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Exploring the Washback of the TOEIC in South Korea

A sociocultural perspective on student test activity

Dawn Karen Booth

Abstract

Previous research clearly demonstrates the powerful relationship that exists between language testing, teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Hughes, 1989; Messick, 1996). However, researchers still wrestle with the multivariate nature of washback, and questions remain as to what factors are involved and under which conditions beneficial washback is most likely to occur (Cheng, 2008). Set within a large Korean university, this study aimed to better understand how certain factors and conditions may work together to contribute to the washback of the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) on student learning. To provide a thick description of the context, the study first explored student perspectives on the TOEIC through focus group methodology. The aim of the second phase of research was to document the actions and beliefs of thirteen students (English and non-English majors) while preparing for the TOEIC over a period of two to seven months. Data was triangulated through semi-structured journals and multiple interviews, quantitatively analysed through descriptive statistics, and qualitatively analysed through a multi-level procedure of coding grounded in Activity Theory (Engestrom, 1987; Lantolf, 2000, 2006; Leont’ev, 1978, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). The results provide further evidence of the high stakes status of the TOEIC for university students and support a view of washback as a complex system involving a range of factors that may mediate the influence that a test has on learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng & Curtis, 2004, Messick, 1996; Shih, 2007). Of these factors, the results highlight the important contribution of situated learner goals and actions, and the influence of learner histories, cultural and social associations, attributes, conceptualisations, and agency in directing the washback effect of a test. In light of these findings, this study posits a revised model of washback on learners and learning. It represents a shift in the direction of washback research toward a more socially situated view of how a test and test-taker, embedded in powerful sociocultural, historical, political, and economic contexts may influence the processes and outcomes of student learning in situ.
Acknowledgements

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1.0 Background and Rationale

English language tests, embedded in political and social contexts, contribute to decisions of critical importance in today’s world, and yet the growing dominance of these tests is often ‘unquestioned, unchallenged, unmonitored and uncontrolled’ (Shohamy, 2007, p. 524). Adjacent to the growth of English as a global language, the demand for ‘worldwide English testing’ (Cheng, 2008) has particularly flourished in recent times. Examples of globally recognised measures of English include: the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Michigan Examination for Certificate of Competency, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). Despite the powerful and far-reaching political and social impact of these examinations (McCrostie, 2009; Nall, 2004), relatively little research has explored the consequences of these tests, not only as gate keeping devices, but on English language learning in general. In particular, despite the high stakes nature of the TOEIC, which has become one of the most powerful and influential tools for hiring employees in Korea and Japan, surprisingly little research (by either the test makers or independent researchers) has systematically monitored the influence of the test on English language learners. This study, which investigates the washback of the TOEIC, therefore, responds to an urgent need for research in this area.

Washback, the major theoretical concept explored in this work, originates from the idea that although tests usually come at the end of a course or unit, they often influence the attitudes, behaviours, and motivation of teachers and learners in the period leading up to the test (Pearson, 1988). This influence is seen as working in a backward direction, hence ‘washback’. While researchers argue over the scope of the term, in recent times the concept has more generally come to refer to the influence that tests have on teaching and learning (Bailey, 1996; Buck, 1988; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Messick, 1996; Spratt, 2005; Wall, 1997). Washback has long been observed in general education where the assumption underlying much debate is that it is often testing that determines ‘what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned and how it is learned’, as opposed to any ‘official’ stated curriculum (Madaus, 1988, p. 83). Latham (1877) first documented examinations as an ‘encroaching power’ affecting students,
parents, teachers and the ‘notion of the public about education’ (p. 2) in the 1800s; however, it was not until the mid-1980s that Alderson (1986) identified washback as an area in which we need to conduct more research in the field of language testing. Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis (2004) also highlight that despite the importance of understanding the mechanisms involved in test washback, only recently have researchers become aware of the need to explore the phenomenon empirically. This study, therefore, contributes to an important, yet underdeveloped field within language testing.

The setting in which this research takes place is South Korea. In as little as four decades, the nation (once referred to as the ‘Hermit Kingdom’) rapidly transformed from a developing agrarian society into the seventh largest exporting country in the world. This ‘economic miracle’ (CNN, 2011) is frequently linked to the rapid growth of a highly competitive work force driven by a strong zeal for education – a commodity greatly prized in Korean society. After a visit to South Korea in 2009, the U.S President, Barak Obama, lauded Korean fervour for education and stressed the need to reform U.S education and infrastructure to catch up with benchmark countries like South Korea (Chun, 2011). However, while these accounts paint an impressive picture of rapid development and commitment to education, the reality faced by millions of students is intense pressure to perform well on standardised tests that control access to elite schools, future jobs, social status and even marriage partners (Cho, 2004; Sorensen, 1994). Spurred on by the cultural-historical belief that tests provide equal opportunity to climb the ladder of social status (Choi, 2008), and in the hope of doing better than others, middle and high school students engage in long days of study (in both regular and private school classes) often finishing around 10 pm every weekday. Of consequence, terms like ‘education fever’ and ‘examination hell’ have come to pervade Korean society (Cho, 2004; Kim-Renaud, 2005).

In a special issue of the Asia TEFL Book Series (Language Assessment in Asia), Jeon (2010) describes the Korean education system as a ‘competitive pressure cooker’ (p. 57), and reports how Korean society observes numerous suicides and ‘mental breakdowns’ among students. As a sad testament, during the first year of this doctoral research, the Korean Times published an article titled: ‘Elementary Schoolboy Kills Himself Over Exam Failures’ (Kim, 2008). The article describes the story of a 10-year-old Korean boy who committed suicide in his family home after crying loudly in class over a low mark in a midterm exam. The year following this incident, a 16-year-old Korean high school student set himself ablaze in the street after
leaving a note explaining how he had done badly in school tests and had let his parents down (Jung, 2011). While these stories perhaps represent extreme anecdotal cases, they draw attention to the need to better understand the powerful influence that tests and testing systems have on learners, especially from the perspective of those who are perhaps most likely affected by them - the test-takers. A key aim of this study is to do just that.

Of the small number of studies investigating the effect of English language tests on Korean learners, most have focused on the English component of the college entrance test (see for example: Cho, 2010; Hwang, 2003; Kim & O, 2002). In a special issue of the journal Language Testing, however, Choi (2008) provides an overview of the impact of standardised tests in EFL education in Korea. He describes how the cumulative effect of the English language testing system in South Korea carries through from elementary school to higher education, and that some of the negative effects associated with standardised multiple-choice English tests include a narrowing focus on content that is easily measurable (such as reading and listening), and test-taking strategies. As the author notes, under such circumstances it is not surprising that so few Korean EFL learners, young and old, have acquired genuine communicative competence. At the same time, he suggests that ‘no one seems to have been able to provide any alternative solution to the complex issue of EFL testing and its negative impact (pp. 58-59). His article highlights the need for more empirical research on the influence of tests and testing systems within Korea.

Descriptions of the Korean context by both Choi (2008) and Jeon (2010) above, also direct our attention toward the need to explore tests as situated within complex social environments. A key aim of this study is to investigate the washback of the TOEIC within Korea from a sociocultural perspective – a point of view that to date appears to have gained little attention, but one that supports recent emphasis in the field of language testing. Rather than viewing tests as ‘isolated events’, for example, Shohamy (2007) suggests we turn our attention to understanding them as ‘acts’ - acts which are embedded in and connected to political, educational, pedagogical, bureaucratic, psychological and social variables that affect teaching and learning (p. 522).

1.1 Specific Purpose and Significance of this Study

Perhaps the ultimate purpose of any researcher investigating washback is that of better understanding how tests can encourage positive learning outcomes and act as positive levers
of change. It does not take much reading on the subject, however, to realise that washback is a highly complex phenomenon where, from the small body of research to date, results suggest that ‘it can no longer be taken for granted that where there is a test, there is a direct effect’ (Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis, 2004, p. xiii). Chapter Three of this dissertation draws attention to the multifarious array of factors that may mediate the washback of a test – a perspective recently captured in a model of washback on student learning by Shih (2007). Shih (2007) presents a range of factors (test, intrinsic and extrinsic factors) that may interrelate and influence the washback of a test on student learning and psychology. In essence, Shih’s (2007) model portrays a dynamic and complex view of washback that accounts for why students in similar contexts may experience different types of washback in response to the same test. At the same time, as the author himself points out, the model fails to show the mechanisms or processes by which different variables may interact. In light of this limitation, and influenced by learning theory in social traditions of education and SLA (Breen, 2001; Engeström, 1987; Gergen, 1985; Lantolf, 2000, 2006; Leont’ev, 1978, 1981; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Thorne, 2000; Sfard, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978), a significant feature of the present study is that it examines washback as a process, driven by the contributions that learners make in situ.

Simply stated, this thesis tells the story of a group of individuals preparing for the TOEIC over one semester at one Korean university. As opposed to exploring washback within a specific classroom context (typical of other washback studies), this thesis traces the actions, behaviours and perspectives of learners as they voluntarily and independently instigate their own methods of test preparation. It explores student perspectives on the TOEIC, investigates motivating factors behind taking and preparing (or not preparing) for the test; documents the types of actions and learning processes students engage in, and investigates key influences behind this. It further examines learner perspectives on the outcomes of their test preparation. Due to the hypothesis that English majors may experience washback differently as a result of their major (Shih, 2007), a further feature of this study is that it examines and compares the perspectives of both English majors, and students with majors other than English (other-majors). Accordingly, it provides interesting insights into how familiar communities of practice associated with a student’s major may influence washback.

To best capture some of the social complexity associated with washback, this study employs a predominantly qualitative, case study approach conducted in two phases. As Dörnyei (2007) suggests, case studies offer ‘rich and in-depth insights that no other method can yield,
allowing researchers to examine how an intricate set of circumstances come together to interact in shaping the social world around us’ (p. 155). Phase One comprises an exploratory investigation involving four focus group interviews, where the aim was to introduce the researcher and reader to the context, and become aware of different learner perspectives that may be used to help direct the second phase of the study. Through semi-structured journals and interviews, the purpose of the second, and more substantial, phase was to document and analyse the actions and beliefs of thirteen students preparing for the TOEIC (seven English-majors & six other-majors). Both phases provide a rich source of data that contributes to a very small pool of longitudinal research documenting the real-life actions students take in response to a worldwide, high stakes English language proficiency test. The results also present candid learner perspectives on the influence of the TOEIC and unveil important insights into the wider stakes of the test, and, as mentioned, highlight the important contribution that individual test-takers make in intentionally or unintentionally directing the washback effect of the TOEIC.

1.2 Structure
Following this introductory chapter (Chapter One), the thesis is divided into three parts. Part One (Chapters 2-4) reviews literature across fields relevant to the study; Part Two (Chapters 5-9) comprises the methodological design and the results, and Part Three (Chapters 10-11) presents the discussion and conclusion. Each part is described in more detail below.

Part I: Review of Literature
Chapter Two begins with a review of literature on the context of South Korea, including a brief description of the geography, population, history, and economy. The chapter further explores the unique qualities of the Korean education system: the early and ongoing influence of Confucianism, the development of the modern education system, and present day emphasis on academic achievement and assessment. An overview of EFL teaching and testing in Korea follows, and it is within this context that the TOEIC is introduced. The second part of the chapter presents an historical overview of the Standard (Reading and Listening) TOEIC, and outlines recent changes to the format and test battery, including the debut of TOEIC Speaking and Writing. Despite the scant number of studies to have critically evaluated the TOEIC, the chapter then examines the use, practicality, and validity of the test, and highlights the need for more research on the consequential validity of the TOEIC program.
Chapter Three introduces and operationalises the key concept under investigation – washback. It begins with an overview of the origin of the term in general education, and follows with the historical development of the concept in language testing. The chapter then focuses on the nature and scope of washback in terms of its different dimensions and relationships to other similar and related concepts. The second part of Chapter Three examines previous studies investigating key areas of learning including washback on content and strategies of learning, and washback on the promotion of language skills and learner affect. It further explores washback and Korean learners in ESL and EFL contexts, and the washback of the TOEIC. Acknowledging that ‘various factors within a particular educational context seem to be involved in engineering desirable washback’ (Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis, 2004, p. xiii), the final part of the chapter introduces Shih’s (2007) model of washback on learning as a key influence behind this study.

Due to previous limitations of studies that have tended to overlook or under-operationalise learning (see Tsagari, 2007), Chapter Four then demonstrates how a ‘social’ conceptualisation of learning through sociocultural theory (SCT) may help capture and disentangle some of the complexity associated with washback. It begins with a review of cognitive and social traditions in SLA, and outlines the origin and development of Vygotskian sociocultural theory, focusing on key concepts such as: mediation, the zone of proximal development, and agency. Then, drawing upon the importance of learner agency in developing a second language, and the influence of different community states, represented in more recent literature, the chapter presents Activity Theory (within SCT) as a theoretical framework to help better understand the process of student learning in response to a test.

**Part II: Methodology & Results**

Chapter Five, the methodology, introduces the research paradigm, and defines and rationalises the use of a qualitative, case study approach to the central enquiry. It further summarises criteria associated with credible, valid and dependable qualitative research, and outlines strategies employed to establish this. Figure 5.1, on page 108, presents an overview of the two major phases of data collection, and the chapter continues with an outline of procedures used for the recruitment and selection of participants. Although detailed descriptions of the participants are presented in Part Three of the study, other key players (including the researcher, translators, transcribers, and translation and peer checkers) are introduced in this chapter. The methodology continues with a description and discussion of
the instruments and methods used in each phase of data collection and outlines steps used to counter potential limitations. Procedures taken with regard to data transformation and analysis are also presented in this chapter.

Chapters Six to Nine provide a detailed description of the participants and report on the results of both phases. Chapter Six presents the key themes to emerge from Phase One - focus group interviews. Findings from this chapter help support an emic perspective, introduce the reader to the context, and highlight the need to explore washback as a complex system. The results further support the use of sociocultural theory as a lens through which to investigate the type of factors that may drive learner action in situ. Chapter Seven introduces the longitudinal quantitative results of the second phase of research. It begins with a description of the participants and reports on the quantitative findings of semi-structured journals establishing the different types of actions students took during test preparation and the areas of language students focused on. From the thirteen students who participated in Phase Two, Chapters Eight and Nine present the individual case studies of three other-major and two English-major students respectively. Each individual case study incorporates the quantitative and qualitative results of journals and interviews. Then, guided by Activity Theory, each chapter reports on the goals, actions, and operations driving student test preparation, and key influencing factors behind learner activity. Chapters Eight and Nine further present student perspectives on the outcomes of their learning as a consequence of their test activity. Each case study is summarised by way of a visual data display.

Part III: Summation

Where Chapters Six to Nine present the results with some descriptive commentary specific to the data set, Chapter Ten provides a detailed discussion based on the data set as a whole. Divided into three parts, the discussion begins with an evaluation of the wider stakes and positions the TOEIC as both influencing and being influenced by test-takers and interrelated groups within the wider community. The second part of the chapter draws attention to the individual test-taker and highlights the complex influence of interconnected, individual, community, and test factors on individual test stakes, motives and goals and subsequent learner action toward test preparation. The chapter further highlights the influence of different mediatory factors on the content of student learning, strategy use, and rate and sequence of learning, which in turn may influence the degree and depth of student learning and learner affect. Based on the results of the study and previous literature, the third part of
the chapter proposes a new tentative model of washback on learning. Finally, Chapter Eleven concludes with a restatement of the rationale and purpose of the study, acknowledges the scope and limitations, and summarises the most important findings and contributions to emerge from the project. The chapter further outlines implications for students, teachers, test makers and policy makers; and directs our attention toward areas in need of more research.
Part I: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter Two

South Korea and the TOEIC

2.0 Overview

This chapter reviews research on South Korea and the test under investigation – the TOEIC. It provides general background information about Korea, describes the unique cultural and historical factors that have shaped the development of the education system, and summarises the impact of EFL learning and testing within this context. The second part of the chapter presents the historical background of the TOEIC and describes the growing popularity of the test worldwide - particularly in Korea, where it is used for a range of high stakes purposes. The chapter continues with a description of the TOEIC program (highlighting recent changes to the test battery), and follows with an overall evaluation of the test.

2.1 SOUTH KOREA

The Republic of South Korea constitutes an area of 98,190 sq km and is divided into nine provinces, including seven administratively separate cities: Seoul, Busan, Incheon, Daegu, Gwangju, Daejeon and Ulsan. It has one of the world's highest population densities, with close to 50 million people, and despite a tumultuous history, including both cultural and military invasions from foreign countries, virtually all Koreans share a common (cultural and linguistic) heritage, making it one of the more culturally, ethnically, and linguistically homogeneous countries in the world (Edwards, 2006, 2011). As Edwards (2006) suggests, this intensity of Korean identity provides a distinctive arena for sociocultural and linguistic research since it is affected by fewer outside influencing factors in comparison with countries that have more richly diverse heritages. The unique and rich setting of Korea is explored below with a particular focus on the cultural and historical development of the education system, and the role of standardised testing both in general education and within the context of English language teaching and learning.

2.1.1 A Brief Historical Overview

Korea has had a varied and unique history as an independent state and as a collection of states. From 57 BC to 935AD, three kingdoms ruled the peninsula - Koguryo (37 BC-AD 668),
Paekche (18 BC-AD 660), and Shilla (57 BC-AD 935). Until the Shilla dynasty prevailed in establishing its authority over the peninsula, the time of the three kingdoms was a period marked by a flourishing of Confucianism and Buddhism, attempts at unification, and a suzerain relationship with China. At this time, Chinese systems and ideas pervaded the three early states of Korea and had a significant impact on Korean culture and society, influencing the early development of the Korean education system (as later discussed). From the 14th to the 19th century, Korea virtually closed itself from the rest of the world and became known as the ‘hermit kingdom’, only later to be influenced by international trade and Christian missionaries toward the late 1880s. In 1905, following the Russo-Japanese War, Korea became a protectorate of imperial Japan, and was annexed in 1910 as a colony until regaining independence under Japan’s surrender to the Allied Forces in 1945. Conflict between the North and South culminated in the Korean War, which continued from 1950 to 1953, and resulted in the division of the peninsula. To this day, North Korea remains an isolated communist country facing chronic economic problems.

South Korea, on the other hand, has achieved an incredible record of growth and integration into the high-tech modern world economy since the 1960s (CIA World Fact Book). In four decades, the country transformed from a GDP per capita of $100 (comparable with poorer countries in Africa and Asia) to an industrialised nation reaching a GDP per capita of $30,000 (est.) in 2010. Among many factors, this rapid success can be linked to a system of close government/business ties resulting in the promotion of directed credit, import restrictions, the sponsoring of specific industries, and importantly, the development of a strong labour effort (CIA World Fact Book). As Korea does not possess great natural resources, its main industries are generated from human resources (i.e. electronics, telecommunications, automobile production, chemicals and ship building). Human resources, as Choi (2008) notes, are cultivated and screened through fierce competition (p. 39). This is pertinent to the context of the present research since fierce competition among human resources links closely to a preoccupation with educational achievement and competitive examinations (Guilloteaux, 2007, p. 8), as described below.

2.1.2 The Korean Education System

One of the more distinguishing characteristics of Korean people is their passion for education (Kim-Renaud, 2005; Lee, 2009), as evidenced by the fact that South Korean parents spend four times more on private education (as a percentage of GDP) than parents in any other
major economy (Asiaone, 2008). Guilloteaux (2007) observes three distinct factors which make the South Korean education system quite unique among other education systems: (a) the early and continuing dominance of Confucianism; (b) unique historical developments, and the rapid build-up of the modern education system under the influence of Japan and America; and (c) a national fervour for educational achievement and competitive examinations. Each is described in turn below.

Confucian Ideology
The values of Confucianism have pervaded the consciousness of Koreans for over two centuries (Park & Cho, 1995), and of all the Confucian spheres of Asia, Korea is often described as the most Confucian country (Guilloteaux, 2007). Confucianism, a philosophy that originated in China, derives from the traditional values espoused by Confucius and his followers, and includes elements from Taoism, Legalism, Mohism, Buddhism, and, in the case of Korea and Japan, Shamanism (Park & Cho, 1995). The fundamental principles of Confucianism apply to two dimensions of human life: the interpersonal and the intrapersonal. The interpersonal dimension relates to ‘loving the people’ and ‘renovating the people’, or bringing about the same result in every other person (Legge, 1960). Loving the people requires one to act with human-heartedness (i.e. jen), which entails displaying benevolence, goodness, and sympathy for others. Renovating the people involves observing the rules of propriety or ‘rightness’ (i.e. yi). This includes knowing one’s place and role within the family and within society, and fulfilling the duties associated with that place (Guilloteaux, 2007). The second, intrapersonal dimension of Confucianism involves ‘self cultivation’, i.e. the pursuit of harmony with oneself, others and nature, and the development of one’s knowledge through life-long learning (Guilloteaux, 2007, p. 9).

Influenced by these dimensions, formal learning, scholarship and examinations have played a central role in Korean society. Seth (2005), for example, explains how in traditional Korea an individual could become virtuous through the study of ethically oriented Confucian classics and assume an informal role as a moral exemplar or teacher/advisor to others. In other words, individuals could enhance their status and influence in society through formal learning and by passing civil examinations. Therefore, while education was recognised as a means to an end in itself, in practice, it was also generally seen as a means of social mobility and status selection (p. 5). Seth (2005) summarises this relationship as follows:

As a result of the Confucian ideology and the use of examinations as a social selection device, pre-modern Korea was a society in which formal learning, important as a
means of acquiring public office and for achieving personal moral perfection, was a major preoccupation (p. 5).

Discussion on the ongoing influence of Confucianism and examinations in the development of the Korean education system continues below.

The Development of the Korean Education System

Early Development of the Korean Education System (Late 4th Century - 958)

Education was introduced into Korea after China established suzerainty over the peninsula in 110 B.C. During the 4th century, formal education began with the teaching of Chinese ideograms and the Chinese classics to the sons of the upper class who were expected to become the future elite (Kim & Park, 2000). Despite the fact that education was highly valued and open to anyone, only the upper classes could afford the long years of study required to master the Chinese classics (Seth, 2002). In 958, Korea adopted a series of highly competitive civil service examinations modelled on the Chinese system. The rewards for passing these exams included secured positions of power, land, success, and prestige in Korean society (Park & Kim, 1999). The examinations required candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the Confucian classics, their ability to write poetry and essays, and their skills in Chinese calligraphy. Again, very few commoners took these exams because of restrictions such as regional quotas, restrictions on low caste groups, the presence of low caste ancestors in applicants’ lineages, and the barring of illegitimate sons (Won, 1997). Consequently, education was mostly limited to the ‘self-conscious, hereditary ruling class’ known as the yangban, which numbered no more than 15 percent of the population (Sorensen, 1994, p. 12). Commoners were almost totally excluded from official government service.

