

A Study of TOEIC Results and College Recruiting Policy

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There have been changes throughout the past 100 years of English education in Korea. The Ministry of Education revised the English curriculum numerous times. From the 6th national curriculum, communicative competence became an essential objective in English learning. The study is to see if E University students' TOEIC results show any significant difference between the two groups under the 5th and 6th national curriculum. Another objective of this research is to see if recruiting medical students with high scores of the standardized English tests is suitable to select the best candidates who can fulfill medical studies. For these two purposes, sophomore students' TOEIC results in 2000 & 2004 and non-resident-status students' cumulative GPA were analyzed. The study shows that there is no significant difference in the two groups. Moreover, the current recruiting policy to select the best fit medical candidates based on their high TOEIC or TOEFL scores does not seem to be an appropriate measure since such students' GPA reveals poor academic performance amid their high scores in English.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The term *globalization* became one of the most popular catch-phrase in 1990s. Hence, proficiency of English became a necessary tool and an essential part of globalization. The term was greatly emphasized not only in the academic field but also in political, economic-related, technological and diplomatic areas. As a means of measuring proficiency in English, the standardized test results have been asked for. Numerous corporations and companies require the results of the TOEIC, TEPS, or TOEFL to assess English competence of their job applicants. Moreover in recent years, a growing number of universities adopted the policy of recruiting their applicants with high scores from these tests under the special recruiting criterion. Such trend is also prevalent in the field of medicine, especially medical doctors and nurses as well as clinical pathologists when seeking employment.

With the non-resident-status recruiting policy, E University selects about five percent (usually two students each year) of the total number of medical freshmen who resided abroad for at least two years with their parents. As the academic performance of students from Japan and China turned out to be far from satisfactory, there has been preference over the students from the English-speaking countries. For such a recruiting measure, the results from the standardized English tests became a predetermining factor of selecting competent students who are likely to fulfill their academic goals.

Considering the ongoing demand for these tests, E University renders its medical students an opportunity to be ready for them. To fulfill such a social demand, a class called Course of Official Tests in which students receive credits based on the English test scores has been a requirement for medical students' curriculum at this institution. In other words, medical students get two-hour-credit with a letter grade by taking one of the three tests according to the grade distribution table. The table is notified on the bulletin board and it gets revised every two years. There is a failing grade in this policy. If students do not receive the TOEIC score of 630 or higher by the end of their sophomore year, they get an F and can not advance to the third year medical school. The minimum requirement score for the TEPS is 580 and the CBT TOEFL is 200.

According to a recent study on grammar in EFL context by Suh (2004), his

results of the study indicate that “rather than giving priority to the promotion of communication ability suggested by the 6th national curriculum, our EFL classes had placed a heavy focus on grammar.” The current study will look into the TOEIC results to see if such a focus on grammar is supported in the results of the reading comprehension section of the TOEIC taken by the medical students. Although reading comprehension of the TOEIC contains other questions than grammar along with vocabulary and reading related questions, the study is based on the students’ belief noting that their grammar is weak when their R/C (reading comprehension) scores are low.

The literature review will be regarding the English curriculum in Korea, especially the 6th national curriculum which focuses on the ability of communicative skills of the English language rather than traditional emphasis on grammar since a half of the subjects, sophomores in 2004 in the study, were educated under the 6th curriculum. Therefore, the study will examine if the changes in education policies and curricula had any impact on the results of the standardized English tests. By comparing their TOEIC (or TEPS/TOEFL) results and the cumulative GPA of non-resident-status students, foreign-educated, it will also examine if recruiting policy based on the English scores proves to be a valid measure.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

There have been numerous changes, reforms, and revisions throughout the English education in Korea. The first through the fifth national curriculum of Korean education had been based on grammatical structural syllabus, often called traditional, which consisted of two components: a list of linguistic structures and a list of words. The underlying assumption was learning a language meant learning to master its grammatical system. The purpose of this curriculum was to apply grammar correctly, to gain appreciation of literature, and to be able to communicate in the language. In teaching approaches based on it, forms and meaning were assumed to be in a one-to-one correspondence, and meaning was to be learned together with particular grammatical forms. Meaning is thought to be self-evident, and is not taught as such. According to

Yalden (1983), in the grammatical syllabus, we have not accounted for the way in which it is used in an utterance, and still less an exchange of utterances between two or more speakers. This is said to be the shortcoming of structural syllabus. Therefore, the goal of grammatical-structural syllabus is to provide the learners with as good a command as possible of the linguistic system of the target language as pointed out in Chang's (2001) study, and the next curriculum took full consideration of such shortcoming.

The 6th national curriculum was issued with the basis on the notional-functional syllabus having much emphasis on the communicative competence. When the current first-year students were in middle school in 2000, they began studying with the new textbooks under the 7th curriculum. It was different from the 6th for having included various syllabus types.

