute interview, I would be thankful to you for giving me your precious time.

Please add your email here so that I can contact you for more details.

Appendix 2: Teacher's questionnaire

Teacher's Questionnaire

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for setting aside time to answer this survey. I would like to ask you a few questions regarding your experiences while instructing students who wish to appear for the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). The responses to this survey questionnaire will be used to explore the washback effects of the TOEIC on EFL learning and teaching. The responses to this survey questionnaire will be used to explore the washback effects of English language proficiency tests on the instruction of English to EFL learners. The responses will remain anonymous in the final report.

Background Questions

1. What is your gender?

Male Female

2. To which of the following age groups do you belong?

20-30 30-40 40-50 Above 50

3. For which standardized test do you train EFL students? [Select all that apply]

TOEIC TOEFL IBT IELTS Others (.....) Please name the test

4. For how long have you been teaching English?

Less than 2 years 2 to 6 years 6 to 10 years More than 10 years

5. For how many years have you been training students for the TOEIC?

Less than 2 years 2 to 6 years 6 to 10 years More than 10 years

6. How many periods of 1-hour EFL classes do you take up per week?

Less than 6 6-12 periods 12-18 periods 18-24 periods Above 24 periods

Teaching Methods

This section of the questionnaire focuses on the influence of the TOEIC on how you teach EFL students. For the questions in this section, please choose which of the five options best describes your opinion on the mentioned aspect of the TOEIC and EFL teaching. While responding to question 13, you can select multiple options.

7. I spend majority time conducting mock tests in class to ensure that my students perform well in the TOEIC.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree Agree

8. I particularly focus on developing those language skills of my students that are most likely to be tested in the TOEIC.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree Agree

9. I seek to align my teaching objectives in EFL classes with the objectives of the TOEIC proficiency tests.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree Agree

10. My EFL teaching methods tend to focus more on communicative competence (CC) rather than grammar because of the TOEIC tests.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

11. I tend to give less importance to those skills that are unlikely to be tested in the TOEIC.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12. Generally, which category would you place your EFL teaching method?

Grammar-translation method (GTM)

Audio-lingual method (ALM)

Communicative-language teaching (CLT)

Task-based learning (TBL)

13. Which of the following skills has the TOEIC encouraged you to emphasize while teaching EFL students?

[Select all that apply]

Reading Writing Speaking Listening

14. Which of the following factors influences your teaching method the most?

Employer's expectations

Peer's expectations

Learner's expectations

Proficiency test requirements

Teaching Content

This section will assess the extent to which the TOEIC test compels teachers to modify what they teach in class. Please choose the most appropriate option out of the five given options for each question in this section.

15. In class, I include only those teaching content that are relevant to the TOEIC and exclude the rest.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

16. Proficiency tests like the TOEIC help me discover problems and inadequacies in my course materials.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

17. I spend less time on course content that is not likely to be covered in the TOEIC tests.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

18. I make the students do classroom exercises that are closely modelled on the kind of questions that are asked in the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

General perspectives on the influence of language proficiency tests

This section will focus on teacher's perspectives on the effects of the TOEIC on the learning process and EFL instruction in South Korea in general. Please select the most appropriate option for each of the questions given below. The last question in this section allows multiple responses (if applicable).

19. The TOEIC score is a fair indicator of the students' real-life communicative proficiency in the language.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

20. Students who obtain low scores in the TOEIC tend to develop a negative attitude towards EFL learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

21. I think EFL students in South Korea learn English only to perform well in proficiency tests such as the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

22. English language proficiency tests like the TOEIC have increased the motivation levels of EFL learners in class.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

23. EFL learners are now increasingly hesitant to learn those skills that are not likely to be tested in the TOEIC.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

24. Do you think taking the TOEIC is an integral part of the EFL Learning process?

Yes No

25. Do you think the current formats of TOEIC has had an overall positive impact EFL learning in South Korea?

Yes No

26. In your opinion which is the best option for standard EFL testing for EFL students in South Korea?

IELTS TOEIC TOEFL IBT Others (please mention)

27. What do you think is the main advantage of standardized EFL Tests? [Select All that Apply]

Improving one's skills

Gaining employment abroad

Social prestige

Admission in overseas institutes of higher education

Thank you for your response to the questionnaire.

I would like to recruit in-depth interviewees regarding the washback effects of the TOEIC. If you are available for a short 10-minute interview, I would be very thankful to you for giving me your precious time to find out further information.

Please add your email ID here so that I can contact you for more details.

Appendix 3: Student's semi-structured interview

How long have you been preparing for the TOEIC at this institute?

How has your learning style changed because of the TOEIC?

What are the specific teaching methods that you think your teacher has adopted only because of the TOEIC?

What are the ways in which you think the TOEIC has positively influenced your English learning experience?

What are the ways in which you think the TOEIC has negatively influenced your English learning experience?

What is your opinion on the extensive practice of mock tests and multiple-choice questions as preparation for the TOEIC?

What are some ways to eliminate the negative effects of the TOEIC on English learning and teaching in South Korea?

Is there anything you would like to add about how the TOEIC has influenced your English learning experience?

Appendix 4: Teacher's semi-structured interview

For how long have you been teaching TOEIC aspirants at this institute?

Could you shed some light on some aspect of your EFL teaching style that has been directly influenced by the TOEIC?

What are some specific influences of the TOEIC on the learning strategies of the students you teach?

How has the TOEIC influenced the course material you prepare for your students?

What are some positive ways in which the EFL has positively influenced EFL teaching or learning in South Korea?

What are some positive ways in which the EFL has positively influenced EFL teaching or learning in South Korea?

What is your opinion on the overall influence of the TOEIC on English teaching and learning in South Korea's private institutions?

How do you think the negative effects of the TOEIC can be mitigated?

Would you like to add anything else about the effect of the TOEIC on English learning or teaching?

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