First Foreign Influence (late 19th Century – 1910)

During the Chosen period (1392 – 1910), Korea adopted a political system based on an indigenous form of Neo-Confucianism – a rigidly prescriptive interpretation of Confucianism. At this time, as mentioned, Korea closed itself off from the rest of the world, and education focused on moral instruction, history, writing, and literature as fine art, and prompted contempt for practical learning in mathematics and science. As a result, education was almost entirely history, philosophy, and poetry written in Chinese. Practical areas such as astronomy, medicine, and foreign languages were left to the chungin – a small collective of distinctly lower-status specialised lineages located in the capital (Sorensen, 1994). Blaming Neo-Confucian conservatism and rampant corruption for the backwardness of the country, a group
of scholars known as the ‘enlightened movement’ pushed for reform toward the 1880s (Park & Kim, 1999). During this time of change, Korea also started to engage in international trade where attempts were made to introduce Western knowledge and skills. Christian missionaries (mostly Americans) initiated movements toward educating the masses, founding private schools and public institutes (including schools which taught practical subjects). For most Koreans, this was their first exposure to Western education values. This time was further marked with the abolition of the civil service examinations in 1894, movement toward mass education regulated by the state, and an effort to replace Confucian orientated learning with a modern curriculum (Guilloteaux, 2007, p. 12).

Build up to the Modern Education System (1910 – present day)
Since Korea had developmentally fallen behind the rest of the world by the nineteenth century, progress involved adapting knowledge from more developed countries such as Japan and America – two historically influential powers that significantly impacted the development of the modern education system in Korea. Under the colonisation and annexation of Japan from 1910 to 1945, authorities established a highly centralised system of mass education in Korea modelled after the 19th century German “Volksschule” (Kim & Park, 2000). Government agencies maintained strict control of the curriculum, textbooks, and teacher training, creating uniformity in content and quality. Under Japanese rule, the aim of the education system was to bring the entire school-age population to a basic level of education. In 1945, when Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule, 65% of primary school aged children were enrolled in schools. Accordingly, Japan had brought structure to the education system and made elementary education available to more Koreans. In reality, however, education under Japanese rule was elitist with secondary education highly restricted for Koreans. Only 20% of secondary school aged children were enrolled in schools. Moreover, Japanese colonial education, as Sorensen (1994) notes, was fundamentally designed to assimilate Koreans, to ‘keep them in their place – subordinate in all ways to ethnic Japanese’ (p. 15). Furthermore, in terms of content, although more people had become acquainted with modern science and mathematics, few could talk about these subjects in any language other than Japanese, and when Korea became independent again in 1945, the departure of Japanese teachers created a gap in trained manpower. Illiteracy increased to 78%.

The liberation of the Korean peninsula from Japan was a turning point for education in Korea. After the creation of the new independent republic and under the three-year period of the U.S.
Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), America made educating South Koreans a major priority. The focus of reform included promoting anti-communism and democratic ideals, and raising literacy in the general population in order to bring about economic prosperity. Although the new South Korean government embraced reform (especially the ideal of education for everyone), they decided that in keeping with Confucian values the new Korean education system would be based on ‘life centered’ and ‘morally centered’ education - ethical ingredients perceived to be missing from American progressive education (Guilloteaux, 2007).

Following this period, and despite the later destruction of the Korean War (1950 – 1953), the Rhee administration (1948 – 1960) continued to work hard to lay the foundations of Korea’s new education system, and in 1949 it passed the Basic Education Law (with modifications, still in effect today). This law provided for the creation of a unified system which included six years of compulsory free education beginning at age seven, three years of non-compulsory high school and four years of college. However, providing funding for facilities and teachers for a rapidly expanding population proved challenging during a time of early economic growth. Classes frequently exceeded 100 pupils, and schools sometimes operated two and three shifts a day in crowded urban areas (Sorensen, 1994). This period, from 1953 on, also marked the government implementation of comprehensive entrance exams for middle and high school ensuring that those who received the limited secondary education available were the most qualified.

In conjunction with rapid economic progress, the Korean educational system expanded rapidly from the 1960s onward. Widespread illiteracy was eradicated and the drive to improve the quality of education was relentless, leading to reforms in teacher education and regular revisions of the curriculum and teaching methods (Guilloteaux, 2007). In 2000, Korea boasted a near 100% literacy rate, and in the last decade, South Korean students have consistently achieved high math, science and problem-solving scores in international aptitude tests (Kim-Renaud, 2005), outpacing their American counterparts. In effect, over a period of fifty years, South Korea went from having one of the lowest literacy and educational achievement levels in the world to one of the highest (Kim & Park, 2004) - a remarkable transition. However, the rapid expansion of what many perceive to be equal educational opportunity has led to a substantial increase in the number of students entering higher levels
of learning, which in turn, has caused stiff competition, contributing to a present day atmosphere of ‘education fever’ and ‘examination hell’ as described below.

Present Day Education Fever and Examination Hell

Motivated by deeply rooted Confucian principles of self cultivation and diligence, and driven by the belief that upward mobility is possible through educational attainment, Kim-Renaud (2005) describes how Koreans have become obsessed with obtaining diplomas – ‘tickets to a brighter world’ (p. v). This obsession, where students fiercely compete for positions in prestigious universities, is frequently referred to as ‘education fever’ (kyoyungnyol). No doubt, national standardised test scores which control access to sought-after places within education play a critical role in the lives of individuals - so much so, that the term ‘examination hell’ (sihom chiok) has also come to pervade the vernacular of Korean students. Of all standardised tests used to screen university admission, the KCSAT (Korean College Scholastic Aptitude Test) carries the heaviest weight among all indicators of achievement (Choi, 2008, p. 55), and literally determines the future social, financial and intellectual success of the test-taker (Cho, 2004; Choi, 2008; Sorensen, 1994). Consequently, it is considered the most important high stakes test in Korea. Breen (2004) summarises the rewards attached to graduating from a ‘top’ university as a result of performing well on this test as follows:

(S)chool and university provide Koreans with the most important social network of their life. Old Boyism works rather like the public school and Oxbridge system in that the higher the establishment is on a scale, the greater the sense of mutual support. If you are a graduate from a top university you can be confident that there are thousands of ‘seniors’ out there who will do favours for you (p. 65).

Assessment clearly plays a pivotal role in determining the future success of individuals in Korea. Choi (2008) suggests that although the use of standardised testing influences educational systems, teaching paradigms, and the learning styles and future careers of individuals around the globe, it is ever more the case in the context of Korea given that the economy is driven by human resources (p. 208). Sorensen (1994) goes as far as to describe the Korean education system as a ‘testocracy’ where high school and college entrance exams ripple throughout the entire system (p. 17). No doubt, as the author notes, teachers ‘teach to tests’ and examination preparation drives South Korea’s education (Seth, 2005, p. 33).

Germane to the present study, it is within this context that EFL education and testing in Korea is situated, as introduced below.
2.1.3 EFL Education and Testing in Korea

Jeon (2010) describes the ability to communicate in English as a vital and competitive tool within Korean society (p. 55). Not surprisingly, it forms an integral part of the Korean educational system. English as a foreign language has been taught as a required subject in secondary schools since after the Korean War, and was incorporated into the elementary school curriculum from 1997. Primary school children learn English from ages three to six; secondary school education includes three years of English in middle school, and three years in high school. By the time students finish high school, they are expected to have a productive vocabulary of around 3000 words. At the tertiary level (technical college and university degree courses), students must take English as a required subject which typically consists of reading and language laboratory practice. Technical colleges often focus on general and business English, while universities may encourage more academic English. Cho (2004) also describes how many students suspend their degree program for one or two years before graduating in order to obtain English certifications abroad - a notable advantage when applying for jobs.

Due to severe competition, and in order to compensate for limitations in public education (including large class sizes, a lack of exposure to native speakers, and grammar orientated lessons) many students turn to extracurricular English activities, such as private lessons with native English speakers, and/or private language classes at institutes (called *Hakwons* or ‘English academies’) (Cho, 2004). The demand for private English language learning has grown dramatically. While only 4% of elementary school children enrolled in private schools in 1990, this figure rose to 50% by 1997 (Guilloteaux, 2007). In 2008, numbers increased again to 90%. In addition to core areas of English, EFL instructors in private language schools often teach special EFL examination courses such as TOEIC and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) which tend to focus on test-taking skills. This is similar to the teaching methodology found in ‘cram schools’ which focus specifically on improving students’ test-taking skills for the English section of the KCSAT (Guilloteaux, 2007). There is no doubt that English language testing has had a significant impact on Korean society.

In a special issue of *Language Testing* (exploring language testing in Asia) Choi (2008) presents an overview of the impact of EFL testing in Korea. He describes each of the major standardised tests used across elementary, secondary and adult education, and provides an overview of the impact of English language testing at each level. Based on the results of a
survey presented to teachers within private institutes, Choi (2008) suggests there is a strong presence of testing at the elementary school level where teachers use EFL tests to motivate students to study English and improve their English skills. TOEFL was reported in a number of cases, and as such, the author stresses concern over the use of language assessments deemed far too difficult for students’ cognitive level and language ability, leading to invalid consequences and unreliable statistics. He further highlights ethical concerns regarding children’s rights to learn in an appropriate manner. Surveys from one hundred fifth graders at private institutes also revealed that students believed that adults (institute instructors, followed by parents) were responsible for making them take tests. Results from teacher questionnaires, however, reported that it was parents, not schools who were most responsible for enforcing the use of EFL tests. The most important reason for institutes choosing a particular EFL test was whether it was a recognised record of achievement among parents. Therefore, parents, ‘extremely sensitive to their children’s school record of academic achievement’ (ibid, p. 54), and language institutes sensitive to the needs of parents, appeared to be a key motivating forces behind the use of EFL tests in the private sector.

Choi (2008) also reports on the effect of EFL testing in secondary schools. Despite major changes to the national curriculum promoting communicative objectives and activities, and despite having three or four classes a week, Choi (2008) describes how pupils rarely take part in conversation sessions. A major influence behind this, according to the author, is that teachers tend to place an ‘excessive emphasis on reading and grammar’ in response to the content of the KCSAT, and focus on skills needed to answer exam questions including test-taking strategies (p. 31). At one secondary school, for example, the author found that in order to score well in the college entrance test, students did not refer to the entire passage of the English reading section but resorted to test-taking strategies instead. Research on the influence of the English component of the KCSAT is further outlined in Chapter Three.

In the case of higher learning, Choi (2008) describes a recent trend in Korea where universities adopt policies where students must obtain scores on specified standardised EFL tests (such as the TOEIC) in order to graduate - a practice controversial among students and professors. Some universities and colleges also use EFL test scores in allocating scholarship funds and fee reductions. For example, Jee (2007) reports how Chonnam Food and Nutrition College supported scholarships from 200,000 to 500,000 KRW (US$200 - $500) for students who scored over 700 on the TOEIC, and how students from Seoul Women’s University
received scholarships based on increases in TOEIC scores. In the case of the TOEIC in particular, Choi (2008) posits that it is problematic to employ the test for uses other than those intended by the developers (p. 44). Certainly, the test makers suggest that the TOEFL not the TOEIC be used for institutions of higher learning to fulfil language or graduation requirements or to screen for scholarships. Beyond tertiary institutions, Choi (2008) also describes how some national exams (i.e. the Sasi - the Korean version of the Bar Exam) have selected standardised EFL test scores, including the TOEIC, as a prerequisite to enrolment.

Given the powerful presence of high stakes, standardised English testing throughout Korean education, where students are essentially trained to prepare for multiple-choice exams, Choi (2008) suggests that it is no wonder that Korean students, young and old, have difficulty acquiring genuine communicative competence. He concludes his paper with an overall description of the impact of EFL testing in Korea as follows:

Failing to acquire good test scores and the expected English proficiency, the majority of Korean test consumers are increasingly disillusioned with EFL testing. At the same time, no one seems to have been able to provide any alternative solution to the complex issue of EFL testing and its negative impact (p. 59).

With very little empirical research investigating the consequences of English language testing in Korea (see Chapter Three of this work), Choi’s (2008) words call attention to an urgent need for more research. The influence of the TOEIC on student learning in Korea, in particular, has received very little interest within the research community; yet for decades it has functioned as ‘practically the one and only EFL test for hiring employees at major Korean corporations’ (Choi, 2008). The second part of this chapter is devoted to presenting this incredibly influential test within Korean society.

2.2 THE TOEIC

The TOEIC was developed in the 1970s by Chauncey Group International, a subsidiary of Educational Testing Service (ETS), in response to a request by the Japanese government for an English language proficiency test developed specifically for the workplace. Based in Princeton, ETS is the largest private testing organisation in the world, developing educational testing programs including TOEFL, GMAT, and SAT. Through collaboration with a Japanese team, the Chauncey Group designed a listening and reading comprehension test (the Classic Standard TOEIC) to be used by corporate clients, and in 1979, the TOEIC was first administered in Japan to 2710 examinees. For well over two decades, the format of the test remained the same. However, in 2006, ETS revised the Standard TOEIC, and introduced
speaking and writing modules, and with all four components, the test makers describe the TOEIC program as a measure of the ‘everyday English skills of people working in an international environment’ where ‘scores indicate how well people can communicate in English with others in business, commerce and industry’ (ETS, 2008). They also promote the use of the test as follows:

- Corporations use the TOEIC test to document progress in English training programs, recruit and promote employees, and put standard measurements in place across locations.
- English programs use it to place students at the right learning levels, and show student progress and program effectiveness.
- Government agencies use it to document progress in English language courses, and to recruit, promote and hire employees (ETS, 2008).

As the TOEIC program has come to meet the needs of various stakeholders for a wide range of purposes, the popularity and influence of the test has grown considerably over the last 30 years. In 2010, ETS administered more than six million TOEIC tests worldwide, establishing the program ‘as the largest and most widely used English-language assessment for the work place’ (Betaneli, 2011). The majority of test-takers come from Japan or Korea (making up 90% of all test-takers); however, the TOEIC is available in 120 countries and the global use of the test continues to rise. The number of test-takers in Taiwan, for example, grew 18% in 2010 (Betaneli, 2011), and in 2011, the TOEIC was accredited by the U.K Border Agency for people wishing to work, study or settle in the U.K. In Korea, 1.9 million examinees took the test in 2007, outnumbering Japanese test-takers for the first time, and in 2008, Choi (2008) described the TOEIC as the most widely used English test in Korea, making up 47.1% of the entire EFL testing market for adult test-takers. A detailed description and evaluation of the test follows.

2.2.1 Description
The Standard TOEIC is a two hour pencil-and-paper assessment with two sections (reading and listening) each containing 100 multiple choice questions. The test content includes settings and situations associated with general business, finance, corporate development, travel, entertainment and health (Cunningham, 2002). Although vocabulary and usage are targeted for business contexts, specialised knowledge or vocabulary from any specific field is not required. The listening section includes four parts, lasts 45 minutes, and is administered via a compact disc or tape-recorder. The reading section also includes four parts and allows 75 minutes. Using item response theory, each section is scored separately and converted to a
scale from 5 to 495. The total score ranges from 10 to 990 points, i.e. the simple sum of the points from the two sections.

As noted, in 2006 revisions to the Standard test were undertaken to reflect growing demand from companies and organisations to better reflect international business language communication scenarios and real language (In’nami & Koizumi, 2012; Liao, 2010, Schedl, 2010). Table 2.1 provides a summary of the composition of the old (classic) and revised versions.

Table 2.1
A Comparison of the Classic and Revised TOEIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Classic TOEIC</th>
<th>No. of Questions</th>
<th>Revised TOEIC</th>
<th>No. of Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Listening Section (45m)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Listening Section (45m)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Question-Response</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Question-Response</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Short Conversations</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Short Conversations</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Short Talks</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Short Talks</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Reading Section (75m)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Reading Section (75m)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Incomplete Sentences</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Incomplete Sentences</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Error Recognition</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Text Completion</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>Single passage</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Double passage</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the most part, the format of the listening section remains the same across both versions. Part One requires examinees to listen to a statement about a photograph and select the item that best describes the picture. In Part Two, examinees hear a question or statement and three responses spoken in English, and are asked to select the best response. In Part Three, test-takers listen to conversations between two people and answer questions about what the speakers say in each conversation. Finally, in Part Four, examinees hear short talks given by a single speaker and answer questions about what the speaker says in each talk. Changes to the content of the Classic test, as noted by the test makers, include:

(a) a decrease in the number of photograph questions in Part 2, allowing more testing time for other authentic tasks;

(b) the use of both recorded and written questions in Parts 3 & 4, and longer listening stimuli, creating a broader measurement of abilities;

(c) a shift from individual questions to sets of questions in Part 3, moving away from discrete point items and evoking fewer topics to process; and
the use of different English accents, as spoken in North America, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, reflecting English taught and spoken across a wider international community.

With the exception of major changes to Part Six, the overall composition of the classic and revised versions of the reading test remains the same. In Part Five, examinees are given a series of incomplete sentences and must choose the best word or phrase missing from each sentence. Part Seven asks test-takers to read a selection of texts (such as magazine and newspaper articles, letters and advertisements) and answer several questions. A key difference in this part between the classic and revised versions, however, is the inclusion of sets of questions based on two inter-related passages which require the reader to connect information from both sets of text in a more authentic real world context (Duke, 2006). Further changes between the two versions include the elimination of error recognition questions from Part Six in the classic test, and the introduction of text completion questions in the revised version. In Part Six of the revised test, examinees are also asked to read a passage and choose the best word or phrase missing from different parts of that text.

In addition to revisions of the classic version of the TOEIC, ETS also introduced new (optional) speaking and writing components. The speaking test takes approximately 20 minutes and contains the following tasks: reading a text aloud, describing a picture, responding to questions with and without information provided, proposing a solution, and expressing an opinion. It is administered through the Internet-based test delivery system (iBT) and scored on a range between 0 – 200, and on an overall scale of 1 – 8. The writing test takes approximately 60 minutes and contains three tasks: writing sentences based on pictures, responding to a written request, and writing an opinion essay. Although the speaking and writing components are offered as a package, examinees may also take the speaking test separately.

In order to avoid confusion over the different forms of the test, throughout this work the original reading and listening test is referred to as the Classic TOEIC, and the revised version is distinguished as the Standard TOEIC. The new speaking and writing versions of the test are further differentiated as TOEIC Speaking and TOEIC Writing.

2.2.2 An Evaluation of the TOEIC

Despite the scope and popularity of the TOEIC, and after 30 years in circulation, research into the validity of the test has received relatively little attention from independent
researchers or ETS, particularly in comparison with the TOEFL. Chapman (2003) highlights that where the journal *Language Testing* published eight articles on the TOEFL between 1990 and 2003 no articles were dedicated to the TOEIC\(^1\). Moreover, between 1977 and 2002, ETS presented 69 research reports on the TOEFL with an additional 17 technical reports. During the same period, they published only three full research reports on the TOEIC (Wilson, 1993; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1996; Boldt & Ross, 1998), two research summaries (Woodford, 1982; Wilson, 1993) and four TOEIC related test reports. It was not until recent changes to the test that substantially more research emerged on the U.S website including one full research report and sixteen TOEIC related reports. A further five studies can be found on the Japanese website. Drawing upon research from ETS and independent research on both the old and newer versions of the test, the following evaluation of the TOEIC examines issues of utility, practicality and construct validity.

### 2.2.2.1 Utility

As noted in the introduction, where English as a global lingua franca increases, so does the need for English proficiency tests which provide a common yardstick, and without which, well-informed decisions would be more problematic (Hughes, 1989; Moritoshi, 2001). For companies, as ETS notes, the ability to communicate in English is often essential in today’s global workplace environment and employers are often faced with important decisions concerning the English language skills of their employees and prospective employees (Powers, 2010, p. 1.2). Rebuck (2003) further observes that where the responsibility for the English language needs of a company in the past may have fallen on a few specialised employees, the spread of the Internet and daily use of e-mail messages has made English a necessity. In this light, is hard to argue against the need for an English proficiency test for international communication in the workplace.

From a test-taker’s point of view, the TOEIC provides a measure of English ability which self-assessment cannot adequately fulfil, and as Moritoshi (2001) notes, given that employers are demanding a wider range of skills from applicants, the TOEIC plays an important role in providing a recognised measure of English ability for job applications. This is of particular importance in a depressed labour market, as currently experienced by many countries (including Korea), and in economies driven by human resources (which also applies to

\(^{1}\) Since this time, Language Testing published an article by Zhang (2006) investigating the relative effects of persons, items sections and languages on TOEIC score dependability; and an article on the factor structure of the TOEIC by In’nami and Koizumi (2012).
Korea). Moritoshi (2001) notes, however, that what was once an advantageous inclusion in a résumé, ‘is increasingly becoming a prerequisite, particularly in qualification-oriented cultures’ (p. 5). In other words, applicants may respond to the perceived need to provide TOEIC scores as a way of keeping up with other candidates, regardless of the actual need for a measure of English ability. Very little wide-scale research has investigated the extent of the English language demands within companies, how and why TOEIC scores are used, or the extent by which the test is able to address the language needs of companies. Much research is needed to establish the necessity of the test and justifiable use of test scores in the workplace.

Within contexts of higher learning, the TOEIC is used to assess the effectiveness of instruction, screen and place students, and award credits. Certainly, where thousands of university students take mandatory introductory English classes across Korean universities, the TOEIC provides an indispensable tool for placement. As presented in the next chapter, a study at one Japanese university shows how teachers were ‘grateful’ to have the TOEIC to place students and streamline classes (Iwabe, 2005). As mentioned, however, Choi (2008) reports cases where the test may be used for purposes outside that intended by the test makers, such as awarding scholarships or entry into and graduation from programs for which the TOEFL would be better suited. Accordingly, questions are raised regarding the utility of test scores functioning beyond the scope of the test construct.

2.2.2.2 Practicality

Practicality is a key factor contributing to the effectiveness of a test (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) and, from the perspective of its end users, the Standard TOEIC meets this criteria in several respects. It is not as expensive as tests that require all four components of language ability (such as the TOEFL); it is relatively easy to administer and score, and can be completed within appropriate time constraints. Rebuck (2003) emphasises the practical strengths of the Classic test which greatly contributed to the overall success of the TOEIC:

With TOEIC, companies and other organizations are able to employ one test to efficiently and economically determine the level of a large number of examinees. The TOEIC method of scoring makes the test ideal for the continuous assessment of employees…[and] TOEIC offers an Institutional Program (IP) test, allowing companies and organizations the flexibility to hold tests when they wish and at a venue of their choice (p. 24).