With a strong emphasis on the communicative competence from the 6th national curriculum, it has been said that students' competence in English grammar has declined. It raises a concern because understanding grammar plays an essential role in acquiring a foreign language. As compared to the language teaching methods which take various stances toward grammar, many L2 researchers have also expressed their concern over grammar learning, and showed the overall consensus on its crucial role in the development of target language proficiency (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Bachman (1990), Chen (1990), and Scarcella and Oxford (1992) posited a distinctive status of grammatical competence independent from communicative competence, and noted the importance of grammar rules in language use. Savignon (1972), and Walters (1980) were among those to provide empirical evidence for the separateness of grammatical knowledge from communicative knowledge and for the critical role of grammar in attaining fluency.

Other researchers like Dickins and Woods (1988), Larsen-Freeman (1991), Mitchell and Redmond (1993), Nunan (1998), Terrell (1991), and VanPatten (1993) raised their voice in arguing for grammar teaching, and provided specific, practical suggestions for the L2 classroom.

Despite some differences among L2 teaching methods in their focus on grammar, it can be safely said that there is an overall agreement both on the important role of grammar for the effective, successful development of interlanguage, and on grammar teaching in context for communication (Brown,

2001). It indicates that grammatical competence is an indispensable part of language proficiency, and should be given appropriate attention in L2 learning.

Since the main objective of English education was to develop communicative competence rather than grammar competence, Ministry of Education revised the English education policy and tried many innovations from the 6th curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1995).

According to Widdowson (1979), communicative competence is not on the list of items learned, but a set of strategies for realizing the value of linguistic elements in contexts of use is on the list. To explain the elements of communicative competence, Canale & Swain (1980) postulate that the communicative competence consists of four parts: linguistic or grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

It is clear that grammar learning and teaching in our EFL classes should take place more effectively and more systematically than ever before along with much efforts to deal with grammar in context, not in isolation.

III. METHODS

1. Subjects

Two groups of medical students were studied for this paper. The first group consisted of sophomore medical students who entered the college in the year 2000, and studied under the 5th national curriculum, whereas the second group of 2004 under the 6th national curriculum.

Medical students at the current institution are required to take four semesters of English. About twice as many hours of English courses are offered to these students compared to non-medical students as one of the educational objectives of medical college is to cultivate medical doctors with competence in the English language. For the first two semesters, six hours of English classes are offered each semester, namely English I & II and English Conversation I & II. The second year's curriculum is reduced to 4-hours-a-week English III for the

first semester and 2 hours of Medical English in the last semester of premedicine. For the Courses of Official Tests, students get a letter grade with two credit units according to their standardized English results. The number of the students in 2000 was 27 whereas in 2004, it was 40 for the study.

2. Procedures

E University medical students are supposed to take one of the standardized English tests, TOEIC, TEPS, or TOEFL in order to better prepare for career opportunity upon graduation as on-going requirement for such test results has been prevalent. As a measure to encourage students to get higher scores, they were informed that they would not pass the course unless they turned in their English scores by the end of their sophomore year. However, since the policy was not compulsory in the year 2000, some students did not bother to take the exam though the majority of the students took the test and submitted their results.

The TOEIC was considerably preferred over the other two tests. The reasons might be attributed to its relatively low test fees, comparatively easier test questions and reading passages than the TOEFL, and convenient test locations. Its fee of 32,000 won is a lot lower than the TOEFL of about 145,000 won. Even though the test fee for the TEPS is 25,000 won, it is considered much more difficult than the TOEIC. As for test locations, there are only two places available either Seoul or Daegu for the TOEFL applicants who reside in the district where this study is done. Another reason might be attributed to the difficulty of the CBT (computer-based test) students felt. Compared to the TOEIC, students' feedback is that there are more difficult and longer passages in all three sections of listening, structure and written expression and reading comprehension.

The TOEIC has mainly two sections: listening and reading comprehension. The first section (listening) contains four parts such as photographs, questions and responses, short conversations, and short talks. The reading section includes incomplete sentences, error recognition and reading comprehension.

The TOEFL is based on the listening, structure, reading and writing. The TEPS is composed of listening and reading comprehension that includes

grammar and vocabulary which further gets divided into 13 parts. Only two medical students took the TEPS in 2004.

The study is based on the standardized English test results that students submitted upon taking the TOEIC at the end of the second year and non-resident-status students' GPA. The only difference in the policy was that in the year 2000, students were simply encouraged to take the test, but in 2004, students were under a stricter policy stating that all students were to take the test and submit the results in order to obtain 2-hour-credit with a letter grade.