The TOEIC Speaking and Writing tests involve a more complex evaluation procedure, requiring carefully trained raters, but are also conveniently administered through the Internet-based test delivery system and stay within appropriate time constraints. It is important to note,
however, that although the practicality of the TOEIC may feature as a strong selling point, Bachman and Palmer (1996) present practicality as the least important of test qualities associated with test usefulness; moreover, since the Standard test may be taken independent from speaking and/or writing components, end users, looking to reduce costs, may be drawn to the Standard TOEIC as a single, defacto measure of English proficiency (Chapman & Newfields, 2008). In which case, the validity of the test in a broader sense comes under threat, as discussed below.

2.2.2.3 Construct Validity
Guided by the work of Cronbach (1989) and Messick (1989, 1996), construct validity has come to refer to the general, overarching notion of validity in language testing. Essentially, it represents the extent to which a given test score can be interpreted as an indicator of the abilities or constructs that are to be measured (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), or as Moritoshi (2001) states, ‘the degree to which a test’s tasks and topical contents ‘operationalise’ or tap into the construct as it has been described’ (p. 9). Messick (1996) highlights six aspects of construct validity to be used as a means of addressing the unified notion of validity, as presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Aspect</td>
<td>The extent by which test content constitutes a representative sample of the language skill structures etc. with which it is meant to be concerned (Hughes, 2003, p. 26), i.e. content validity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive Aspect</td>
<td>Evidence that test-takers engage in cognitive processes that are predicted by a theory of task performance (Read, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Aspect</td>
<td>Evidence that the scoring criteria for a test are consistent with the way that the test construct is defined (Read, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizability Aspect</td>
<td>The extent by which test results are consistent and dependable, i.e. reliability (Brown, 2004); and the extent by which test results may apply beyond the specific tasks in the test (Read, 2010), i.e. concurrent validity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Aspect</td>
<td>The degree by which test scores attest to the utility of the scores for the applied purpose (Messick, 1996), i.e. predictive validity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequential Aspect</td>
<td>Evidence that the test results are being used appropriately and not to the detriment of the test-takers (Read, 2010), i.e. impact &amp; washback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the validity of the TOEIC in Messick’s terms; rather, the aim of this section is to provide an overview of studies that have investigated different aspects of validity in connection to the TOEIC, and highlight areas in need of research.

Reliability Evidence
As a ‘well-constructed norm-referenced multiple choice test’ (Douglas, 2000, p. 236), the Standard TOEIC appears to have produced consistently high measures of reliability in both
the old and newer version of the test. Woodford (1982) reported reliability coefficients of 0.916 for Listening, and 0.930 for Reading, for the classic version. Zhang (2006) also independently examined the relative effects of persons, items sections and language backgrounds on TOEIC score dependability on a large sample of Korean and Japanese test-takers and reported that examinees’ test scores were highly generalizable, and similar to estimates published in earlier studies by ETS. Maintaining score comparability across the new Standard TOIEC and the classic version has been a further concern for the test makers with regard to maintaining consistency in the decisions stakeholders make on the basis of scores. Despite containing slightly different item type structures, the results of item statistics (difficulty and discrimination), as published by ETS, suggest that test scores on the new Standard TOEIC and Classic TOEIC tests are comparable (Liao, Hatrak & Yu, 2010, p. 4.9). Independent research appears to support this. Ito, Shimatani, Norizuki, and Kinoshita (2009), for example, reveal that both versions are equally reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = .928 and 9.3 respectively) and the mean scores are comparable.

While the statistics above provide strong evidence in support of the generalizability aspect of validity, it is important to consider other factors that might threaten the reliability of test scores, such as personal attributes of the test-takers. Of particular note, Bachman (1990) includes test-wiseness as a personal attribute, i.e. characteristics that a candidate develops to assist them in writing a test including aspects such as guessing strategies and test pacing (p. 114). Where test-specific strategies and techniques allow students to achieve higher test scores than their language ability would perhaps allow, this then becomes an issue of reliability (Sewell, 2005). Ideally, to minimise this, Messick (1996) suggests that assessments involve direct, open-ended tasks, unfettered by structured forms or restrictive response formats (such as those included in the format of the Standard TOEIC). This aspect of reliability is later addressed in Chapter Ten in light of the results of the present study.

With regard to reliability measures established for TOEIC Speaking and Writing tests, ETS reports a ten step process in the examinee handbook (ETS, 2007) to ‘ensure reliability’ (p. 24). Detailed scoring guidelines are used by raters who must pass a certification test to show that they can score responses accurately, and once certified, the performance of the raters is monitored to ensure that they maintain their accuracy. Statistics are also computed in order to monitor how well the raters agree with one another (Powers, 2010, p. 1.5). A recent study evaluating test-retest reliability for the speaking and writing tests reports reliability estimates
of .80 for the raw score of the TOEIC Speaking test and .83 for the raw score of the TOEIC Writing test. The publishers conclude that the ‘reasonably high’ reliability co-efficients from the study are acceptable for their intended purposes (Liao & Qu, 2010, p. 10.13). Independent research is needed to corroborate these findings.

Validation Studies – The Classic TOEIC
A major difficulty in clarifying the validity argument for the TOEIC is that the test makers have tended to define the test construct through broad descriptive statements, as opposed to ‘being clear about what knowledge of language consists of, and how that knowledge is actually deployed in actual performance’ (McNamara, 2000, p. 13). With regard to the construct of the Classic TOEIC, ETS originally described scores as indicating ‘how well people can communicate in English with others in the global workplace’ (ETS, 2003, p. 4). Throughout past decades ETS supported this mainly through the outmoded psychometric practice of presenting several forms of criterion-related, concurrent validity evidence. Early reports, for example, included correlations between the TOEIC and TOEFL reading comprehension and vocabulary sections, and the structure and written expression section. Correlations of .85 and .87 resulted respectively. Other concurrent measures included an in-house direct test of listening, which resulted in a correlation of 0.9, and numerous correlations with other listening tests ranging from 0.67 to 0.92 (ETS, 1998, cited in Sewell, 2005). Similar results have been reported for the reading test with correlations reported by ETS from 0.73 to 0.87.

Not surprisingly, criticism has emerged regarding the appropriateness of correlating the Classic TOEIC with the TOEFL since the test constructs are quite different, i.e. that of English in the global workplace, and English for academic purposes respectively (Chapman & Newfields, 2008; Nall, 2004). Moreover, Bachman (1990) describes how attempting to establish construct validity through criterion related validity evidence is essentially flawed since it simply extends the assumption of validity to other criteria, ‘leading to an endless spiral of concurrent relatedness’ (p. 249). In other words, concurrent evidence presented by the test makers above ‘is effectively circular, mutually supportive and neglects to make the necessary reference to descriptions of the constructs under examination’ (Moritoshi, 2001, p. 11).

In addition to scepticism surrounding the validity of the Classic TOEIC as a measure of listening and reading skills, concurrent evidence promoting the TOEIC as an overall measure
of English proficiency (Chauncey Group International Ltd., 1996; Suomi, 1992; Woodford, 1982) has also drawn strong criticism. Based on correlations between the TOEIC and the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), ETS stated that TOEIC scores provided a basis for predicting oral proficiency (ETS, 2003, p. 7). Previous discussion regarding the inappropriate use of criterion related validity evidence aside, Sewell (2005) notes that the correlation (i.e. between 0.71 and 0.83) was only slightly higher than Hughes’ (1989) suggested minimum correlation of 0.70 for a relatively low stakes test. Moreover, as Sewell (2005) notes, there was a much lower correlation between the Classic TOEIC and the OPI in the case of a Korean sample of test-takers (Wilson, 2001). Correlations between the TOEIC and other speaking tests also resulted in figures as low as 0.49 (Hirai, 2002). With regard to comparisons between the Classic TOEIC and writing ability, ETS reported a correlation coefficient of .83 (Woodford, 1982); however, the concurrent test was a custom-made direct test of writing constructed by the publishers, and independent research by Hirai (2002) against the BULATS test of writing showed a lower correlation of 0.66².

Research published by ETS in 2010, showing the relationship between the test scores of the new Standard TOEIC and TOEIC Speaking and Writing tests, further discounts earlier claims by the test makers supporting the Classic TOEIC as a general measure of English proficiency. Using disattenuated correlations, Liao, Qu and Morgan (2010) found that the TOEIC clearly measured four separate language skills. The authors suggest that although ‘it is natural that different language skills are correlated with each other to a certain degree…each test measures distinct aspects of language proficiency that cannot be assessed by the other tests’. Accordingly, in what appears to be quite a turn-around from ‘implying that reading, listening, speaking and writing are viewed as unitary, integrated skills’ (Moritoshi, 2001, p. 9), ETS now claims that ‘none of the TOEIC tests are regarded as an appropriate substitute for any one of the other TOEIC tests’ and that examinees should take ‘all of the TOEIC tests in order to gain a full understanding of the complete spectrum of their language proficiency skills’ (Liao, Qu & Morgan, 2010, p. 13.11).

Validation Studies – The Revised Standard TOEIC

Criticism regarding a lack of evidence supporting the construct validity of the TOEIC does not appear to have abated with the introduction of the new Standard TOEIC. In 2009,

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² Nall (2003) suggests that these results should be viewed with a degree of reservation given that Hirai (2002) did not make reference to the level of significance of these correlations, and correlations at this level are still likely to be significant.
Stoynoff (2009) reported that it still remained unclear, from research and practice materials available on the ETS website, ‘if the TOEIC was designed on the basis of a theoretical framework’ (p. 32). He also questioned the limited amount of validity evidence available and stated that the validity argument for the new Standard TOEIC would be much stronger if the publishers undertook similar rigorous investigations such as those used to promote the TOEFL. As if in response to this, and given a history of weak validity evidence, ETS contributed sixteen new reports from 2008 to 2010. Thirteen reports were published in 2010, doubling the total number of research reports on the website.

In a report titled, ‘Validity: What does it mean for TOEIC tests?’, the publishers introduce the overall purpose of the test as a measure of ‘a person’s ability to communicate in English in the context of daily life and the global workplace environment using key expressions and common, everyday vocabulary’ (Powers, 2010, p. 1.2). They also explain how key changes to the reading and listening tests brings the Standard TOEIC into alignment with current theories of language proficiency and communicative competence which recognise the complexity of authentic language contexts (Schedl, 2010). For example, the publishers highlight changes made to the test in line with the following acknowledgement:

…it is necessary for the learner to use multiple abilities and strategies in order to comprehend and connect information that is heard and read. Communication in real-world situations usually requires the simultaneous engagement of lexical, grammatical and phonetic and pragmatic language abilities (p. 2.2).

Overall, the test constructors promote the redesign as a better reflection of international business communication styles and real language contexts, and a ‘valid measure of international communication today’ (Powers, Kim & Weng, 2010, p. 6.2).

ETS also highlights greater transparency of the test construct, outlining the individual construct components of the Listening and Reading tests, identifying the claims the test makes about the examinee’s proficiency, and the underlying abilities related to each claim (see Schedl, 2010). By means of strengthening content validity, the publishers ensure that thorough and detailed test specifications are followed to ensure that ‘each form is highly similar to every other one and the right content is covered in the same proportion in each test’ (Powers, 2010). In what appears to be a movement away from an over-reliance on correlations with other tests like the TOEFL, ETS also promotes evidence of validity by linking test scores to test-takers’ self-assessments of their ability to perform everyday language tasks in English (Powers, Kim & Wen, 2010). Over 5000 test-takers from Japan and
Korea completed can-do inventory reports (divided into two forms) for listening and reading. Test-takers were asked to consider 25 reading tasks and 24 listening tasks and indicate how easily they could perform each task. From the results, ETS states that correlations between the TOEIC Listening and Reading scores and test-takers’ self-assessments show that for nearly all tasks, higher test performance was associated with a greater likelihood of reporting successful task performance.

However, as the authors note, the ‘soundness’ of the test-taker self-reports as a validity criterion was not evaluated and self-assessments may be susceptible to distortion and subject to criticism since people are not always aware of their own strengths and weaknesses (Powers, Kim & Wen, 2010, p. 6.12). Moreover, it is not clear from the study exactly how the items on the self reports specifically relate to the test construct or how they were proportionately represented. Moreover, despite changes to the Standard Test, Knapman (2008) fundamentally questions the theoretical basis from which ETS can promote the TOEIC as an indicator of communicative proficiency given that ‘communicative proficiency cannot be measured by paper and pencil tests, especially those that use only multiple choice items’ (p. 88). As the author notes, since the Standard TOEIC remains a multiple choice test divided into separate skills-focused sections, it essentially promotes a cognitive and structuralist model of language.

To highlight this point, Knapman (2008) cites McNamara (2000):

> Approaches which see the criterion performance as essentially requiring cognitive ability will be pre-disposed to use more indirect language tests, rather than those more communicative and contemporary theories of language which will emphasise social and interactional roles in meeting future criteria (p. 10).

Accordingly, Knapman (2008) concludes that given the ‘stark contrast’ between the cognitive model of test design that frames the Standard TOEIC, and the aim of the test designers to produce a test based on a communicatively defined test construct, the construct validity of the TOEIC is weak.

Chapman and Newfields (2008) also suggest that changes to the Standard TOEIC have not been comprehensive enough to make any considerable steps toward strengthening validity. In terms of the substantive aspect of validity, the authors contend, in line with previous criticism of the Classic TOEIC (Buck, 2001; Douglas, 1992; Hirai, 2002), that the Standard TOEIC fails to assess essential aspects of listening comprehension required in real-life communication. This includes: indirect speech acts, pragmatic implications, or other aspects of interactive language use, including natural hesitations, phonological shifts and negations.
for meaning between interlocutors. Moreover, although Chapman and Newfields (2008) laud the introduction of accents other than American, the authors point out that the accents represent a narrow sample of the range of varieties that are spoken worldwide, particularly in the context of Asia. With regard to the reading section, Chapman and Newfields (2008) also posit that although a decrease in the amount of items focusing on grammar and vocabulary has strengthened claims of validity, the new format still does not employ authentic, methods of testing reading comprehension. Lee, Yoshizawa and Shimabayashi (2006) also suggest that a key problem with the content aspect of validity is that the TOEIC does not measure a specific business English domain as suggested by the construct.

In order to improve the validity of the Standard TOEIC, Chapman and Newfields (2007) posit that seven specific measures be taken: the inclusion of more varieties of Asian English; a move away from a solely descriptive focus to a broader narrative/descriptive focus in Part 1; a move away from printing the questions and response items in Parts 3 and 4; the adoption of alternative response formats; the addition of more paragraph level exercises; the allowance of limited note-taking; and the provision of a compulsory section that tests a productive language skill i.e. speaking and/or writing (p. 35).

Validation Studies – Speaking and Writing
No doubt, the introduction of Speaking and Writing tests is likely to promote greater construct validity as part of a battery of tests in that it offers a more comprehensive and communicative measure of L2 ability. Evidence of construct validity, provided by ETS, includes the results of a similar self assessment study as reported above for the listening and reading tests. Results reveal that, overall and for each individual task, the TOEIC scores were relatively strongly related to test-takers’ self-assessments in the case of both Speaking and Writing - leading the publishers to strongly suggest that the TOEIC Speaking and Writing test scores ‘can distinguish between test-takers who are likely to be able to perform these tasks and those who are not’ (Powers, Kim, Weng & VanWinkle, 2010, p. 11.13). The constructs under investigation in the speaking and writing tests are also explicitly defined. In another Compendium Study report, ETS outlines the evidence-centred design (ECD) processes used to produce the task specifications which ‘ultimately support the generalization of test scores from any individual set of test tasks to performance on actual tasks required in the workplace’ (Hines, 2010). As with TOEIC Listening and Reading, specifications include the overall claim and sub-claims about what each measure is intended to assess. In addition, linked to
each sub claim are task model components that describe the nature of the task, response type, scoring guides, number of questions, the nature of the stimulus information and task or section timing.

Yet Stoynoff (2009) questions the authenticity of the TOEIC Speaking test due to constraints imposed by the test method. The tests require examinees to perform communicative functions consistent with the test purpose; yet the author suggests that ‘speaking to a computer does not engage test-takers in important aspects of communicative competence’ (p. 33). A genuinely interactive dimension of speaking ability, therefore, is missing. Moreover, given that the speaking and writing tests are optional and cost more than the Listening and Reading test, it is possible that the Standard TOEIC may continue to function as the sole measure of so-called communicative proficiency for most candidates (Knapman, 2008, p. 88). This will perhaps greatly depend on how the new components of the test are perceived and used by different stakeholders. Given that the Classic TOEIC was promoted and functioned as a measure of communicative ability for over two decades (as supported by ETS), examinees and stakeholders may question the necessity or importance of additional measures.

Clearly, more research by ETS (and independent researchers) is needed to establish construct validity, both in terms of the independent language areas of the test and of the program as a whole. Self-assessment data provided by the test makers is a poor substitute for the kind of direct evidence that would be highly desirable. In particular, given that the TOEIC is a proficiency test evaluating the ability of examinees to communicate in the work place setting, evidence of the external aspect of validity (i.e. how well TOEIC scores directly relate to job performance) would greatly strengthen construct validity. This is an area that has received very little attention.

The Consequential Aspect of Validity

The final component of Messick’s (1996) unified notion of validity is the consequential aspect. Brown (2004) summarises this as ‘all the consequences of a test, including such considerations as its accuracy in measuring intended criteria, its impact on the preparation of test takers, its effect on the learner, and the (intended and unintended) social consequences of a test’s interpretation and use’ (p. 26). Terms linked to this aspect of validity include impact and washback. Where impact most often refers to the influence of a test on the wider educational context, washback is more commonly distinguished as the influence of testing on teaching and learning. Other than a handful of independent studies from Japan, very little...
research has focused on the impact or washback of the TOEIC. Yet as Chapman (2003) notes, the attention that standardised tests receive can lead to major important changes and improvements in teaching and learning - as perhaps evident in the release of the TOEFL-iBT (Wall & Horak, 2006). Given that a major aim of this study is to investigate the influence of the TOEIC on learning, the next chapter is devoted to reviewing literature on washback as situated within Messick’s (1996) unified notion of validity.

2.3 Chapter Summary

In a push toward rapid development, South Korea invested heavily in education, transforming into one of the most educated countries in the world. Dramatic reform, and deeply rooted Confucian values have led to a present-day zeal for education (‘education fever’) and ‘examination hell’ which has carried into EFL education and testing. Obtaining high scores on EFL tests greatly influences graduation requirements, scholarship allocation, fee reductions, entry into courses and job placement. The TOEIC, in particular, has become a powerful device used by universities and companies to fulfil a range of gate keeping purposes, and, consequently, it attracts millions of test-takers every year. The success of the TOEIC can be attributed to its high standards of internationalism, reliability and practicality; yet with regard to both the classic and revised Standard TOEIC, criticism of the overall construct validity of the test amounts, where many question the extent by which scores can provide a valid measure of communicative ability for international communication. The introduction of TOEIC Speaking and Writing arguably strengthens the likelihood of validity; however, since stakeholders may exclude these productive measures, it is unclear what effect this might have on the valid interpretation of test scores. This chapter has highlighted the need for more research on the use of test scores by end users, and the consequences of the test on student learning, as explored in the next chapter.
Chapter Three

WASHBACK

3.0 Overview

Washback, the phenomenon under investigation in this study, refers to the influence that tests exert on teaching and learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Hughes, 1989; Saville, 2000). Misleading as this definition is in its simplicity, it does not take much reading in the field to quickly begin to grasp the complexity of the concept. The aim of this chapter is to provide a conceptualisation of washback that acknowledges much of this complexity. In three parts, a review of washback literature begins with an historical overview of the origins of the phenomenon, and traces early hypotheses and models in language testing. Part two of the chapter explores the nature and scope of washback, discussing its many dimensions and relationships to other similar concepts in language testing. Part Three then provides a summary of key findings that have emerged from empirical studies that have specifically focused on washback on learning, and ends with a description of a recent model of washback used to guide elements of the present study.

3.1 BACKGROUND

Seated in behaviourist psychology and pedagogy in general education, the traditional concept of washback, according to Cheng and Curtis (2004), can be found rooted in the notion that ‘tests or examinations can and should drive teaching, and hence learning’, i.e. measurement-driven instruction (Popham, 1987). In other words, the content of assessment or test items, can act as powerful ‘curricular magnets’, motivating teachers to pursue the objectives that a test embodies (Cheng, 2005, p. 36). Assessment, in this light, can act as an agent of top-down reform, to which Noble and Smith (1994) suggest ‘the most pervasive tool of top-down policy reform is to mandate assessment that can serve as both guideposts and accountability’ (p. 1). In order for tests to act as agents of positive reform however, a “match” or an overlap between the content and the format of the examination, and the content and format of the curriculum is encouraged, i.e. curriculum alignment (Cheng & Curtis, 2004, p. 4). However, as Madaus (1988) pointed out earlier on, ‘It is testing, not the “official” stated curriculum, that is increasingly determining what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned, and how it is learned’ (p. 83). In other words, ‘what is assessed becomes what is valued, which becomes what is taught’ (McEwen, 1995, p.42). Pearson (1988, p. 98) described the directional nature of this as follows:
Public examinations influence the attitudes, behaviors, and motivation of teachers, learners and parents, and, because examinations often come at the end of a course, this influence is seen working in a backward direction – hence the term ‘washback’.

In this way, the term washback came to represent the directional influence that tests have on learning and teaching. As noted, however, in recent times it has more generally come to refer to the influence that a test has on teaching and learning (Bailey, 1996; Buck, 1988; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Messick, 1996; Spratt, 2005; Wall, 1997). Similar and related terms to washback used in measurement literature include: measurement-driven instruction (Popham, 1987), teaching to the test (Madaus, 1988), consequential validity (Messick, 1989, 1996), systematic validity (Frederiksen & Collins, 1989), test-curriculum alignment (Shepard, 1990), and consequences (Cizek, 2001). In applied linguistics (or language testing), backwash3, test impact, consequential validity and systematic validity are terms closely related to washback. Although the remainder of this chapter draws on studies from general education which has long explored the powerful influence of testing, the main focus, hereafter, is on washback as conceptualised within the field of language testing.

3.1.1 Background to Washback in Language Testing

Washback remains a relatively new concept in language testing. Not until the mid 1980s did Alderson (1986) identify it as an emerging area in need of more research. In the classic article, ‘Does washback exist?’, Alderson and Wall (1993) critically explored the notion of test washback in L2 teaching and learning, and contributed what they considered to be fifteen logically plausible hypotheses relating to various test consequences and effects:

1. A test will influence teaching.
2. A test will influence learning.
3. A test will influence what teachers teach.
4. A test will influence how teachers teach.
5. A test will influence what learners learn.
6. A test will influence how learners learn.
7. A test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching.
8. A test will influence the rate and sequence of learning.
9. A test will influence the degree and depth of teaching.
10. A test will influence the degree and depth of learning.
11. A test will influence attitudes to content, method, etc. of teaching/learning.
12. Tests that have important consequences will have washback.
13. Tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback.
14. Tests will have washback on all learners and teachers.

3 Backwash is a term sometimes used synonymously with washback, however, ‘washback’ now appears more frequently since becoming the preferred term in British applied linguistics (Cheng & Curtis, 2004, p. 5).
Tests will have washback effects for some teachers and some learners, but not for others.

In order to allow for the construction of a basic model of washback, Hughes (1993) later added to Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses by illustrating the mechanisms by which washback may work. Namely, he categorised the types of effects that might occur into three constituents, i.e., the participants, processes and products of an educational system. Participants refer to classroom teachers and students, educational administrators, textbook developers and publishers. Processes refer to ‘any actions taken by participants which may contribute to the process of learning, such as materials development, syllabus design, changes in teaching methodology, the use of test-taking strategies, etc’. Finally, products refer to ‘what is learned and the quality of learning’ (Hughes, 1993, p. 2). He explains the relationship between each constituent as follows:

The nature of a test may first affect the perceptions and attitudes of the participants towards their teaching and learning tasks. These perceptions and attitudes in turn may affect what the participants do in carrying out their work (process), including practicing the kind of items that are to be found in the test, which will affect the learning outcomes, the product of the work (p. 2).

Hughes (1993, pp. 2-3) also outlined five conditions that would have to be met before all of the possible washback effects could occur:

- Success on the test must be important to the learners,
- Teachers must want their learners to succeed,
- Participants must be familiar with the test and understand the implications of its nature and content,
- Participants must have the expertise which is demanded by the test (including teaching methods, syllabus design and materials writing expertise), and
- The necessary resources for successful test preparation must be available.

Combining Hughes’ (1993) distinction between participants, processes and products with Alderson and Wall’s (1993) Washback Hypotheses, Bailey (1996) later put forth a model of washback (Figure 3.1). The model depicts the direct influence of a test on the many participants, who engage in various processes, which result in products specific to different participants. The dotted lines in the figure represent possible influences from the participants on the test. Bailey (1996) further defines the direct impact on test-takers from having test-derived information provided to them, as ‘washback to the learners’ and links this to numbers 2, 5, 6, 8 and 10 of Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses. She also differentiates the results of test-derived information provided to teachers, administrators, curriculum
developers, and counsellors as washback to the program, which relates to Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses 1, 3, 4, 7, 9 and 11.

Around the same time, recognising that washback may vary across individual teachers and learners, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) contributed to the conceptualisation of washback by extending and refining Alderson and Wall’s (1993) washback hypotheses to include:

Tests will have different amounts and types of washback on some teachers and learners than other teachers and learners. The amount and type of washback will vary according to:

1. the status of the test (the level of the stakes);
2. the extent to which the test is counter to current practice;
3. the extent to which teachers and textbook writers think about appropriate methods for test preparation…; and
4. the extent to which teachers and textbook writers are willing and able to innovate…(p. 296)

The notion that teachers and learners may experience different levels of washback, often as a result of the same test in similar contexts, moved direction away from traditional views of washback which, for the most part, tended to credit the positive and negative effects of testing as a result of the quality of the test (Burrows, 2001). The idea, instead, that the washback effect of a test may involve a range of factors not directly connected to the construction of the test is now supported across a number of empirical studies (Alderson &

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**Figure 3.1**

Basic Model of Washback - Source: Bailey (1996)
Wall, 1993; Brown, 1997; Shih, 2007; Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt & Ferman, 1996; Wall, 1996), and guides the focus of this study, as later discussed.

3.2 THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF WASHBACK

Since Alderson and Wall (1993) posed the question ‘Does washback exist?’, discussion into the nature and scope of washback has grown considerably where the focus of research now appears to have turned to answering a new question, i.e. ‘What does washback look like?’ (Cheng, Watanabe, & Curtis, 2004, p. ix). A discussion of what washback may ‘look like’ in terms of the nature and scope of the phenomenon is presented below with a description of: (a) washback in comparison with test impact, (b) the different dimensions of washback, and (c) how washback may be situated within validity.

3.2.1 Washback vs Impact

Impact is a term often used interchangeably with washback in language testing, not clearly differentiated, and at times confusing. Differences between the terms lead to examining the scope or contextual boundaries of washback. Many view impact and washback as two separate but related concepts. For example, where ‘impact’ is more commonly used to describe the effects of testing on the wider educational context, washback, on the other hand, refers to the effects of a test on teaching and learning, as may be represented in the diagram to the right.

Wall (1997), on the other hand, refers to impact as an all encompassing term suggesting that it refers to ‘any of the effects that tests may have on individuals, policies or practices, within the classroom, the school, the education system, or society as a whole’ (p. 291). Bachman and Palmer (1996) similarly include washback as a subset of a test’s impact on society, educational systems and individuals (pp. 29-35), as shown on the left. Bachman and Palmer (1996) suggest that impact operates at two levels: the micro level (i.e. the effect of the test on individual students and teachers), and the macro level (the impact on society and its educational systems). In this way, washback may perhaps be seen as one dimension of impact. These levels often work in tandem, which may account for why the terms impact and washback are so often used interchangeably.
Other researchers, conversely, choose not to differentiate the terms, viewing washback in a broader, all encompassing sense. One example can be found in the following quote by Peirce (1992) who states that ‘the washback effect…refers to the impact of a test on classroom pedagogy, curriculum development, and educational policy’ (p. 687). Andrews (2004) similarly states his rejection of Wall’s (1997) aforementioned definition of impact and interprets washback rather than impact in the broader sense:

Instead of adopting Wall’s (1997:291) distinction between test impact and test washback, the present chapter uses washback to refer to the effects of tests on teaching and learning, the educational system and the various stakeholders in the education process (p. 37).

As shown, where some authors refer to impact and washback as unique but related concepts, others may refer to one as the subset of the other, and still others use the terms to mean one and the same. Disentangling the terms when reviewing language testing research is a somewhat difficult task. Nonetheless, what remains is that all levels influenced by testing must be studied and considered in order to provide a complete picture of the effect of testing in language education. For example, though Saville and Hawkey (2004) view test washback as limited to effects on teaching and learning, they further argue that it cannot really be substantiated without full consideration of the social consequences of test use (p. 75). In other words, it seems impossible to investigate the washback on learning as a result of a test without also considering the wider context in which the test and the learner are linked.

In the same way, Wall and Horak (2006) note that factors influencing the form that washback takes may include ‘not only the nature of the examination and related training, but also characteristics of the educational context’, such as: ‘management practices within institutions, classroom conditions, resourcing, feedback mechanisms between the testing agency and schools’ (p. 3). A more impartial view of washback, therefore, would be one that also considered stakeholders at the macro level. As shown in Fig. 3.2, based on Saville and Hawkey’s (2004) description of stakeholders in the UCLES (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate), at the macro level are a wide range of different stakeholders beyond learners and teachers that make up the testing community and who, no doubt, play an important role in the washback effect of any test at the micro level.

Therefore, although washback is used in the traditional sense to refer to the effects of tests on teaching and learning, this study does not seek to separate individuals, or the TOEIC, from the wider community. On the contrary, given that a sociocultural view of washback is
employed in this study (explored in Chapter Four), the influence that the wider community has on the test and students, and vice versa, is explored in this research.

Figure 3.2
Stakeholders in the testing community (Source: Saville and Hawkey, 2004)

3.2.2 Dimensions of Washback
In the seminal book, ‘Washback in Language Testing: Research Contexts and Methods’ (Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis, 2004), Watanabe (2004) identifies five key dimensions along which washback may vary: specificity, intensity, length, intentionality and value – each of which is discussed below.

a) Specificity
Washback may be classified as general or specific. General washback refers to ‘a type of effect that may be produced by any test’ (Watanabe, 2004, p. 20). For example, in the hypothesis that a test will motivate students to study harder than they would otherwise, washback relates to any type of exam, and therefore, may be termed as general washback. Specific washback, on the other hand, refers to ‘a type of effect that relates to only one aspect of a test or one specific type of test’ (Watanabe, 2004, p. 20). For example, the belief that a new component added to a test will emphasise a particular aspect of teaching and learning relates to specific washback. As this study focuses on specific aspects of washback from the TOEIC, it therefore investigates a specific type of washback.
b) **Intensity**

Cheng (1997, 1998b) first developed the notion of *washback intensity* to refer to the degree of the washback effect in an area (or number of areas) of teaching and learning affected by an examination (Cheng and Curtis, 2004, p. 13). Conceptualising it on a continuum between weak and strong, Watanabe (2004) describes this dimension of washback as follows:

If a test has a strong effect, then it will determine everything that happens in the classroom, and lead all teachers to teach in the same way toward the exams. On the other hand, if a test has a weak effect, then it will affect only a part of the classroom events, or only some teachers (p. 20).

This links closely with Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ (1996) hypotheses mentioned earlier, suggesting that the intensity of washback, may function in relation to how high or low the stakes of a test are. Alderson (2004) further notes ‘high-stakes tests – tests that have important consequences for individuals and institutions - will have more impact than low-stakes tests’ (pp. ix-x). Measuring the intensity of washback, however, is not a simple matter since what may be a trivial consequence for one person may not be for another. In other words, it is difficult to generalise the nature of the stakes of a test given that it may function in relation to the circumstances and perspectives of individual test-takers.

c) **Length**

Another dimension of washback is that of length - if washback is found to exist, it may last for a short or long period of time. For example, Watanabe (2004) notes, ‘if the influence of an entrance examination is present only while the test takers are preparing for the test, and the influence disappears after entering the institution, this is short term washback’ (pp. 20-21). In the case of long term washback, however, the test would influence students after they entered the institution. This dimension is revisited later in light of empirical studies reviewed in this chapter.

d) **Intentionality**

Whether washback ought to be defined as intentional and/or unintentional has caused some debate. Early on, Messick (1989) supported the view that in order to measure consequential validity, both the intended and unintended consequences of test interpretation be evaluated:

Judging validity in terms of whether a test does the job it is employed to do…requires evaluation of the intended or unintended social consequences of test interpretation and use. The appropriateness of the intended testing purpose and the possible occurrence of unintended outcomes and side effects are the major issues (p. 84).
Spolsky (1994), however, later suggested that washback was better applied only to the accidental side-effects of examinations, and ‘not to those effects intended when the first purpose of the examination is control of the curriculum’ (p. 55). In an empirical study investigating the intended change on classroom teaching through a public exam in Hong Kong, Cheng (1997), on the other hand, referred to washback as the ‘intended direction and function of curriculum change, by means of a change of public examinations, on aspects of teaching and learning’ (p. 36). She did, however, also recognise that ‘unintended and accidental side effects can also occur, because successful curriculum change and development is a highly complex matter’ (Cheng, 2005, p. 28). McNamara (1996) further contends that, ‘high priority needs to be given to the collection of evidence about the intended and unintended effects of assessment’ (p. 22). In line with Messick (1989) and McNamara (1996), both the intended and unintended effects of the TOEIC are explored in this study.

e) Value

A further dimension of washback, is value, or direction (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Green 2007) - the potential for tests to be ‘powerful determiners, both positively and negatively [emphasis added] of what happens in classrooms’ (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 117). Linked to the above dimension of intentionality, Cheng and Curtis (2004) suggest that, ‘because it is not conceivable that the test writers intend to cause negative washback, intended washback may normally be associated with positive washback, while unintended washback is related to both negative and positive washback’ (p. 21). According to Pearson (1988), a test’s washback effect will be negative if it fails to reflect the learning principles and course objectives to which the test supposedly relates. In the case of a proficiency test, negative washback may be more likely if it fails to reflect the focal construct of the test. Green’s (2007) basic model of washback direction below (Figure, 3.3) shows this relationship well. Essentially, Green (2007) argues that the more closely the characteristics of a test reflect the focal construct as understood by the course providers and learners (i.e. the greater the overlap), the greater the potential for positive washback. Conversely, the smaller the overlap is, the greater the potential for negative washback (p. 14). In the case of the TOEIC, the previous discussion of the construct validity of the test becomes important in establishing the potential for positive and negative washback.
The negative influences of testing have long been discussed in education and language testing literature. Madaus (1988), for example, summarises a range of negative outcomes associated with measurement-driven assessment, such as: cramming, the narrowing of curriculum, constraints on the creativity and spontaneity of teachers and students, and the demeaning of professional pedagogic judgment (p. 95). Yet making positive or negative value judgments on the consequences of a test is a complex and contentious matter given that it is not possible to form a direct one-to-one relationship between positive or negative washback and the perceived quality of a test. Alderson and Wall (1993), for example, stress that the quality of a washback effect might be independent of the quality of a test, since any test, good or bad, can be said to have beneficial or detrimental washback (pp. 117-118). Messick (1996) similarly notes 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 education system’ (p. 242). Therefore, making value judgments on the perceived quality of a test may be an oversimplification. As Wall (2000) succinctly notes, ‘test design is only one of the components in a quite complicated equation’ (p. 502).

Another difficulty in establishing cases of negative (or positive) washback is that there remains no obvious consensus in the research community as to which washback effects are specifically positive or negative (Cheng & Curtis, 2004). For example, where Wiseman (1961, p. 159) argued that coaching students for exams is not a good use of time because students practice exam techniques rather than language learning activities, Heyneman (1987) contended that many proponents of academic testing view ‘coachability’ not as a drawback.
but as a virtue. Different stakeholders may also disagree over what qualifies as positive or negative washback. As Watanabe (2004) notes,

…one type of outcome may be evaluated as being positive by teachers, whereas the same outcome may be judged to be negative by school principals. Thus, it is important to identify the evaluator when it comes to passing value judgment (p. 21).

Similarly, Cheng and Curtis (2004) agree that evaluating the effect of tests as either positive or negative is dependent on who conducts the investigation within a particular context. They also suggest that it is important where the investigation takes place - the school or university contexts; when - the time and duration of using such assessment practices; why - the rationale; and how - the different approaches used by different participants within the context (p. 8). In other words, ‘whether the washback effect is positive or negative will largely depend on where and how it works and within which educational contexts it is situated’ (Cheng, 2005).

Despite the fact that making positive or negative value judgments on the consequences of a test is a contentious matter, much research has been founded on the desirability and feasibility of creating positive washback in language testing. Bailey (1999) recognises positive washback as one of the main criteria for evaluating language tests (p. 8). Cheng (2005) suggests that it is possible to ‘bring about beneficial change in language teaching by changing examinations’ (p. 29). Yet she also notes that despite the increasing number of empirical washback and impact studies, researchers in the field of language education still wrestle with the nature of washback and ‘do not know exactly how to induce positive and reduce negative washback and impact in our tests’ (p. 358). More research is certainly needed in order to understand how positive washback can be achieved.

### 3.2.3 Situating Washback within Validity

A number of authors maintain that a test’s validity should be gauged by the degree with which it manifests either positive or negative washback (e.g., Messick, 1996; Morrow, 1986; Shohamy et al., 1996; Weir, 1990). As indicated in Chapter Two, Messick (1996) situates washback within the theoretical notion of consequential validity:

In the context of unified validity, evidence of washback is an instance of the consequential aspect of construct validity, which is only one of six important aspects or forms of evidence contributing to the validity of language test interpretation and use (pp. 254-255).

Washback, therefore, is only one form of testing consequence that ‘needs to be weighed in evaluating validity; and testing consequences are only one aspect of construct validity
needing to be addressed’ (p. 242). While the author identifies the potential for washback to provide evidence in support of validity, he also recognises that it 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’ (p. 242).

Consequently, Alderson and Wall (1993) posit that washback cannot be directly related to a test’s validity due to the complexity of the phenomenon (p. 116). As indicated, besides the design of the test, the authors argue that there might be other factors at work beyond the influence of the test that could lead to desirable or undesirable outcomes. Certainly, evidence from washback studies (later reviewed in this chapter) reveals that it is possible to mistake washback for other influences related to teaching and learning (Tsagari, 2007). Similarly, Davies (1997) questions the plausibility of measuring validity through washback noting that, ‘the apparent open-ended offer of consequential validity goes too far’, and it is ‘not possible for a tester as a member of a profession to take account of all possible social consequences’ (p. 335). Citing Messick (1996), Ferman (2004) further stresses that validity is not a property of the test or assessment as such, but rather the meaning of the test scores (p. 245) thereby making a direct connection between washback and validity problematic. Certainly, in the case of the TOEIC we would need to distinguish between score interpretation by the testing company/examining authority, and wider interpretations by parents, administrators, employers, politicians and so on.

Despite the complexity involved in establishing consequential validity, and conflicting views with regard to the extent that washback may serve as a measure of validity, there appears to be little disagreement over the necessity of investigating the effects and consequences of tests (Tsagari, p. 2007, p. 8). Moreover, Messick (1996) implies that it remains feasible to relate washback as a function of a test’s validity. His position is that evidence of washback should not be considered in isolation but as one of the multiple forms of evidence needed to sustain valid language use. As he notes, ‘by attempting to minimize sources of invalidity in language test design, the test deficiencies and contaminants that stimulate negative washback are also minimized, thereby increasing the likelihood of positive washback’ (p. 243). Green (2007), as presented above, supports this idea where he suggests that positive washback is more likely to occur where the test construct overlaps with the test characteristics. Accordingly, Chapter Ten of this study (the discussion) evaluates the likelihood of the TOEIC promoting positive
or negative washback in light of more encompassing issues of validity such as those presented in Chapter Two.

3.2.4 Washback as Defined in this Study

Given that washback is often unclearly defined, and that detailed descriptions of the phenomenon are nearly ‘as numerous as the people who write about it’ (Bailey, 1999, p. 3), it is important, as Green (2007) suggests, to operationally define the term within a study. Accordingly, washback is operationally defined in this research as the influence that a test, situated within a wide community of practice, exerts on teaching and learning. Also included in the definition of washback, although excluded from narrower definitions (Hamp-Lyons, 1991; McNamara, 2000; Wier, 1990), this study also considers the effects of a test on test preparation, on individuals actually sitting the test, of feedback received, and of decisions taken by various stakeholders on the basis of test scores (Green, 2007). Washback is associated with the consequential aspect of validity, and thus may contribute to, or be affected by, the validity of a test in a more general sense. It may also result from both intentional and unintentional causes. Intentional, positive washback is more likely to occur where the test construct overlaps to a large degree with the test. Where the test construct does not overlap with the test, unintentional washback, either positive or negative may occur. Test design, however, is only one aspect that may contribute to washback. The washback effect of a test may involve a range of factors not directly connected to the construction of the test, and will greatly depend on the perspective of key stakeholders. The intensity of washback is also likely to function as a result of the stakes of a test but this too may vary across stakeholders.

3.3 REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The third part of this chapter reviews empirical studies focusing primarily on washback on learners and learning, and therefore excludes some of the more classic washback studies focused on teachers and teaching. It includes studies that have explored a range of language tests, languages, language foci, contexts, and research methodologies. A review of these studies begins with those investigating different aspects of learning, and follows with studies that have focused specifically on the washback of tests on Korean learners. Studies on the washback of the TOEIC are also reviewed, in preface to the presentation of a model of washback on learning proposed by Shih (2007). Table 3.1 below provides an overview of all studies reviewed in this section.
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</table>
Shohamy (1993)  Israel  Arabic as a Foreign Language Test (ASL), English Foreign Language Oral Test (EFL), L1 Reading Test  Washback on teaching – teaching activities, test preparation materials etc.  45 student questionnaires, 17 teacher questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, analysis of documents

Qi (2005)  China  National Matriculation English Test (NMET)  An examination on the failure of the NMET to bring about intended washback  Interviews and/or questionnaires with 986 students; 388 teachers; 8 test constructors, 6 English inspectors

Watanabe (1992, 2001)  Japan  University Entrance Exams  Test preparation practices  The Strategy of Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) Student interviews

Woo (2001)  Korea  Korea University Entrance Exam (KCSAT)  Relationship between the KCSAT English test and characteristics of 12th grade English classroom teaching in Korea  Textual analysis, classroom observation, interviews.

3.3.1 Washback across Different Areas of Learning

The following review of studies explores the effects of washback on different areas of language learning particularly from student perspectives. It is divided into four parts, incorporating the process and product areas of Bailey’s (1996) model. Washback on the learning process includes: (a) the content of student learning, and (b) strategy use. Washback on the product of student learning includes: (c) the promotion of language skills, and (d) learner affect.

Washback on the Content of Student Learning

Washback on content in this section refers to the areas of language that learners focus on and the materials students use to do this. Where much research on washback has focused on content with regard to teachers and teaching (e.g. Alderson and Wall, 1993; Cheng, 1997, 2005; Lam, 1993, 1994; Li, 1990; Shohamy et al., 1996; Stecher et al., 2004) little research has explored washback on content from the perspective of the learner. However, an important study linked with the present one (given that both use diary/journal methodology) is Gosa’s (2004) research investigating the possible washback effects taking place inside and outside classrooms as experienced by Romanian students preparing for the English component of the Baccalaureate (Bac). In general, Gosa (2004) found that listening and speaking skills were almost completely neglected by students and teachers, and attributed this to the fact that these skills were not tested in the Bac. The majority of the task-types that students focused on in the classroom, and in their personal environment, were also those predominantly found in the Bac as students ‘felt the need’ to extensively practice the exam tasks (p. 226). Content of student learning, therefore, was for the most part directly related to the content of the exam.
These results concur with previously established descriptions of washback, i.e. that examinations drive teaching (and therefore influence learning) in the direction of what is required in the examination (Cheng, 1998a, p. 297).