IV. RESULTS

The results of the standardized English tests were collected and analyzed for the study. For those recruited based on the special criterion, under non-resident-status, their cumulative GPA was analyzed to see how they performed in premedicine courses. The total number of medical students for English was 35 in 2000 and 43 in 2004 respectively. Among them, only 27 students turned in their TOEIC scores in 2000 and 40 students did in 2004. Since the policy was not mandatory in 2000, 20% of the students did not turn in their results. One student took the TEPS in 2000 whereas two students did in 2004. One student took the TOEFL in 2004 but no one did in 2000. Thereby, the study was based on 27 students' TOEIC results in 2000 and 40 in 2004. The average scores of 2000 students in the sections of listening and reading comprehension were 385 and 344 respectively, with the average total score of 729. On the other hand, the average scores of the 2004 sophomores' listening and reading comprehension were 393 and 341 with the average total score of 733. For both groups, scores of listening comprehension were higher than those of the reading section, which focuses on grammar, vocabulary and understanding of the reading passages. Though the study done by Suh (2004) supported that grammar-centered instruction had been still popular in spite of the recommendation by the 6th national curriculum stressing more on communication than grammar in the classroom, the results of medical students' TOEIC actually revealed that they did better in communicative aspect in the language. There were five students (18% in 2000 and 12% in 2004) from each

group who had higher reading comprehension scores than listening, by 31 and 52 points respectively. Only one student had the same scores of both listening and reading comprehension in 2000. In other words, twenty two out of twenty seven (82%) students had higher listening comprehension scores in 2000 whereas it was thirty five (88%) in 2004. The largest gap between the two sections was 80 points lower in the reading section in 2000 and 160 lower in 2004. Both groups of students received 52% and 53% of the total for listening comprehension scores respectively. The following tables (Table 1 & Table 2) show the results of medical students' TOEIC in year 2000 and 2004 respectively.

TABLE 1
Students' TOEIC Results in Year 2000

St. No	L/C	R/C	Total
0001	395	380	775
0002	325	380	705
0004	425	345	770
0005	365	305	670
0006	375	295	670
0007	335	310	645
0010	335	355	690
0011	420	370	790
0012	365	300	665
0013	480	460	940
0014	320	285	605
0015	290	315	605
0016	340	325	665
0017	420	355	775
0019	395	375	770
0020	435	390	825
0021	390	325	715
0022	450	405	855
0023	335	295	630
0026	445	375	820
0027	340	370	710
0029	375	330	705

0031	350	310	660
0032	385	385	770
0033	285	310	595
0034	385	345	730
0035	310	285	595
Average	385	344	729

TABLE 2
Students' TOEIC Results in Year 2004

St. No	L/C	R/C	Total
0401	495	390	885
0402	330	395	725
0403	325	405	730
0405	360	305	665
0406	395	365	760
0407	370	300	670
0408	380	335	715
0409	380	255	635
0410	380	320	700
0411	460	385	845
0412	400	295	695
0413	460	395	855
0414	370	325	695
0415	385	295	680
0416	370	310	680
0417	330	315	645
0418	430	350	780
0419	360	355	715
0420	335	295	630
0421	365	350	715
0422	355	325	680
0423	480	420	900
0424	420	390	810
0425	445	370	815

0426	455	385	840
0427	420	395	815
0428	405	310	715
0429	405	375	780
0430	410	285	695
0431	380	270	650
0432	380	325	705
0433	445	285	730
0434	290	345	635
0435	440	310	750
0436	465	395	860
0437	465	370	835
0438	395	310	705
0439	345	335	680
0440	315	335	650
0441	310	350	660
Average	393	341	734

Since the subjects were in the top 4% rank in terms of scholastic performance of college entrance examination, their average TOEIC scores were approximately 150 points higher than the national college students' average of 585. As shown in the above, there was no difference in the scores of listening and reading even though the two groups of students learned English under different national curriculum policy. In other words, the policy of emphasizing communicative skills of English education does not give a great impact on the result of higher scores of listening comprehension of the test or lower scores of grammar and reading section of the test.

The following table shows the non-resident-status, foreign-educated students' TOEIC results and their cumulative GPA.

TABLE 3
Non-resident-status students' TOEIC Results and GPA

Name	L/C	R/C	TOEIC	PTS(GPA)
OEH	470	430	900	44(1.92/4.3)
BHJ	435	450	885	48(2.10/4.3)
KHG	434	445	880	45(1.94/4.3)

PTS(points): out of 100

Scores of 880 or above are considered excellent English competence. As the above table shows, all three students obtained the TOEIC scores of highly advanced native-like English ability. However, their academic performance showed less than satisfactory results, in fact, deficient grades.

V. CONCLUSION

The TOEIC results of the two groups of students under the 5th and 6th national curricula showed no significant difference in two sections of the test, listening comprehension and reading comprehension. More emphasis on the communicative aspect of English does not influence on any sections of the standardized English test. In fact, it is interesting that the two groups showed relatively the same results of the TOEIC.

Though communicative competence should definitely be acquired, grammar teaching should also be a part of English teaching as it plays an essential role in language acquisition and therefore, adequate attention should be given.

The results of the three students recruited under the non-resident- status, foreign-educated, showed high scores of the TOEIC but extremely low cumulative GPA (44, 48, and 45 out of 100) showing the negative correlation coefficients of $r=-0.005$. Foreign-educated students' background in science was so weak that all of them had difficult times with chemistry, physics, and/or biology. Consequently, they ended up repeating another year. Though there is a limitation of the small sample size and exclusively excellent group of students, the results of the study reveal that selecting medical students with good scores

of the standardized English test does not necessarily give a strong support on the current recruiting policy.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Levels: College

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