Research by Qi (2005) also highlights how test design (content and format), particularly in relation to stakeholder goals, may drive the content of student learning. Qi (2005) examined why changes to the format of the NMET (National Matriculation English Test) in China failed to bring about intended changes. The test constructors’ intention was to encourage teaching and learning for real-world language use by introducing listening multiple choice items, reducing grammar and vocabulary items, and introducing a proof reading section. However, although school textbooks contained more communicative tasks to reflect changes to the test, results show that teaching and learning practices continued to focus on the knowledge of isolated linguistic elements, and on test-wiseness through mock tests (practice tests), practice questions, and drilling exercises based on multiple choice formats. A key influence behind this was that, in line with the selective function of the test where crucial decisions were made on the basis of results, the immediate goal of schools, teachers and students was to raise test scores. Therefore, the focus of teaching and learning content was that which teachers and students believed to be measured by the test, i.e. their interpretation of the test construct.

As with many large-scale standardised tests, Qi (2005) argues multiple-choice formats are not conducive to the creation of good teaching and learning exercises that promote authentic language use (see also Hamp-Lyons, 1998). Moreover, to achieve positive washback, literature suggests that authentic materials and tasks be used (Bailey, 1996; Messick, 1996). Although the writing and proof reading sections of the test aimed to reflect a greater level of language in use, as the author notes, in order to reduce subjectivity, the test content did not reflect authentic tasks. Essentially, the NMET’s primary function to select students for institutes of higher learning (with an emphasis on reliability) imposed constraints on the test design and development, focused teachers and students toward the immediate goal of raising scores in direct relation to the test content and format, and therefore impeded the intended washback effect of the test constructors. As Qi (2005) notes, ‘when crucial decisions are made on the basis of test results and when one’s interests are seriously affected, who can afford not to teach to or study for the test?’ (p. 163).
Specific classroom contexts may also play an important role in the development of washback. In the United Kingdom, Green (2007) investigated the washback of the IELTS Writing subset on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) by exploring three different writing preparation classes. The classes included: an IELTS preparation course, an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) course, and a course that combined both. Not surprisingly, he found that learners engaged with different types of content across the classes. In the IELTS class, samples of work supported claims by students that IELTS coursework was closely directed toward IELTS where they undertook writing tasks that closely mirrored the test. Tasks in the EAP class included timed writing practice on similar broad topics in the test, but also included specific projects linked to learners’ academic subjects beyond the scope of the test. In his study, Green (2007) provides evidence that the influence of the test on learners was in part mediated by teachers and course materials.

At the same time, Green (2007) found that learners did not always simply accede to their teachers’ priorities, i.e. that washback to learners is not determined by washback to the teacher (p. 303). His study highlights the powerful influence of learner agency (discussed later in Chapter Four). For example, questionnaires revealed there were areas where students’ reports of learning outcomes moved away from teacher objectives, such as their desire for more grammar. Gosa (2004) also highlights how the personal environment of learners, i.e. test preparation outside of the classroom, may influence the type of tasks and methods students employ perhaps to a greater degree than specific classroom contexts. This point strengthens one of the major foci behind the rationale of the present study, i.e. the need for more studies to explore washback from students’ perspectives, both inside and outside the classroom, especially where students may prove ‘more easily affected by washback than their teachers’ (Gosa, 2004, p. 226).

**Washback on Student Learning Strategies**

In addition to the type of content students focus on, studies have also investigated learning strategies employed in response to a test, i.e. the ‘specific actions, activities or behaviours that are directly linked to some processing stage of language acquisition, use or testing’ (Purpura, 1999, p. 23). Not surprisingly, the strategies students employ, closely relate to the focus of content. For example, Shih (2007) found that students who prepared for the speaking section of the GEPT used more diverse observable learning strategies than in other language areas. Some students practiced with classmates, some alone, another read textbooks aloud
and one other listened to and repeated a radio station broadcast. The reason for this, Shih (2007) suggests, is that students seldom practiced speaking skills and therefore developed strategies of their own to cope with this aspect of the test. Therefore, students used a range of strategies not only connected to the focus of the language area being assessed, but also in relation to their own historical experience.

Through student diaries, mentioned above, Gosa (2004) found that memorisation skills appeared to dominate students’ choice of strategies, again linked closely to the test content, and often undertaken outside of the context of the classroom. Similarly, Green (2007) found students engaged in memorising phrases (and in a few cases extended passages) outside of the class context in response to the Writing section of the IELTS. Perhaps of most interest, however, Green (2007) also found a lack of congruence between what students thought of as successful strategies, and the types of learning strategies or approaches that actually proved successful in the IELTS. For example, where a number of participants claimed that successful responses in the IELTS Writing test (and rapid gains in test scores) could be fashioned from memorised formulas, results showed highest gains were achieved by those adopting a Meaning-Based approach to their learning. In other words, the test appeared to reward a more analytic and exploratory approach to learning (p. 280). Students’ beliefs therefore played an important role in the direction of their strategy use in relation to the test.

Highlighting the above difficulty of specifically attributing strategy use to a particular test, Watanabe (1992) investigated first and second year students who entered college through two different avenues, i.e. entrance examinations, or recommendations. He found that the exam students used more learning strategies than those who entered via recommendations. However, Watanabe (1992) also found that individual differences in language proficiency, the effect of supplementary preparatory classes, and students’ motivation were also influential factors driving learning strategies. These studies again show the difficulty of isolating strategy use as directly influenced by a specific test. The choice of strategies students engage in may also be influenced by factors such as language proficiency, familiarity with regard to the content, mediatory teaching and materials, learner affect, and also the learning culture of the student (as discussed further below).

**Washback on the Promotion of Language Skills**

Washback on the promotion of language skills (Tsagari, 2007) links to the product segment of Bailey’s (1996) model, which arguably relates to Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses
that a test will influence what learners learn and the degree and depth of learning. Where the previous category of content refers to the focus of language and materials students engage in during the learning process, this section relates to the outcomes of student learning. It is certainly an area in need of more research as there exists very little evidence showing whether students have learned ‘better’ or ‘more’ as a result of a particular test (Tsagari, 2007). Reasons for this may include the fact that much research is either based subjectively on student or other stakeholder perceptions and beliefs; or relies on the examination of test papers. In the case of the latter, it is difficult to decipher the degree by which learning can be described as: a general promotion of language skills, the promotion of skills specific to a test, or an increase in test-wiseness. Nonetheless, results from the studies presented here provide important insights into understanding more about washback.

Ferman (2004) recorded varying perspectives of positive washback in an investigation of the new national EFL oral matriculation test battery introduced into the Israeli education system in 1998. The test contained both an oral and reading component consisting of four parts: an extended interview, a modified role play (using cue cards), an oral report on two books, and a test on pieces of literature studied over two years preceding the test. The participants included 18 teachers and 120 twelfth grade students from six different classes, of varying levels, across three different high schools. Using structured questionnaires, open interviews, and document analyses, Ferman (2004) reported that the English Inspectorate, teachers and students all stated that the oral test had had an impact on upgrading the students’ overall command of English. Opinions differed, however, with regard to the extent of this. For example, the English Inspectorate was convinced from an educational standpoint that ‘the oral test had been a great success with the washback effect rippling ‘all the way to the elementary school’ (Ferman, 2004, p. 201). In other words, although only the higher grades were tested, a focus on learning the oral skills was evident not only in those grades, but in the lower ones as well. Teachers, on the other hand, argued that not all parts of the test had had the desired impact on upgrading the oral skills, and were doubtful about the promotion of reading (Ferman, 2004, p. 200). For instance, with regard to the modified role play section of the test using cue cards, the teachers stressed that although the students were supposed to be tested on cards they had not seen before, in reality the examiners tested them on cue cards their classroom teachers had used in preparation for the test. As a result, teachers found themselves coaching students with the end product being memorisation that ‘did not do much toward promoting the oral skills’ (p. 201).
Opinions also varied across students. Although 80% reported improvement in their overall command of English, differences emerged across the different levels of 3-, 4- and 5-point students, with 4-point students (the average ability level) showing the greatest perception of improvement in their overall command of English. Interestingly, the parents of this group also showed statistically more significant involvement than the other parents in terms of willingness to invest extra resources to aspire to the highest achievement possible. This, in turn, led Ferman (2004) to suggest that such results point to ‘the upward mobility phenomenon of the average level aspiring to join the highest level and believing they can achieve it’ (p. 205). This highlights the complex relationship between a range of factors including learner affect and parental support that might influence the outcomes of student learning in response to a test. Moreover, with regard to the reading section of the EFL oral matriculation test battery, the study also showed that students engaged in much less reading than they had indicated or as presumed by the English Inspectorate. This suggests that although examining the perceptions of participants is valuable, they are still subjective (see also Wesdorp, 1982), may not be accurate, and may vary considerably.

Using a different form of research methodology, Andrews et al. (2002) also investigated the promotion of oral language skills - in this case in connection with the washback of the addition of an oral component in a public English exam in Hong Kong secondary schools. Rather than basing results on the perceptions of different stakeholders as above, the authors conducted simulated oral tests across three groups of students, graded by trained examiners. The first group had not prepared for the new test; the second group had taken the test in its first year of implementation, and the third group in the second year of implementation. The oral proficiency of each group was compared along with a discourse analysis of the organisational and language features of the candidates’ speech. In terms of the differences between the groups, a small indication of improvement in performance between the first and the third group emerged; however, results were not substantial enough to be significant.

However, the authors note that the form of washback that emerged from discourse analysis represented a ‘very superficial level of learning outcome’ consisting of ‘familiarisation with the exam format, and the rote learning of exam specific strategies and formulaic phrases’, where students often used phrases inappropriately suggesting ‘memorisation rather than meaningful internalisation’ (pp. 220-221). In other words, although students may have shown improvement in terms of learning certain language features, knowing when and how to use
them appropriately was a different matter (p. 221). This adds to the debate that in assessing the washback of a test on learning it is necessary to establish what is meant by ‘better’ or ‘more’ successful learning. A further point raised by Andrews et al. (2002) is that when comparing the three groups, the authors found that washback was ‘more noticeable in the second year of the test than the first’ (p. 220), leading the authors to conclude that the washback effect of the test was delayed. These findings coincide with Li (1990) and Cheng (2005), mentioned earlier, where the actual realisation of washback may take time.

Another study on the washback of language skills, this time comparing pre- and post-test scores, is that conducted by Read and Hayes (2003). As a minor part of a larger project, the authors compared data over a one-month period from two IELTS courses involving international students preparing for tertiary study in New Zealand (at two different schools). Course A was a separate IELTS preparation course, which focused predominantly on giving students information about the test, advice on test-taking strategies and multiple practice tests. Course B consisted of a topic-based approach paying attention to the development of language knowledge and skills in addition to test tasks. The authors found mixed results with regard to an increase in scores at the end of data collection. Nearly half of all students in both courses showed an overall increase in their scores from 0.5 to 1.5, when pre and post-test scores were compared. However, when mean scores were compared across all students, using a paired t-test, the difference was not significant.

In saying this, the authors did find a statistically significant gain in scores for students in Course A with regard to the listening module of the IELTS suggesting that even over a short period of time, the large amount of class time devoted to listening tests and exercises seemed to benefit the students in Course A. As discussed earlier, however, it is difficult to isolate exactly what form of washback on learning took place, i.e. an increase in test-wiseness, general listening skills or listening skills specific to the IELTS. In other words, without a detailed analysis of what was learnt, it is difficult to establish positive washback through test gains alone. Moreover, for washback to occur, as Read and Hayes (2003) conclude ‘students need an intensive and usually extended period of study to achieve any substantial increase in their score on a proficiency test like IELTS’ (p. 33).

Hughes (1988), taking a different approach, compared results from student performance on the Michigan Test with the introduction of a new Turkish university entrance exam. The author reported that student performance had increased, making the argument that positive
washback had resulted from the fact that the test was criterion referenced and based on the needs of undergraduate students. However, Tsagari (2007) points out that there was no discussion as to why the introduction of the new proficiency test was compared to students’ results on a test which had no resemblance to it (p. 40). Certainly, as introduced in the beginning of this discussion, measuring the degree and depth of learning as a result of a given test is problematic. Perspectives of participants may vary across different stakeholders, and when measuring learning across pre- and post-tests it is difficult to establish if learning is an increase in test-wiseness, isolated sets of skills found in the test or a general promotion of language skills. Moreover, measuring learning through the use of a different test to the one studied is also problematic given difficulty in establishing clear comparisons. As such, Tsagari (2007) suggests that to increase the validity of research, it is preferable if more than one method is used.

**Washback on Learner Affect**

A further product of learning included in this section includes the washback on learner affect. Alderson and Wall (1993) include in their list of hypotheses that a test will influence learner *attitudes*. This area of washback, under-researched in the field, is included to refer to the wide range of interrelated affective factors and conceptualisations that learners contribute to their learning process such as motivation, self-confidence, learner identity and anxiety etc. – all of which work towards raising or lowering the ‘stickiness’ or ‘penetration’ of any comprehensible input that is received (Krashen, 1981). Of these different learner affects, motivation has received the most attention in washback literature.

Read and Hayes (2003), in the aforementioned study, reported positive feelings about the IELTS exams and motivation among learners via student questionnaires. Similarly, Li (1990), investigating the Matriculation English Test in China, noted positive attitudes toward the exam and motivation to study. New enthusiasm for learning English outside the classroom was evident through more after-class learning and high sales of simplified English readers. It is not clear, however, if these views were based on teachers’ opinions or came from student discussions. Shih (2007), on the other hand, reported detrimental impact on motivation in his study of the GEPT (reviewed in more detail later) where one student’s self-confidence and motivation, in particular, eroded due to failing the first stage of the GEPT three times. Shohamy (1993) also found mixed results among students in the way they perceived and reacted to exams. Through student questionnaires, she found that 62% of students claimed
that the ASL test increased positive motivation, but 38% of students reported that they were affected negatively in terms of experiencing fear, pressure and anxiety, and feeling that the test did not reflect real learning.

As Tsagari (2007) notes, where the relationship between motivation and second language learning is complex in itself, ‘the relationship between these and high-stakes exams is likely to be even more complex’ (p. 56). For example, through interviews with Japanese university students regarding their test preparation practices for university entrance exams, Watanabe (2001) found the relationship between students’ test preparation and their motivation to be a complex matter in that a test can be motivating and have a positive effect on students’ test preparation if it is of the appropriate difficulty to the learner. It is, therefore, as Watanabe (2001) suggests, not the test alone that causes washback but the learners’ perception of the difficulty of the test - a rather neglected area of research.

In addition to the perceived difficulty of a test, a further non-test factor that may influence washback with regard to attitudes and motivation is the year that students take the test. Berwick and Ross (1989) in their article titled, ‘Motivation after matriculation: Are Japanese learners of English still alive after exam hell?’ found that the intensity of instrumental motivation to learn English peaked in the last year of high school where once university exams were over, there was little to sustain high levels of motivation. The authors describe students as appearing in freshmen classrooms as a kind of ‘timid, exam-worn survivor with no apparent academic purpose at university’ (p. 206). In other words, while the English test may have encouraged high levels of motivation to study before and at the time of taking the test, it did not appear to be an enduring outcome. Related to this, Cheng (1998a) found students had mixed feelings toward the HKCEE exam, which reportedly encouraged students to work hard to achieve good scores. At the same time, they considered that the exam was not an accurate reflection of all aspects of their study. In this case, and in the one above, it is not clear to what extent the tests motivated students beyond the aim of achieving good scores. As a result, Tsagari (2007) notes that a useful addition to the field of washback would be more research into ‘how high-stakes exams motivate students to learn and whether they can help sustain students’ motivation for learning after the exam’ (p. 56).

Moreover, as shown, washback on learner attitudes may also be linked with non-test factors such as the language ability of the learner. With regard to anxiety, Ferman (2004) found that the test resulted in differential washback among learners of varying abilities. For example,
students in the average ability level reported the highest anxiety and were the most adversely affected by potential failure in the test. As a result, the author suggests that to ensure desired washback, individual differences among students need to be taken into account. Related to this, Paris et al. (1991) found that when facing an important exam ‘low achievers’ abandoned effort and appropriate strategies in the attempt to decrease personal anxiety and increase the protection of their own self-esteem. Strategy use, in this case, was influenced by test anxiety and language ability – interrelated individual learner factors connected to, but not directly related to the test. Tests, therefore, may influence a range of learner attitudes and affect. At the same time, as Gosa (2004) notes, students’ expectations, feelings, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, learning styles and anxiety, etc. are also likely to intervene in the washback of other areas of learning such as in the promotion of language skills, and so should be taken into account when trying to promote positive washback.

3.3.2 Washback and Korean Learners

Despite the fact that terms such as ‘examination hell’ and ‘testocracy’ pervade Korean society, surprisingly little research has been published (particularly internationally) on washback and Korean learners. Of the studies that exist, most have focused on the KCSAT (the aforementioned Korean College Scholastic Abilities Test) including for example, Cho (2010), Hwang (2003), Jung (2008), Kim and O (2002) and Woo (2001). Using textual analysis, classroom observation, and interview methods, Woo (2001) investigated the relationship between the KCSAT English test and characteristics of 12th grade English classroom teaching in Korea. In addition, Woo (2001) explored how teachers and students perceived the test and test preparation. Results revealed that both groups perceived that the English test had a profound impact on English classes in Korea; however, where teachers perceived it to be moderately successful, it was rated negatively by students. This supports previous discussion on the fact that the value of washback may differ across different stakeholders. Woo (2001) also found that with regard to washback on content, the materials and activities that twelfth grade teachers used were mostly those tailored to the test.

Similarly, Cho (2010) surveyed 391 high school students across three different school years (first, second and third years) while preparing for the KCSAT, and interviewed 23 students, and found that, overall, most time spent preparing for the KCSAT was focused on practice tests and memorising vocabulary. Reading related skills also dominated the content of learning. As such, much less time was spent on listening and learning grammar, and almost

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no time was devoted to speaking and writing. The amount of time spent on each area of English, Cho (2010) notes, did not reflect the national curriculum, but rather more proportionately reflected the content of the KCSAT (p. 54). In saying this, Cho (2010) isolated a number of key differences between students across the three school years. For example, where first and second year classes centred on textbooks highlighting reading and listening, including content outside of the KCSAT, third year students reported using mostly KCSAT specific materials. The intensity of washback on content, therefore, increased as students drew closer to taking the test. Textbooks focused solely on the KCSAT is a matter of concern given that in an analysis of textbooks used by third year students in high schools, Hwang (2003) reported a misalignment between the national curriculum and the focus of content in textbooks used in preparation for the KCSAT.

Moreover, with regard to strategy use, Cho (2010) found that students in their third year used a smaller number of strategies with an adherence to limited strategy use such as memorisation and repetition. Interestingly, she also found that students appeared to become less dependent on private education preferring instead to turn to Internet-based lectures and independent study in their final year, often due to the time they saved in doing this. This was particularly the case with students of higher ability. In her study, Cho (2010) further shows how different contexts of learning may be affected by the washback of the KCSAT (i.e. the public school sector, the private school sector and independent study) and how washback may take different forms within each of these contexts. For example, where students in their first and second years of study reported a wider variety of English content outside of the test in their public school classes, they reported that the content at private schools across all years focused specifically on the KCSAT. Cho (2010) also reveals how different learning communities may interrelate. For example, some students noted continuing the use of the strategies they had learned at the private institutes during independent study. Moreover, due to parental demand and competition with private institutes (often seen as providing more individualised and specialised support to learners preparing for the KCSAT), students reported extended hours at high school devoted to KCSAT preparation where private institute teachers were invited to give lectures on how to prepare for the test. As such, Cho’s (2010) study provides a very complex view of washback at both the macro and micro level.

Outside of Korea, Roberts (2002) conducted a student-focused study exploring the washback of the TOEFL on Korean students. It is summarised in detail here given the relevance it holds
to the present thesis and the limited research on the washback of EFL tests on Korean learners. Roberts (2002) investigated the way 14 Korean adult learners, studying in private language schools in Toronto, prepared for the TOEFL test and their general attitudes towards the TOEFL. The overall purpose of the study was to make a contribution to ‘how socio-cultural backgrounds influence the way second language learners conceive of and prepare for standardised examinations’ (p. 81). As the author notes, few studies had considered student’s attitudes towards TOEFL preparation and ‘the extent to which these stem from their educational background’ (p. 81). The study included four focus groups (three to five participants in one group) and individual interviews with participants from each group.

In particular, Roberts (2002) reports how the participants’ culture of learning appeared to affect the way they prepared for the TOEFL. For example, participants tended to prefer Korean TOEFL preparation teachers because they believed that ‘the “Korean” system of test preparation is an effective way of increasing one’s score on the TOEFL’ (p. 102). Participants also indicated that they spent a great deal of time studying listening because ‘their educational background lacked oral communication’ (p. 102); they also felt they were able to do well on the structure section of the test because of the emphasis placed on grammar by the Korean public education system. Participants tended to ‘shy away’ from writing, rating the skill as relatively unimportant, tending to dedicate less study time in preparation for this section of the test. Although not mentioned by Roberts (2002), this is perhaps indicative of the fact that relatively little writing is taught throughout education in Korea. A lack of washback on participants’ attitudes and practices in terms of developing writing skills, as Roberts (2002) notes, is an indication that ‘consideration needs to be given to publicity and orientation when making improvements to the format of the TOEFL’ and that ‘dissemination of information about the structure of the test seems necessary if positive washback on test preparation is a goal of the next generation of TOEFL’ (p. 104).

Roberts (2002) also found, however, that while patterns and trends in the way that the participants prepared for the TOEFL tended to fit their culture of learning, they also fitted the format of TOEFL preparation manuals which played an important role in the design and structure of TOEFL preparation instruction. The participants relied heavily on these manuals for the content of their language studies and for information on the structure of the test. Roberts (2002) also discovered that the participants were open to alternative forms of TOEFL
preparation besides manuals. The majority believed that using authentic materials in addition to TOEFL preparation manuals was a good way of improving their TOEFL score.

With regard to differences between individual students, Roberts (2002) reported that satisfaction over preparation methods was influenced by individual motivations and experiences. Some participants noted dissatisfaction with TOEFL preparation classes arguing that they would prefer a method that helped them improve their overall language ability, where others were content with classes as the most ‘expedient method for achieving a high score’ (p. 101). Roberts (2002) concludes that ‘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’ (p. 103). As with Gosa (2004), many students also indicated that a significant portion of time was spent studying for the TOEFL outside the context of a formal classroom. This, according to Roberts (2002), is an important finding since previous research on TOEFL preparation had tended to focus on classroom activities without taking account of this variable (e.g. Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Brown, 1995; Hamp-Lyons, 1998). His research highlights that studies into the washback effects on high-stakes test preparation, should bear in mind the extracurricular studies of students (Roberts, 2002, p.104), as explored in the present study.

3.3.3 Washback and the TOEIC

Of the handful of studies investigating the consequences of the TOEIC, most have explored the influence of the test on programs and faculty within institutions of higher learning including, in particular, the use of the TOEIC for placement or selection (Ikeda, 2005; Iwabe, 2005; Lee, 2005; Newfields, 2005). Iwabe (2005) and Ikeda (2005) investigated the TOEIC with regard to the introduction of the test as a criterion for streaming students at Yamaguchi University in Japan. In line with TOEIC sales literature which states that TOEIC provides a standardised proficiency criterion for streaming, Ikeda (2005) found that most teachers at Yamaguchi University felt ‘grateful’ to have TOEIC as a placement test to streamline classes in replacement of teachers’ subjective assessments. In addition, Iwabe (2005) found that many teachers believed that adopting a minimum TOEIC score as a graduation requirement sent a clear message that students need to learn something during their years of English study. Before adopting the TOEIC, teachers cited students as ‘pretty much expecting to pass a class just by attending the lessons’. Iwabe (2005) also reported on the amount of time students spent on homework before and after the implementation of the TOEIC within one particular
faculty. The majority of students claimed that their study time for English increased an average of 300% and that time spent studying other courses increased. This led Iwabe (2005) to suggest that positive study habits may wash back into other areas of study.

In Korea, Lee (2005) also investigated the use of TOEIC scores for placement or selection. More specifically, a key aim of the research was to establish whether recruiting sophomore students with high scores on EFL standardised tests was a suitable method for selecting the best candidates for placement within the department of medicine. To assess this, Lee (2005) compared the 2000 and 2004 TOEIC results and cumulative GPA of non-resident-status sophomore students and concludes:

The current recruiting policy to select the best fit medical candidates based on their high TOEIC scores does not seem to be an appropriate measure since such students’ GPA reveals poor academic performance amid their high scores in English (p. 55).

As noted in the previous chapter, it is certainly problematic to employ TOEIC for uses other than those intended by test makers (Choi, 2008), i.e. to provide a measure of English ability for international business communication – not to recruit students for the field of medicine.

The most comprehensive and relevant study on the washback of the TOEIC (focusing mostly on the perceptions of teachers) is that conducted by Newfields (2005) who explored the use of the TOEIC as a streaming tool and curricular component in the faculty of economics at Toyo University in Japan. The participants included 24 instructors who completed seven-item forced-choice questions, and open-ended questions in self-response surveys and individual interviews. The results showed that 78% of respondents indicated general support for the TOEIC as a streaming tool. Yet in reality the study showed relatively minor differences between the TOEIC scores of students, raising concerns over whether the test could sufficiently place students. In other words, Newfields (2005) found the range in the population to be too narrow for the TOEIC to be of much predictive value. He notes, ‘Anyone who understands basic statistics should question whether TOEIC is an appropriate tool for screening incoming Japanese university freshmen’ (p. 5).

Results also revealed, however, positive perceptions of the influence of the test on the curriculum with 83% of teachers believing that focusing on the TOEIC enhanced the overall English ability of students. Other perceptions of positive washback from the instructors included a noticed increase in motivation among students to study English; the provision of standard-referenced content and a clear curricular focus; and the introduction of a business
focus in the content of learning (especially for business majors). With regard to negative washback, Newfields (2005) recorded the following teacher perceptions: discouragement among low level students, possible test fatigue and performance anxiety, a reduction on the focus of language skills unrelated to the TOEIC, and the incorporation of test preparation strategies unrelated to English proficiency. Anecdotal evidence also revealed that students with relatively high TOEIC scores tended to be proactive in attempting to raise their scores further, yet those with low scores tended to perceive themselves as bad English learners and easily got ‘stuck in a rut of ennui’ (p. 5).

Despite the widespread use of the TOEIC in Japan and Korea, few studies have investigated the consequences of the testing program, and much evidence, up to this point, has been anecdotal rather than systematic (Newfields, 2005). Furthermore, as far as this researcher is aware, no research has focused, in any detail, on the effect of the TOEIC on Korean learners. In the area of washback in general, research has also tended to focus on the perspective of teachers, as opposed to learners. Yet as noted earlier, students may prove more easily affected by washback than their teachers (Gosa, 2004) and so their perspective is an important one. The aim of the present study, therefore, is to contribute to a neglected and important area of study.

3.3.4 Summary of Empirical Studies

In order to better understand the phenomenon under investigation, this section provides an overall summary of the literature reviewed in this chapter. With regard to washback on the product of learning, research shows that measuring the degree and depth of learning remains problematic. Perspectives across participants and stakeholders may differ and it is problematic to establish if learning, through the comparison of test score gains, is an increase in test-wiseness, isolated sets of skills or a general promotion of language skills. With regard to washback on learner affect, results shows that washback on motivation from one test may also influence student motivation toward other subjects. Tests may also influence student motivation to learn English, but this is likely to reduce in intensity as the need for test scores reduces. More research is needed on the long term effects of washback in this regard.

With regard to washback on the process of learning, many studies report that learners focus on content directly related to the test itself. As in the case of the KCSAT, this may be to the detriment of productive English skills not included in the test (but included in the national
Results also suggest that the strategies students use to learn may be closely related to the content of their learning. A focus on practice tests, for example, may encourage test-wiseness coaching as opposed to the development of the skills purportedly measured by the test (Green, 2007). Research also shows that the content and strategies encouraged in class may mediate the washback of a test; however, students may not always comply with what is taught in the classroom. Individual differences in language proficiency, supplementary preparatory classes, student motivation, and time leading up to taking the test may also be influential in driving the strategies students use. Studies also show that students may be affected by test washback (if not to a greater extent) outside of the classroom suggesting the need for more studies investigating what students do both inside and outside the classroom. Other factors that may affect washback on content include the nature of the tested skills and structure of the test (in terms of stages and prerequisites).

As found with studies focusing on Korean learners, culture is also likely to influence how learners approach test preparation. Yet few studies have explored the influence of the wider socio-cultural context on the washback effect of tests, or areas such as learner identity in relation to the wider context within which tests are situated. In addition, many studies have tended to rely on limited or single methodologies failing to provide triangulated evidence or detailed examples of preparation tasks in practice. Much research into the washback of the TOEIC, for example, has particularly relied on anecdotal evidence. Results of these studies, however, raise concern over the use of TOEIC scores for purposes that may run counter to what the makers of the test intend. Studies investigating washback in this context appear to be greatly under-represented despite the fact that TOEIC remains one of the most powerful influential tools used by companies for hiring employees in Japan and Korea.

Across all studies, what is perhaps most evident is the fact that a range of factors (often interrelated) beyond the control of the test may intervene in the washback effect of a test. Individual learner factors in particular may mediate the washback of a test. Green (2007) acknowledges the importance of learner characteristics and values in the direction of washback by extending his basic model as shown in Fig. 3.4. The extended model shows how test preparation may be influenced by the test, and by the individual characteristics and values of the learner which may also be influenced by the learner’s awareness of the test stakes.
Although Green (2007) begins to show a more complex view of the directional nature of washback, it excludes a wide range of mediating factors evident in the studies reviewed above. Finding that existing theories or models on washback did not fully explain or account for these factors, and guided by the results of his own study and the research of others, Shih (2007) created a new washback model of student learning. His study and model are presented in more detail before the close of this chapter.

### 3.3.5 A Model of Washback on Learning

In response to the suggestion that more research be conducted to investigate the kinds of processes participants take part in (Bailey, 1996), Shih (2007) investigated the washback of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) on English learning in two Taiwan technological institutes. He focused on two applied foreign language departments of a university of technology (School A) and an institute of technology (School B). Where School A did not prescribe any GEPT requirements for graduation, School B required day-division students to pass the first stage, or the intermediate level of the GEPT, or alternatively, the school-administered make-up examination. In each department, Shih (2007) reviewed records and interviewed the department chair, 2 - 3 teachers, 14 – 15 students, and the parents or spouse of three participating students. He also observed one of the courses taught by each interviewed teacher over one semester (2 hours weekly for 8 selected weeks), and a self-study
centre. At School B, Shih (2007) also observed a GEPT preparation course for the length of the semester. Although many of the students recognised the importance of the GEPT, overall, Shih (2007) found that it had weak washback intensity on learning among participants at both schools. Specifically, the GEPT brought about a varied yet small impact on learning among participants at University A (the school that did not prescribe any GEPT requirements), and only a slightly higher degree of washback at University B.

Overall, Shih (2007) felt that these findings appeared to contradict previous studies where the higher the stakes of a test, the more significant its impact (Shohamy, et al., 1996). One reason that may explain the unexpected, limited amount of washback, according to Shih (2007), is that the GEPT had no immediate importance for students. For example, students in their first year of study did not have to pass it immediately and so did not spend significant time on preparation for the test. Another reason why the GEPT may not have brought a high degree of washback on learning for the participants was that they were English majors and the GEPT, therefore, was not the sole criterion for English achievement. Moreover, as these students were required to study English frequently for their homework or for their own interests, as Shih (2007) notes, their regular English study was often counted as a method of test preparation. Other reasons, according to Shih (2007) included the fact that students did not know how to prepare for the GEPT, or had nowhere to practice. A further reason may have been that the students’ proficiency was higher than that required to pass the GEPT, or that they had pressing commitments providing little time available for preparation prior to the test. Students also noted suffering from ‘self prescribed laziness’ and animosity toward the GEPT and, therefore, resistance toward learning specifically for the test; and finally the ‘loophole’ created by the university in providing a make-up examination (provided for students who had not passed the GEPT) offered a further explanation as to the lack of intensity associated with the washback of the GEPT (pp. 144-149). Evidence of a range of different factors that may have caused limited washback (or perhaps no washback of any kind) led to the development of Shih’s tentative model of washback on learning below (Fig. 3.5).

In the model, Shih (2007) divides washback on learning into five different aspects: content on learning, total time on learning, learning strategies, learning motivation and test anxiety. These categories arguably fit into Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses that a test will influence learning in terms of *how learners learn; and the rate and sequence of learning* (content, time on learning and learning strategies) and *attitudes* (learning motivation and
anxiety while learning). His model further presents how a range of test factors, learner characteristics (individual differences, personal characteristics and perceptions of the test), and contextual factors work together to influence the washback of a test on students’ learning and psychology (p. 150). Where solid lines represent impact that has been empirically proven, dotted lines, represent potential impact not empirically proved or substantiated but ‘nonetheless likely to happen’ (p. 154).

Figure 3.5
Model of Students’ Learning (Source: Shih, 2007)
Since washback may evolve over time (Shohamy et al., 1996) the model also includes the time axis at the bottom of the model as a variable. These variables and other components interrelate. As shown, extrinsic factors may affect intrinsic factors. For example, ‘teachers or parents may converse with students about the validity of the test, thereby altering students’ perceptions of the test’ (p.154). Test factors may also influence intrinsic and extrinsic factors. For instance, the stakes of a test may shape students’ personal perceptions of the test (intrinsic), or national policy on a test may increase the stakes of the test which in turn changes teachers’ teaching practices (extrinsic) (p.154). Certain test factors may also influence other test factors; for example, the stakes of a test may be affected by the purpose of the test (p. 153). As included in the earlier definition of washback in this study, the model also includes the results of a test (in addition to preparing for a test) as having potential impact on students’ subsequent learning, entailing that the ‘potential aftermath’ of a test be taken into account when investigating washback and in test design and educational policies (Shih, 2007, p. 154).

Although this model has yet to be extensively reviewed, the present study benefits from Shih’s (2007) study given the similarities between the GEPT and the TOEIC as high stakes tests used in tertiary educational institutes; and the fact that his research focuses specifically on learners and learning as a process. Specifically, it calls attention to the wide range of different variables that might come under investigation during data collection. This supports what Yin (2003) suggests as characteristic of a case study, i.e. that it benefits from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (pp.13-14).

In saying this, the model does not provide a comprehensive picture of washback mechanisms, as the author accepts, and overall, represents a ‘no risk framework’ – that is, one that provides variables at a very global level making ‘no focusing and bounding decisions’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It also appears to exclude the promotion of language skills, as related to the *degree and depth of learning* in Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses, and other important areas of washback such as motivation. Moreover, although Shih (2007) focused his washback study on learning as a process, it is not clear how learning was conceptualised as a process or how the different intrinsic, extrinsic and test factors intervened within this process. As such, the next chapter looks toward other theoretical frameworks on learning to guide the present study.
3.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter Three presented the phenomenon under investigation in this study, washback. It introduced the nature and scope of washback, and identified five key dimensions: specificity, intensity, length, intentionality and value. As highlighted, although creating positive washback is of paramount concern to test designers and key stakeholders (especially learners), debate exists over what constitutes positive or negative washback as it is often very context and audience specific. The precise nature of the relationship between washback and validity is also in question where it appears to be problematic to judge a test’s validity on the basis of washback, given that the effect of a test may be influenced by any number of interrelated, test-irrelevant mediating factors. Still, the need to better understand the nature and scope of washback remains an important concern if test makers are to increase the likelihood of a test’s validity and encourage positive consequences for learners. Empirical studies have revealed much about washback and have provided evidence of particular factors that may mediate the washback of a test (as consolidated in Shih’s 2007 model), yet questions remain as to how these factors may interplay with the test and test-taker to contribute to the washback effect of a test. The next chapter, therefore, looks to theories on learning, in particular sociocultural theory, as a way of better understanding the mechanisms involved in washback.
Chapter Four
A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE ON LEARNING

4.0 Overview
As Spratt (2005) and Tsagari (2007) note, studies exploring washback on learning are disparate and few, and too mixed to provide a definite conclusion. As a result, it remains unclear how washback from exams affects learning (Tsagari, 2007). Perhaps a key obstacle connected to this is that given the plethora of often conflicting conceptions of learning in SLA, it is often unclear as to what exactly is meant by student learning. Accordingly, the aim of Chapter Four is to present a conceptualisation of language learning that best serves the direction of this study. It begins by establishing the focus of learning under investigation as that of \textit{learning as a process} and discusses key differences between ‘cognitive’ and ‘social’ theories in SLA. A description of the central tenets of sociocultural theory (SCT) follows and establishes a theoretical framework from which learning is conceptualised in this study. The chapter then considers the important role of human agency in the language learning process, and examines the complex interplay between the learner and their situated (social, cultural and historical) context. Finally, Activity Theory (AT), within SCT, is presented as a theoretical basis from which to explore the washback of the TOEIC.

4.1 CONCEPTUALISING LEARNING
4.1.1 Situating Learning as Process
As part of a ‘simple’ protocol for detailing the conceptualisation of learning in second language research, Seedhouse (2010) suggests that researchers differentiate whether learning is being understood as a product, a process, or both. Accordingly, this chapter begins by characterising the construct of learning under investigation in this study as \textit{learning as a process}. In other words, although the product (or outcome) of learning as a result of preparing for and taking the TOEIC is of interest in this investigation, in order to better understand the mechanisms by which washback may work, the central focus is on the process of student learning. \textit{Process} does not refer to a sequence of products, but rather the ‘dynamic interaction of person-in-environment’ that eventually results in a particular product (Ohta, 2001, p. 3), as explained in more detail throughout this chapter. The arrow below, in Bailey’s (1996) model of washback (presented in Chapter Two), situates the present study and responds to her call for more research in this area. It also responds to Cheng’s (2005)
suggestion that with better understanding of the psychology and pedagogy of how students learn, high stakes tests may more readily drive reform (p. 37).

In order to understand the psychology and pedagogy of learning processes, SLA has, in recent times, made a distinct move away from traditional views of learning (and testing) toward cognitive-constructivist perspectives. Before this time, Cheng (2005) describes how traditional views of language learning, seated in behaviourist psychology and pedagogy, tended to view the desired performance of pupils as brought about by reinforcing successive approximations of correct performance. Inadequate responses tended to result in the repetition of the same material until mastered, and instruction in higher order skills rested on a foundation of basic skills. The intentions of learners, as Cheng (2005) notes, were generally ignored where students were considered passive recipients of knowledge (p. 36). As conceptualised by Maton and Saljo (1976), a behaviourist view of learning closely reflects ‘surface-level’ processing including: increasing knowledge, memorising, and acquiring facts or procedures to be used at a later date.

‘Deep-level’ processing, in contrast, according to Maton & Saljo (1976), includes abstracting meaning, and interpreting to understand reality. Marton, Dall’Alba and Beaty (1993) later included a further conception of deep-level processing as that of developing and changing a person. Deep-level processing closely resembles recent psychological and pedagogical views of learning processes (cognitive-constructivism) from which Cheng (2005) emphasizes three interrelated dimensions:
1) Learning is viewed as an active process of construction, i.e. not an act of recording discrete pieces of information, but a process of interpretation and construction of meaning (Cheng, 2005, p. 36; see Glaser & Bassock, 1989; Piaget, 1973).

2) Learning is knowledge-dependent, i.e. not merely an act of receiving information ‘but one of interpreting information through earlier learning’ (Cheng, 2005, p. 36 -37)

3) Learning is situated in a context, i.e. learning cannot be separated from the context in which it occurs (Gergen, 1985); and learning is not only contextualised, it is social (Biggs, 1992, 1995; Resnick, 1989; Resnick & Resnick, 1992).

The first two of the above dimensions represent cognitive perspectives on learning, focusing more on the individual characteristics of learners. The final dimension presents the learner as a social being, taking part in structured networks and social practices (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Recent psychological views that support cognitive and/or social perspectives on learning have led to a greater understanding of the complexity of different learning processes. However, debate over which perspective to use in second language theory building is often at the centre of debate in SLA as discussed below.

4.1.2 Cognitive and Social Traditions in SLA

In 2008, some of the leading names in SLA participated in a seminar titled ‘Conceptualising Learning in Applied Linguistics’ which resulted in much debate regarding the meaning and characteristics of learning in applied linguistics (see Seedhouse, 2010). Central to this ongoing debate was the bifurcation of ‘cognitive’ and ‘social’ traditions to theory building, or ‘theoretical pluralism’, which can lead to very different ways of explaining and researching how learners learn a second language (Ellis, 2010). From a cognitive psychological perspective, acquisition and learning involve distinct mental processes. The role of the researcher, accordingly, is often that of attributing the observed behaviours of language learners to various internal mental processes such as: ‘the construction of interlanguage representations, encodings and decodings between individuals, input processing and attentional operations by the learner, or the biological unfolding of linguistic universals’ (Lantolf, 2000, p. 45). From this perspective, the mind is often metaphorically depicted as a computer involved in the input, networking, processing and output of language where basic units of knowledge are accumulated, gradually refined, and combined to form ever richer cognitive structures. The mind as ‘container’ is another metaphor often linked to cognitive psychological traditions where language acquisition may be viewed as the building up of knowledge that is eventually called upon through language-related mental functions such as
short- and long-term memory (Sfard, 1998). In other words, as depicted in these metaphors, ‘cognitive’ SLA is most concerned with changes made to the cognitive state through the exploration of how the brain processes, stores and constructs knowledge (and meaning) through language (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Thorne, 2000, Sfard, 1998). Investigating learning from this perspective has traditionally favoured standard educational psychometric procedures involving the isolation of variables and the favouring of repeatable experimental designs which often require specific decontextualised and controlled environments (Cheng, 2005; Thorne, 2000). Procedures such as these often filter out the conceptual, affective and social contributions that learners make in interaction.

However, while cognitively oriented research traditionally centres on individual performance, abilities and intrapsychological activity, contextual and social interactional factors may play an important role in a number of cognitive perspectives. Connectionists, for example, place emphasis on the role of the language learning context over any specific innate knowledge in the learner (see Ellis, 2003, 2005, 2006). The interaction hypothesis also focuses attention on learning beyond intrapsychological activity. Long (1983, 1996), for example, reaffirms the essential role of conversational interaction where modified input in interaction leads to comprehensible input which, in turn, promotes acquisition. Through interaction, interlocutors must negotiate for meaning when communication is difficult, whereby creating an opportunity for language development. Long-standing interest in negotiation clearly acknowledges the importance of interactional factors in SLA (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Thorne, 2000).

Yet while some cognitive perspectives stress the role of learners’ engagement with others, for the most part, as Thorne (2000) notes, they retain ‘the terminological inertia of the engineering-computational metaphors common to cognitive approaches’ (p. 224). Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) further suggest that social context does not form an integral part of the learning as ‘acquisition’ metaphor commonly associated with cognitive SLA, suggesting that it is rather ‘tacked on’ as the means for further input (p. 229). Cheng (2005) also highlights criticism associated with observation schemes connected with interaction analyses, questioning the capacity of those schemes to capture the complete picture of classroom interaction, i.e. that which involves individuals within groups and groups within communities who ‘(re)create and respond to both their sociohistorical and locally situated interactive conditions, and the consequences...of doing so’ (Hall, 1995, p. 221).
In a landmark article, Sfard (1998) described a new emerging metaphor in general education, which captures a more participatory, social view of learning, i.e. the participation metaphor (PM). It offers a different perspective to the traditional acquisition metaphor (AM) often associated with the aforementioned computer and container metaphors. While the acquisition metaphor portrays learning as gaining possession over an accumulated commodity, the participation metaphor presents learning as becoming a member of a certain community. As Sfard (1998) explains, participation ‘is almost synonymous with “taking part” and “being a part,” and both of these expressions signalise that learning should be viewed as a process of becoming a part of a greater whole’ (p. 6). From an SLA perspective, the participation metaphor captures a holistic and emic picture of language learning which shifts the focus of language learning to social issues of affiliation and belonging and to language use in context as opposed to language structure (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

Ellis (2010) further summarises ‘social’ SLA using the following quote from Firth and Wagner (2007):

> In situated social practices, use and learning are inseparable parts of the interaction. They appear to be afforded by topics and tasks and they seem to be related to specific people, with particularised identities, with whom new ways of behaving occur as the unfolding talk demands (p. 812; cited in Ellis, 2010, p. 27).

In other words, from a social perspective, language learning involves the ongoing negotiation of social identity where intra- and inter-psychological activity takes place in situated sociocultural historical contexts. It is from a social SLA perspective of learning that the present study seeks to investigate the influence of the TOEIC on learning processes and to which the remainder of this chapter is devoted.

It is important to emphasise, however, that no single theory or approach to understanding language learning is promoted above another in this study. Both ‘cognitive’ and ‘social’ approaches contribute to explicating the complex processes involved in language learning. In fact, Sfard (1998) discusses the dangers of aligning with only one approach, and Ellis (2010) further addresses the need to resolve debates between the two paradigms, promoting the need for a composite theory of L2 acquisition that includes both social and cognitive elements - such as the promising theory of sociocognition (see Atkinson, 2002; Atkinson et al. 2007; Batstone, 2010). Rather than promoting one paradigm over another, the present study follows an epistemic relativistic perspective, i.e. a perspective that acknowledges that ‘theories are
contextual and purposeful, and thus need to be evaluated in terms of what they seek to explain’ (Ellis, 2010, p. 49). The remaining intent of this chapter, accordingly, is to demonstrate how a ‘social’ conceptualisation of learning through sociocultural theory (SCT) may help to capture and disentangle some of the complexity associated with the washback of the TOEIC - a perspective that has received little attention in comparison to more psycholinguistic studies that have tended to dominate previous studies on washback.

4.1.3 A Sociocultural Theory of Mind

Sociocultural theory, commonly used in general education and psychology, traditionally refers to the theory of mental development and functioning formulated by L. S Vygotsky and his colleagues. In an effort to overcome what he characterised as a ‘crisis in psychology’ in the early 20th century (Vygotsky, 1927), Vygotsky (1956, 1978, 1981) introduced a view of learning and teaching that differed in many respects to theories favoured in mainstream education. Since that time, SCT has burgeoned and developed across a number of fields resulting in an abundance of literature, including a growing number of articles and volumes of work in the field of second language development. From literature and studies in L2 development, Lantolf (2000) presents three recurring themes that emerge to directly address the contribution SCT makes to advancing both practical and technical knowledge in the field of SLA: (1) mediation (2) the role of instruction and ZPD; and (3) agency, as described below.

Mediation

Central to sociocultural theory (and that which unites all varieties of SCT) is the concept of mediation – that higher forms of human mental activity are mediated by culturally constructed auxiliary means (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Vygotsky reasoned that humans, unlike other species, have the ability to inhibit and delay the functioning of automatic biological processes through mental regulation - a distinctive dimension of human consciousness. According to Arievitch and van der Veer (2004), ‘without mental regulation a living organism is limited only to perpetuate the “previous experience of an action”, that is, to perform routine, standard activities’ (p. 161). However, with the emergence of mental control, the adaptive ability of an organism increases dramatically. Vygotsky proposed that while biological factors provide the necessary functions for mental regulation, they do not sufficiently account for our ability to voluntarily and intentionally regulate mental activity. Rather, Vygotsky (1927) argued that biological and cultural factors form a dialectically
organised mental system, and it is culture that empowers humans to intentionally regulate these functions ‘from the outside’ (p. 55). More specifically, he reasoned that the capacity that humans have for voluntary control over biology, is made possible through the use of higher-level cultural artefacts, or tools, which mediate or serve as a buffer between the person and the environment (Arievitch & van der Veer, 2004; Lantolf, 2000, Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, Vygotsky, 1997).

Cultural artefacts represent physical as well as symbolic or psychological tools that adapt as subsequent generations rework their cultural inheritance to meet the needs of communities and individuals. While physical tools are outwardly directed, symbolic tools are inwardly or cognitively directed and serve as a means to control and reorganise biological psychological processes (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). Examples of symbolic mediation include: numeracy and arithmetic systems, music, categorisation, rationality, logic and above all literacy and language. Thinking, in this way, is an ‘activity of operating with signs’ (Wittgenstein, 1953, cited in Roebuck, 2000, p. 79). The following quote by Lantolf (2000) summarises the notion of mediation well:

   Just as humans do not act directly on the physical world but rely, instead on tools and labor activity, which allow us to change the world, and with it, the circumstances under which we live in the world, we also use symbolic tools, or signs, to mediate and regulate our relationships with others and with ourselves and thus change the nature of these relationships (Lantolf, 2000, p. 1).

In essence, from a Vygotskian SCT perspective, the task of psychology is to (fundamentally) understand how human social and mental activity is organised or mediated through culturally constructed artefacts (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In applied linguistics, this perspective has been used to shed light on language learning processes across a range of areas, including language testing (e.g. dynamic assessment, Poehner, 2008). Where washback is concerned, a focus of this study is to investigate how human social and mental activity is organised through standardised testing – powerful mediatory artefacts that adapt to meet the needs of communities and individuals.

Vygotsky further argued that mental regulation is made possible through a process of internalisation – the process of transforming meditational external assistance into a resource that is internally available to the individual (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007) as described below:

   Internalization is the process through which members of communities of practice appropriate the symbolic artifacts used in communicative activity and convert them into psychological artifacts that mediate their mental activity. Through internalization,
symbolic artifacts lose their exclusive unidirectional quality (intended for social others) and take on bidirectional functions (intended for social others and the self) (Lantolf, 2006, p. 90).

From researching children, Vygotsky proposed three general stages in the process of internalisation. In the first stage, object-regulation, children are often controlled by or use objects in their environment in order to think. The second stage, termed as other regulation, involves implicit and explicit mediation through varying levels of assistance, direction and scaffolding by parents, siblings, peers, coaches, and teachers, and so on. The final stage, self regulation, refers to the ability to accomplish activities with minimal or no external support showing that what was once external is internalised. In this way, successful learning involves shifting control within activities from the social to the individual, from the external to within oneself, and it is through internalisation that higher forms of mental activity gradually come into being (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Lantolf, 2000).

In language learning, for example, linguistic forms and functions are first used in collaboration with others during social interactions and subsequently become internalised for independent use. In other words, language learning develops through participation in socially mediated activities, where the social and the individual planes of human psychological activity are interwoven (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Germaine to the present study, SCT highlights the importance of conceptualising language learning in response to a test as a process that is mediated by semiotic tools and resources. In the classroom, these resources, as Donato (2000), notes, may take the form of print materials, the physical environment, gestures, and most notably classroom discourse. Interaction, instruction and assisted performance, feature as key variables in the gradual internalisation of shared sociocognitive activities, as discussed below.

The Zone of Proximal Development

As illustrated above, successful learning from a SCT perspective involves a shift from collaborative inter-mental activity (other regulation) to autonomous intra-mental activity (self regulation). During inter-mental activity the domain where learning can most productively take place is in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which refers to ‘the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It is, in effect, a metaphorical location or ‘site’ in which a learner is capable of performing at a higher level
because there is support (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The following reformulation of Vygotsky’s original concept by Ohta (2001, p. 9) provides a working definition of the ZPD within SLA:

For the L2 learner, the ZPD is the distance between the actual development level as determined by individual linguistic production, and the level of potential development as determined through language produced collaboratively with a peer or teacher.

Unlike more cognitive perspectives that traditionally characterise language learning in terms of the comprehensibility of outside input (i.e. Krashen’s i+1 hypothesis), the emphasis of the ZPD is on how learners co-construct knowledge based on their interaction with their interlocutor (Lantolf, 1998). Donato (2000) further explains:

…the utterances of a teacher and other students in a foreign language class are more than linguistic input to be made comprehensible. They are essentially social practices of assistance that shape, construct, and influence learning within interactional and instructional contexts (p. 46).

As mentioned in the previous chapter on washback, the influence that a test has on learners is in part mediated by teachers and course materials (Green, 2007). Of interest in the present research, therefore, are the types of communities and social practices students participate in when preparing for the TOEIC and the influence this may have on the shaping and construction of learning.

**Learner Agency**

The final recurring theme central to SCT is that of agency. Unlike acquiring a first language, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) highlight that new languages are arrived at by choice or through the intent of the learner. As such, learners need to be seen as ‘more than processing devices that convert linguistic input into well-formed (or not so well formed) outputs’; rather, learners need to be ‘understood as people, which in turn means we need to appreciate their human agency’ (p. 145) – their socioculturally mediated capacity to act (Ahearn, 2001). More specifically, agency, refers to ‘people’s ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation’ (Duff, in press). A learner’s capacity to do this is greatly influenced by his or her cognitive belief structure, formed from personal experiences and personal histories – ‘replete with values, assumptions, beliefs, rights, duties, and obligations’ (Donato, 2000, p. 46). Drawing on Taylor (1985), Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) portray agency as that which is socially and historically constructed as part of a person’s ‘habitus’– dispositions that incline
us to act and react in specific ways. The authors also go as far as to argue that the ultimate attainment in second language learning relies on one’s agency (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000). Perhaps most central to the notion of agency is the idea that learners construct the terms and conditions of their own learning by actively transforming their world - not merely conforming to it (Donato, 2000, Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). As a result, agency is closely connected to the needs, desires, goals and motives of the individual learner which, as McKay and Wong (1996) note, ‘must be regarded as constituting the very fabric of students’ lives’ - influencing their investment in learning a target language (p. 603). Similarly, Duff (in press) notes that a sense of agency, ‘enables people to imagine, take up, and perform new roles or identities…and then to take concrete actions in pursuit of their goals’. Agency, accordingly, links motivation to action which then ‘defines a myriad of different paths taken by learners’ (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). This supports the idea that the ‘outcomes of language learning are significantly shaped by what learners bring and contribute to the whole process’ (Breen, 2001, p. 1). Where washback is concerned, it may be argued that the outcomes of student learning, as influenced by a test, are also significantly shaped by what learners contribute. This is particularly relevant in the case of a voluntary test such as the TOEIC where students may approach test preparation in various ways, and as found by Green (2007), may not always accede to a teacher’s priorities but are apt to follow their own beliefs about language learning. Certainly, as Dontato (2000) notes, no amount of instructional manipulation ‘can deflect the overpowering and transformative agency embodied in the learner’ (p. 47).

It is important to note, however, that while agency may appear to refer to something that belongs to a learner, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) argue that it is ‘never a property of a particular individual’; rather it is ‘a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large’ (p. 148). Human agency, therefore, involves a complex interplay between the individual (intrapersonal) psychological plane and the social (interpersonal) plane. This view of the learner as a complex adaptive system aligns closely with Complexity Theory - a growing field in SLA that recognises (as with SCT) that the individual cannot be seen as autonomous and bounded, but instead boundaries between individuals and their context are blurred and changing. When, an individual participates in a group, for instance ‘the group as a system both affects and is affected by the individual’ (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 240).
As a result, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) suggest that to understand the language learning process, we need to collect data about individuals…and about individuals as members of groups’ (p. 240). Similarly, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) argue that research into language learning must focus on the variable exercise of agency among learners within context if it is to account for differential learner achievement. This entails, seeing activities, in a location and viewing learners’ participation within them as ‘having personal, biographical-historical significance grounded within particular values and meanings’ (Breen, 2001, p. 7). The importance of situated human agency and learner contributions to the learning process is presented in the second part of this chapter. These ideas are of prime importance when considering washback.

4.2 Learner Contributions to Language Learning in Context

Breen (2001) posits that an adequate explanation of how a person learns another language must account for, not only the product or outcomes of student learning, but also what learners contribute to the process, the language data made available to the learners, and the interaction between learners and the environment in terms of the situated learning process (p. 172). In a publication devoted to presenting a socially constructed view of language learning that takes learner variables into account (Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research) Breen (2001) summarises the works included in the book in a diagrammatic representation that profiles the contributions learners make toward their language learning within different intrapersonal and interpersonal community states (Fig. 4.2). It highlights a wide range of factors that may influence learning and also emphasises the nested contextualised nature of learning. The following is a summary of four key elements addressed in the diagram: a) learner attributes, conceptualisations and affect; b) situated learner action; c) wider community identity and participation; and d) learner contributions as a complex system.

4.2.1 Learner Attributes, Conceptualisations and Affect

Breen’s (2001) diagram consists of four oblongs (or layers) extending outwards from the first layer: ‘Learner Attributes, Conceptualizations and Affect’. Similar to Shih’s (2007) aforementioned model of washback in Chapter Three, Breen’s (2001) diagram presents a range of individual learner variables to take into account when considering the contributions learners make to the learning process. This first layer represents the learner’s own biographical-historical community – that is, the intrapersonal psychological plane of the learner including: attributes: age, aptitude, personality, learning disabilities, social identities;
and conceptualisation: motivation, attitude, cognitive style, and affects (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). When learners’ mental capacities and processes work upon linguistic data (within a particular setting), it is these learner attributes, conceptualisations and affects that are engaged toward the facilitation and/or constraint of learning outcomes (Breen, 2001).

Figure 4.2
Profile of Learner Contributions to Language Learning (Source: Breen, 2001)
Breen (2001) is certainly not the first to acknowledge this. The study of language learner characteristics or Individual Differences (IDs) has a long tradition in second language studies (see Dörnyei, 2005) with the origin of ID research going back to the end of the 19th century. What is perhaps interesting and somewhat unique about Breen’s (2001) representation, however, is how these learner contributions ‘come to life’ via contact with interweaving communities situated on a micro-macro continuum of context (Block, 2003). In addition to the learner’s own biographical-historical community, the diagram includes two major outer level community states that language learners will move between concurrently (Breen, 2001). This includes the particular learning community that language learners enter (layer three) and the wider speech community (layer four). Drawing from Norton (2001), Breen (2001) notes that different learners in different circumstances will conceptualise each of these communities in different ways, particularly in terms of how they identify themselves with them. These conceptualisations may also, in turn, influence the extent to which learners invest their participation in the learning of the language or, as is often the case, it may influence the learner to withdraw their participation completely (pp. 7-8). Breen’s diagram, therefore, presents a very dynamic, interrelated and situated view of individual differences.

4.2.2 Situated Learner Action

A major limitation of Shih’s (2007) model of washback is that it fails to capture the different ways learners contribute to the outcomes of their learning in response to different contexts. The second and third layers of Breen’s diagram reflect this. Specifically, the second layer (learner action in context) relates to the learners’ actual engagement with discourse practices and interactions with others within the context of a particular learning community (layer three). The conditions that different contexts provide and how learners interpret particular aspects of context, as noted above, will greatly contribute to how learners learn. Although Breen presents the classroom context as a specific example, it may represent other concrete learning contexts whose existence can be felt directly (Kanno & Norton, 2003) such as Internet classes, study groups with peers, etc. Within these communities (closely connected to the notion of regulation and internalisation) participation may move through a process of what Lave and Wenger (1998) refer to as legitimate peripheral participation, where new comers interact with ‘old-timers’ (or the more experienced) in a given community setting - becoming increasingly experienced in the practices that characterise the community, and moving toward fuller participation in that community (Norton, 2001). As such, the language classroom (or particular learning environment) ‘mediates between the learners’ being and

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becoming’ (Breen, 2001, p. 8). Yet as shown in the second layer, learners may contribute to this process in variable ways as they exercise their agency and autonomy, ‘assuming responsibility for determining the purpose, content, rhythm and method’ of their learning (Little, 2000, p. 69). Certainly, as noted earlier, reaching levels of proficiency in another language requires concerted effort, sustained and strategic practice, and opportunity – all manifestations of personal and social agency (Duff, in press).

Language learning strategies (techniques or procedures) feature as an important variable, or manifestation of agency, which can greatly impact learner success, or where washback is concerned, mediate the influence that a test has on learning (Green, 2007). Not surprisingly, much research has focused on the use of strategies and different approaches to strategy use with long standing interest in differences between successful and less successful language learners (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Green & Oxford, 1995; Keatly et al., 1999; Padron & Waxman, 1988). In summary of this research, Chamot, 2001 notes that while studies such as Green and Oxford (1995) report more strategy use with more successful learners, recurring findings in strategy research show that less effective learners often use learning strategies as frequently or, in some cases, more than their more successful counterparts. Consequently, rather than frequency of strategy use, differences between learner proficiencies tend to reflect the ‘choice and flexible application of strategies that are appropriate to the learning task at hand’ (p. 32), or those that are appropriate in the sense of what will ‘work for them’ (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 23). As such, cognitive and affective factors, such as those presented in the first layer, may account for differences in strategy use among learners.

From a sociocultural perspective, Donato and McCormick (1994) further emphasise how strategies are a by-product of mediation and socialisation into a community of language learning practice and are continually under development. Through portfolio investigation into the strategy use of ten undergraduate students in an English conversation class, the authors found that, as in any cultural group, the culture of the classroom and mediating artefacts such as a dialogic cycle of self assessment, goal setting and strategy elaboration and restructuring played an important role in fostering strategic learning. Through self reflective training, students moved from focusing on strategy use that they thought was appropriate in the classroom context (believing the teacher to be the authoritative source of knowledge) to a more reflective and self directed construction of strategy use. The classroom environment and
reflective training played an important role in the development of students’ strategy use. This is just one example of the complex interplay between the very situated cognitive, social and affective processes involved in language learning.

4.2.3 Wider Community Identity and Participation

The fourth and final layer framing Breen’s (2001) profile of learner contributions to language learning is the wider speech community. Block (2003) describes this layer of community as the entire social historical background of the learner – past, present and aspired, i.e. that to which the learner previously belonged, that which the learner currently belongs and that which the learner seeks to belong to. For a new migrant, a community to which a learner may seek to belong to, for example, may be outside the classroom, or for an EFL learner, it may be a community identified at a distance or an imagined community: ‘groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Imagination in this sense refers to ‘a process of expanding oneself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 176).

The wider community aptly frames all layers represented in the diagram given that language learners’ actual and desired memberships in the wider (often imagined) speech communities will affect their learning trajectories, their agency, motivation, investment, and, possibly, resistance in the learning of English (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p. 669). The last point, highlighting potential resistance towards learning English is an important one. As Wenger (1998) argues:

We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through the practices we do not engage in. Our identities are constituted not only by what we are but also by what we are not (p. 164).

In other words, as Duff (in press) explains, in the same way that learners exercise their agency towards learning and becoming part of a community, they may also exercise their agency and resist participation. For example, agency can ‘enable people to actively resist certain behaviours, practices, or positioning, sometimes leading to oppositional stances and behaviours leading to other identities, such as rebellious, diffident student’. A perceived lack of agency, (i.e. where the learner feels that they have little control) might also lead to passivity and disengagement. This links closely to the concept of identity defined as the ‘sense of one’s alignment or affiliation with, or membership in, a particular group and the
emotional ties one has with that group and the meanings that connection has for an individual’ (Duff, in press). Accordingly, how a learner identifies themselves within the wider (and localised) community may greatly impact the learning process.

4.2.4 Learner Contributions as a Complex System

Breen’s (2001) diagram represents a complex interplay between the learner and learning context where ‘each individual acts as a unique learning context, bringing a different set of systems to a learning event, responding differently to it and therefore learning differently as a result of participating in it’ (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 240). However, although Breen’s (2001) diagram includes arrows showing how the different layers are interconnected, it fails, as the author notes, to show the true complexity of the interrelatedness of learner contributions interacting with one another, and within the different levels of context. For example, learner attributes such as personality and identity may relate to how learners conceptualise themselves; which may, in turn, influence the specific learning context they enter; that might also influence the learner’s agency, participation and strategy use within that context; which then may further influence how learners conceptualise themselves etc. (Breen, 2001). This perspective of what learners bring to the learning process in response to their environment presents a challenge with regard to disentangling learner variables in order to trace their impact on learning, and perhaps presents an even greater challenge with regard to disentangling situated learner variables in order to understand their affect on learning in relation to the washback of a test.

Acknowledging this complexity, Breen (2001) promotes Activity Theory (AT), within SCT, as a cross-disciplinary framework for investigating dynamic interrelationships between learner variables within socio-cultural-historical contexts where both individual and social levels are interlinked. It is this theoretical framework that informs the present study and leads the final part of this chapter. It is important to preface this, however, by saying that SCT and AT are by no means the only poststructuralist approaches becoming more central to discussions in SLA with regard to the complex nature of language learning. As Duff (in press) notes, dynamic systems approaches, complexity theory, and new understandings of social context and the ecology of language learning are now entering mainstream SLA theory (see for example: Block, 2007; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Kramsch, 2002; Menard-Warwick, 2006; Norton, 2010; Ricento, 2005). In essence, what poststructuralist theories seem to offer are approaches to research that question oppositional binaries, fixed categories and structures,
closed systems, and stable ‘truths’ (Pavlenko, 2002); and instead embrace ‘fuzziness’ (McAndrew, 1997), seeming contradictions, complexity, interconnectedness, dynamism and human agency. This is also true of Activity Theory, as described below.

4.3 ACTIVITY THEORY

Based on the fundamental tenets of sociocultural theory, AT presents a unified account of Vygotsky’s proposal that human behaviour results from the integration of socially, culturally and historically constructed forms of mediation into human activity (Lantolf, 2000). The unit of analysis in AT is an activity – the behaviour that is ‘actually produced when an individual (or group) performs a task. It is the process, as well as the outcome of the task, examined in its sociocultural context’ (Coughlan & Duff, 1994, p. 175). The intent of the final part of this chapter is to summarise the development of AT, outline the fundamental principles as presented in recent SLA literature; and present the potential AT offers in examining washback in the context of the present study.

4.3.1 Early Development of Activity Theory

From an early Vygotskian perspective, an activity, the minimal meaningful context for understanding human action (Barab, 2002), consists of ‘object-oriented action’ mediated by cultural artefacts. Figure 4.3 below provides an early diagrammatic representation of human activity. The subject, whose agency is chosen as the point of view of the analysis, refers to the person (or group) engaged in the activity; the object refers to the target of the activity (as held by the subject); and mediating artefacts represent the tools and instruments (internal or external) used to achieve the outcomes of the activity (Barab, Evans & Baek, 2004).

![Simplified Model of Mediated Action](Vygotsky, 1978)

Although Vygotsky presented this model as mediated object-oriented action, the conceptual distinction of action within the activity was not yet formulated. Following his death, Leont’ev
(and his immediate collaborators) substantially extended Vygotsky’s ideas into what is now recognised as the cornerstone of present forms of activity theory (Roth & Lee, 2007) - or second generation AT. Although acknowledging the societal, cultural, and historical dimensions of activity Leont’ev sought to separate an individuals’ behaviour from the collective, conceiving of an activity as ‘a nested system of co-ordinations bounded by general human motives’ (Cole, 1985, p. 151). Activities, Leont’ev reasoned, are composed of *actions* (systems of co-ordination in the service of goals); which are composed of *operations* carried out under particular *conditions* and/or constraints (Cole, 1985). Accordingly, Leont’ev identified three interconnected hierarchical levels of human activity: a) needs and motives b) goal directed actions, and c) conditional operations, as discussed below.

**a) Needs and Motives**
Central to Leont’ev’s notion of AT is the idea that activity does not merely involve ‘doing’ something as a disembodied action, rather ‘doing’ involves an act of transformation (Barab, Evans & Baek, 2004, p. 200). This act of transformation is motivated by a *need*, such as a biological need for food, or a culturally constructed need, such as the need to be literate. A need in itself, however, does not have the power to bring about behavioural change until it is connected to an object within an activity system - in which case it becomes a *motive* (Kim, 2010; Lantolf, 2000). In other words, ‘the objectification of a need transforms it into a motive (Miettinen, 2005, p. 56). Using Leont’ev’s original example of tribal hunting practices, Lantolf (2000) exemplifies how hunger (the *need*) does not become a motive until people desire to seek food or ‘hunt’ (the *object*), or, for example, literacy, does not become a motive until people decide to read and write (p. 8). As such, a subject’s motive - the ‘guiding or integrating force’ behind the activity (Wertsch, 1985, p. 212) is inseparable from the object - the central focus of an activity system without which there would be no activity (Leont’ev, 1977). A motive tells us why something is done (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) and features as ‘an internal characteristic of the structure of an activity’ - one that may change and is transformed as the activity develops (Markova, 1990, p. 23).

**b) Goal Directed Actions**
Once created, motives have selective power, realised through specific *goal-directed actions*, i.e. socioculturally designed means of fulfilling motives (Miettinen, 2005, Lantolf, 2000). Actions, in other words, are concrete realisations of activities which tell us what is done, or what course of action is followed based on specific *goals* that are formulated in response to
motives which are concurrently revised as a person acts (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Engeström, 1999a, p. 381). Actions, as Engeström (1999a) notes, have clear points of beginning and termination, and are constantly generated within an activity system through which the object of the activity is enacted and reconstructed (p. 381). In the above example where hunger is the need and hunting is the object, killing an animal would be the goal, and the actions associated with this may include, for example, scaring the animal, slaying it and carving it up etc. (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005).

Lantolf (2000) highlights how one activity may be differentiated from another activity by their objects and their motives but not necessarily on the concrete realisation of action (p. 9). For example, as the author exemplifies, despite the best intentions of a teacher, although students in the same L2 class take may part in the same task they will not be engaged in the same activity if they have different motives and goals as the object of their actions (p. 12). This clearly differentiates task from activity. A further entailment is that students who participate in different tasks may not necessarily be involved in different activities. For example, students may participate in different actions and operations toward language learning but be involved in similar activities because they are acting in response to accomplishing similar objectified goals. For example, one language learner may join a structured conversation class and another learner may participate in a small informal discussion study group. Although they may appear to be involved in different tasks and different activities, the fact that the objectified goal of both participants is to be able to communicate with and make foreign friends, they may in fact be involved in the same or similar activity.

c) Operations Determined by Conditions
As motives may be realised in different ways, actions too may similarly be operationalised through numerous means as represented in the third strata of Activity Theory: operations determined by conditions. Operations are the ‘real-time in-process means by which an action is carried out’ under appropriate meditational means (Lantolf, 2006b, p. 219). Following the above analogy of hunting, an operation to the action of ‘slaying the animal’ might include, for example, gripping and throwing a spear (Barab, Evans & Baek, 2004). Leont’ev (1981) contends that operations are not defined by the original goal of the activity, but by the objective circumstances under which it is carried out. As Barab, Evans and Baek (2004) further explain, ‘operations do not have their own goals; rather they provide an adjustment of
actions to current situations’ (p. 205). Therefore, operations are oriented and determined by
the conditions in which the activity unfolds (Lantolf, 2006). As such Leont’ev (1981) notes,
‘under different conditions the same action will be instantiated in different ways’ (pp. 204-
205). This level of activity links closely to the second layer of Breen’s (2001) diagram –
‘learner action in context’ - where students will participate in the operations of language
learning using a range of strategies and exercise their agency and autonomy adapting to the
conditions of their particular learning community. The conditions that a particular learning
community supports may therefore influence the type of operations that take place. An
example of this, as previously mentioned is the impact that certain learning communities have
on strategy use.

In summary of the above description of Leont’ev’s theory of human activity - activity
develops from need which transforms into motive when it is directed at a specific object.
Motive, accordingly, generates activity and determines goals which in turn direct actions that
are composed of operations, situated in specific spatial and temporal conditions, as illustrated
in Figure 4.4 below.

![Diagram of Activity](Source: Wilson, 2006)

The above graphic representation of Leont’ev’s theory of activity by Wilson (2006) illustrates
how relationships between different levels of activity may be expressed. However, it does not
clearly express the unstable and complex nature of activities. As Lantolf (2000) notes,
‘activities, whether in the workplace, classrooms, or other settings, do not always unfold
smoothly. Actions, Engeström (1999b) notes, ‘are not fully predictable, rational, and
machine-like. The most well-planned and streamlined actions involve failures, disruptions,
and unexpected innovations’ (p. 32). What begins as one activity, for example, may reshape itself into another activity ‘in the course of its unfolding’ (Lantolf, 2000, p. 11). Moreover, Leont’ev’s conceptualisation of activity fails to show how the fundamental components of an activity interact, and appears to neglect the continuous, self-reproducing, systematic, and longitudinal-historical aspects of human functioning (Engeström, 1999b, p. 22).

Perhaps most importantly, given that Leont’ev’s unit of analysis for understanding human functioning is based on individual, delineated action, his theory of activity does not account for ‘the socially distributed or collective aspects’ of activity and it fails to conceptualise the artefact-mediated or cultural aspects of purposeful human behavior’ (Engeström, 1999b, p. 22). In other words, it is unclear how mediating factors such as artefacts (instruments and tools) and the wider mediating community may influence the outcomes of the activity. Echoing Kozulin (1984) and Valsiner (1988), Engeström (1999b) argues that Leont’ev’s work suppresses the original Vygotskian idea of semiotic mediation. In response to these limitations, particularly the isolation of human activity from the societal, collaborative and mediatary nature of actions, Engeström (1999b) conceived of a new complex model of an activity system based on Vygotsky’s representation of mediated action as presented below.

### 4.3.2 Second and Third Generation Activity Theory

Considered part of the second generation of activity theory and described as ‘modern activity theory’ (Lantolf, 2006), Engeström’s (1999b) complex model of an activity system shows how a variety of contextual factors work together to impact an activity (Fig. 4.5).

**Figure 4.5**

Engeström’s Schematic of an Activity System *(Source: Engeström 1999b)*

Founded on Vygotsky’s original triadic representation of subject, object and mediating artefacts, which forms the upper section of the diagram, Engeström (1999b) restates that in
order to reach an outcome, it is necessary to produce certain objects (e.g. experiences, knowledge and/or physical products). This occurs through the use of appropriate mediatory artefacts, i.e. tools and instruments. Extending Vygotsky’s original directional model of activity, Engeström (1999b) further adds that human activity is also mediated by the wider community as represented at the base of the schematic pyramid. It is the bottom part of the pyramid that acknowledges the contextualised nature of activity, and provides a conceptual framework that brings together local human activity and larger social-cultural-historical structures (Barab, Evans & Baek, 2004; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Specifically, on the lower level, community refers to the participants who share the same ‘object’ and who shape and lend direction to the individual and shared activity at hand; and division of labor refers to the horizontal actions and interactions among members of the community (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 223). It further comprises the vertical division of power and status, including, for example, identity and social role, expected interactional dynamics etc. (Engeström, 1993; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). As such, the subject (or subjects), therefore, work as part of a community to achieve an object, which in turn may involve a division of labour, ‘consisting of multiple layers of fragmentation and compartmentalization’ (Engeström, 1999b, p. 31). The community may also impose its own set of rules – ‘the explicit norms and conventions that constrain actions within the activity system’ (Kim, 2009, p. 275). In this way, Engeström’s AT model highlights mediating subject-community relations as an integral aspect of a complex activity system absent in Leont’ev’s conceptualisation of activity which is crucial to exploring washback, as later explored.

In providing an example of how L2 learning may be represented in this framework, Kim (2009) describes how a subject may symbolise the L2 learner who wants to acquire sufficient L2 skills (object) using various meditational artefacts (instruments). The learner as a social being, lives in a variety of language communities such as L2 schools, (home-stay) family, peer networks and workplaces (community) and conforms to unique conventions of learning and using the L2 (rules), while collaborating with other L2 learners or users (division of labour). The double arrows, Kim (2009) further implies, show how elements may potentially oppose one another, in which case tensions may arise. As the author notes, ‘from a longitudinal perspective, L2 learning is the process of experiencing and overcoming tensions; if tensions persist, L2 learning stagnates, whereas if the L2 learner can solve the tensions, he or she can achieve a higher level of L2 proficiency’ (p. 275-276).
Recent developments of Engeström’s model (in what is viewed as the beginning of the third generation of AT) provide an even more complex perspective of AT involving interdependent and co-adaptive relationships between multiple activities (see Y. Engeström, R. Engeström & Vähäaho (1999). As Lantolf and Thorne (2006) note,

Importantly, a single activity system is influenced by a multiple of other life events and communities, each of which can also be analytically described as features of other activity systems. In this way, an activity system such as a second language classroom may be influenced by other educational contexts as well as exogeneous activity systems not related to education (p. 225).

A particular educational context, therefore, may be viewed as part of a number of activity systems relevant to participating individuals. Engeström et al. (1999) describe this conceptual approach as ‘knotworking’ – the ‘construction of constantly changing combinations of people and artifacts over lengthy trajectories of time and widely distributed space’ (1999, p. 346). Third generation conceptualisations of AT, therefore, includes what Kuutti (1996) posited as missing from Leont’ev’s early conceptualisation of activity - that is, the overlapping of different subjects’ activities - engaged together in a set of coordinated actions that may have multiple or conflicting objects. Typically, third generation AT is diagrammatically represented as two activity pyramids affecting the outcomes of each other as they work alongside each other (but may include any number of activity systems).

Despite the fact that Lantolf and Thorne (2006) describe Engeström’s second and third generation conceptualisations of AT as privileging agency, the environment appears to dominate the framework and seems to move away from privileging the influence of individual learner contributions to activity – as explored in the chapters of Breen (2001). It also fails to capture the incremental nature of learning that evolves through different hierarchical levels of human activity as portrayed in Leont’ev’s conceptualisation of activity. In fact, Engeström (1999b) views the actions and operations of the subject as ‘subordinate units’ of analysis interpreted against the background of entire activity systems and does not conceptualise this within his schematic. The author himself acknowledges that it may be very ‘fruitful’ to move from the analysis of individual actions to the analysis of their broader activity context and back again (p. 32). Moreover, different points of Engeström’s schematic appear to be under-theorised, especially ‘subject’ as Lantolf and Thorne (2006) point out; and open to the interpretation of the researcher. It also remains unclear how a descriptive, analytic AT framework may be systematically and scientifically operationalised to determine how general mental concepts develop out of specific activities. As such, AT does not, as
Engeström (1999) notes, propose ready-made techniques and procedures for research. Accordingly, rather than committing to any rigid framework or model, the present study is led by the principle underlying concepts of AT as outlined below, and concretised in accordance with the specific nature of the investigation at hand.

4.3.3 Principle Concepts Underlying Activity Theory

Based on Engeström’s (1999) manifesto, earlier principles outlined by Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), and more recent interpretations of these by Lantolf (2006) and Lantolf and Thorne (2006), this study consolidates AT into five main guiding principles as presented below.

1. An activity system provides a unit of analysis for understanding mental activity

To understand human activity, including mental activity, means to know how it developed into its existing form (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 144). Human psychological functioning develops as a special component of human interaction with the environment which entails that it in order to understand how the human mind develops investigation must extend beyond the individual (Lantolf, 2006). The minimal meaningful context for understanding human action is an activity and the unit of analysis in AT, is the activity system.

2. The human mind is formed through the mediation and internalisation of cultural artefacts

The human mind is formed and functions as a consequence of mediated human interaction with the culturally constructed environment through the appropriation of artefacts made available by a particular culture. They may be both physical and semiotic, and be as objective as physical, chemical and biological properties. Mediation through the use of culturally constructed tools and others’ voices (or discourses) shape the way people act and think as a result of internalisation. Internalisation is not simply a matter of a verbatim copy of what was carried out, but a transformation of this activity as the mediation becomes private (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 144)

3. Activities transform through object oriented action and operations

Activity systems are not static or purely descriptive; rather, they imply transformation and innovation (Lantolf, 2006). Activities are oriented objects (concrete or ideal), impelled by motives or needs (physical, social and psychological) (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). The transformation of object into an outcome motivates an activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 4).

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Actions are directed at specific goals and are socioculturally designed means of fulfilling motives. Operations are the specific processes through which actions are carried out and are determined by the actual conditions in which the activity unfolds (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 144). Activity systems realise and reproduce themselves by generating actions and operations (Engeström, 1999a).

(4) **Activities are ‘multi-voiced’**

There is no ‘student’- or ‘teacher’- or ‘technology’- centred pedagogy from an activity theory perspective (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Rather, an activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, traditions and interests. The division of labour in an activity creates different positions for participants; the participants carry their own diverse histories; and the activity system itself carries multiple layers and strands of history engraved in its artefacts, rules and conventions (Engeström, 1999a). This multi-voicedness is multiplied in networks of interacting activity systems as activity systems do not operate independently (Lantolf, 2006, p. 226). Multiple activity systems are always relevant, to varying degrees, and part of the analyst’s obligation is to understand how exogeneous systems influence the focus system(s) under investigation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 226).

(5) **Tension within activity systems drives development and transformation**

Activity systems may include conflict and resistance as readily as co-operation and collaboration. Where historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems are aggravated, individual participants may begin to question and deviate from the established form of the activity ((Engeström, 1999a). Tension within and between activity systems drive development, innovation and change in the activity system (Lantolf, 2006, p. 226).

While AT is emerging within the context of SLA (e.g. Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Kim, 2009, 2011; Lantolf, 2006, Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, Roebuck, 2000), there is, to date, no study known by this author, that has investigated washback through the lens of AT. Founded on the principles of AT, the remainder of this chapter, therefore, seeks to show how AT may support investigation into washback on learners and learning.

### 4.3.4 Examining Washback through Sociocultural Activity Theory

One of the more important claims of AT is that where cognition is situated and distributed, we should not expect any two individuals to learn and develop in precisely the same way,
even if the material circumstances, or conditions, of their learning appear similar (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). In a similar way, studies on the washback of tests on learning, as presented in Chapter Three, clearly show a myriad of factors that are likely to interact with a learner and a test and, therefore, intervene in the washback process. Early on, Hughes (1993) captured a somewhat distributed view on washback suggesting that test-taker perceptions and attitudes toward a test may affect how they carry out the process of their work which may in turn affect the learning outcomes – or the product of their work. However, while his hypothesis begins to account for how differences in learners may affect learning processes and outcomes, it fails to explain the mechanisms by which this may happen. Moreover, where positive or negative washback largely depends on the educational context in which it is situated (Cheng, 2005) this hypothesis further fails to account for situated learner action. In order to capture a more situated and social view of washback, this study, therefore, draws on Activity Theory to help guide investigation.

Specifically, given that washback will vary according to the status or stakes of a test (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hughes, 1993), of interest to this study are factors that may contribute to the test stakes and to the ‘objectified need’ for TOEIC scores among test-takers, as represented in the first level of Leont’ev’s (1985) hierarchy of activity. Essentially from an AT perspective, it is the stakes of the TOEIC, as perceived by a student, that drive individual learner motive toward the goal of voluntarily taking and preparing for the TOEIC. No doubt, as introduced in Chapter Two, the TOEIC acts as a powerful mediating tool utilised by a variety of stakeholders. Within companies it is used for making significant personnel decisions, and across tertiary institutions TOEIC scores may play an important role in placing students in programs, supporting graduation and scholarships, and documenting progress in English language courses. Of interest in this study, therefore, are factors such as these (and others) that may affect the stakes of the TOEIC in the lives of individual test-takers. In other words, the role that the wider sociocultural-historical community plays within the activity system is of particular concern to the present study.

In meeting the objectified need for TOEIC scores, particularly in the case of a voluntary test, individuals may participate in a range of ‘other regulated’, mediating contexts which, in turn, is likely to promote certain learning conditions and operations. This part of Leont’ev’s (1985) hierarchy of human activity links closely to the process stage of Bailey’s (1996) basic model of washback. It also relates to Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses that a test will
influence *what* a student learns and *how* they learn. Although this is not specifically detailed by the authors, the *what* of learning, as identified in other studies, may include the content of language focus (see Cheng, 1998a; Cho, 2010; Gosa, 2004; Green, 2007; Shih, 2007); and *how* students learn may include the rate and sequence of student learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993), and learner strategies (see: Cho, 2010; Green, 2007; Gosa, 2004; Shih, 2007; Watanabe, 1992). This level of activity also connects with Breen’s (2001) description of learner action within particular learning communities. Therefore, of interest in this study are the types of operations students engage in (i.e. focus on content, strategy use, and rate and sequence of learning) as influenced by particular learning communities.

Moreover, although the particular learning communities that a student enters may be an important mediatory factor behind the types of operations students engage in, of equal importance to exploring washback is the role of learner agency with regard to which particular learning context(s) learners choose to enter, and what and how they choose to study within those particular learning communities. As explored in this chapter, learners bring a unique set of systems to a learning event, and a learner’s capacity to exercise their agency is greatly influenced by his or her cognitive belief structure, formed from personal experiences and personal histories and ‘replete with values, assumptions, beliefs, rights, duties and obligations’ (Donato, 2000, p. 46). Therefore, of interest to this study are individual factors that may influence what and how learners prepare for the TOEIC. Moreover, since agency is a relationship that is constantly co-constructed with those around the individual and the society at large (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), this study is further interested in the influence of different communities attached to the learner such as those presented by Breen (2001) including: communities that students once belonged, those to which they currently belong and those they seek to belong (i.e. imagined communities).

A further principle of AT is that in the shaping of the way individuals think and act, learners move through a process of mediation (object/other-regulation) to internalisation. This aspect of learning may represent the product component of Bailey’s (1996) model. It may also reflect Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses that a test will influence the degree and depth of student learning, and learner attitudes. As, noted, a major aim of this study is to examine learning processes involved during test preparation; however, although not systematically explored, learner perspectives on the outcomes or products of their Test Activity, and key factors behind these perspectives, are also investigated, as outlined in the next chapter.
4.4 Chapter Summary

The aim of this chapter was to present a conceptualisation of learning with which to guide an investigation into the washback of the TOEIC. Learning as a process from a social SLA perspective was identified as the primary focus. In other words, a key aim of this study is to fundamentally understand how human social and mental activity, in the development of second language learning, is organised through culturally constructed artefacts such as language tests and learning contexts linked to test preparation. As highlighted in this chapter, learning processes involve a complex interplay between individual learner factors and the real and imagined communities to which learners belong. Therefore, even if the material circumstances (or conditions) of a learning context appear similar, we cannot expect any two individuals to learn and develop in precisely the same way (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2001). In the same vein, we cannot expect that a test will influence test-takers to learn and develop in precisely the same way. From this perspective, psychometric research methods may be ‘too minute to capture and understand such a multidimensional phenomenon like washback’ (Cheng, 2005, p. 52). Rather, as this chapter has posited, a multifarious understanding of washback will be one that views different kinds of human practice as development processes, where both individual and social levels are interlinked at the same time (Kuutti, 1996). Activity Theory, a unit of SCT analysis, affords such a perspective. The methodological procedures employed to investigate the washback of the TOEIC from this theoretical standpoint are outlined in Part II of this work, as follows.
5.0 Overview

Chapter Five, divided into four parts, begins with an outline of the research paradigm and characterises and rationalises a qualitative case study approach to studying washback. Part Two of the chapter introduces the research context and overall design. It includes a description of the role of the TOEIC within the research setting, and an overview of the two phases of methodology central to the study. This section further describes the recruitment process, and profiles the ‘research team’, i.e. those involved in interpreting, transcribing, translating and peer checking the data. The third and fourth parts of the chapter present the methodology of Phase One (exploratory focus groups), and Phase Two (semi-structured journals and interviews) respectively. Each part provides the rationale behind the use of the instruments, and details the procedures involved in data collection and analysis.

5.1 THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

5.1.1 Categorising the Research Paradigm

This study is categorised as an exploratory-qualitative-interpretative research design (Mackey & Gass, 2005) in the tradition of an in-depth case-study, based on grounded theory. It is exploratory in that it explores uncharted areas (Dörnyei, 2007), i.e. little research has investigated the washback of the TOEIC on student learning, particularly from a socio-cultural perspective. It employs qualitative research methods in order to make sense of highly complex situations (ibid.), i.e. where washback on learning ‘is far too complex to have a possible linear input and output relationship’ (Cheng, 2005, p. 52). The study is also interpretive in that the research outcome is ultimately the product of the researcher’s interpretation of the data, i.e. where several interpretations may be possible (Dörnyei, 2007), and it is presented in the form of a case-study as it provides an ‘holistic description of language learning or use within a specific population and setting’ (Mackey &Gass, 2005, p. 171). Finally, the research takes a grounded theory approach in that it is ‘grounded’ in data that has been systematically collected from participants who have experienced a particular process under investigation (in this case learning), and is methodologically analysed toward the generation or discovery of a theory (Croker, 2009, pp. 15-17).
5.1.2 Defining and Rationalising a Qualitative, Case Study Approach

The value and utility of qualitative research is becoming increasingly recognised in the field of second language research since it offers a natural and holistic perspective on language learners in their complex, dynamic and multifaceted settings, including both the broader sociocultural context as well as micro-level phenomena (Croker, 2009; Mackey & Gass, 2005). Given that this study explores the washback of the TOEIC embedded in and connected to complex, dynamic, political and social settings, a qualitative research design was considered the most suitable approach. In particular, case study research design, the most widely used approach to qualitative research in education (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003), was utilised in this research. A case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, such as a single person, group, institution or community, either at one point in time or over a period of time (Duff, 2008, Stake, 1995). As a way of increasing the sense of representativeness, or variation among cases, however, case studies may also involve more than one participant (referred to as multiple case studies or collective case studies). This research represents a collective case study incorporating two phases of participants. The first phase includes focus group strategy, also referred to as ‘one shot’ case studies, i.e. where groups are studied only once (Duff, 2008). The second phase includes individual descriptive and exploratory case studies.

Research into the contextualised nature of washback benefits from case study methodology since it emphasises the socially situated and constructed nature of cognition and performance (Patton, 1990, p. 79). Case study strategy is also valuable where boundaries between a phenomenon (such as washback) and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003). As a bounded system, a case study approach further allows for a perspective on washback from perhaps the most important singularity involved in the process - the test-taker. According to Heigham and Croker (2009), a bounded system is composed of an individual and a site including the contextual factors that inform the relationship between the two, and it is the researcher’s responsibility to define the boundaries of this context (pp. 68–69). In some studies, the analysis of an individual’s knowledge system and performance at the micro level may provide sufficient background information to interpret influences on learning; however, based on the literature presented in Chapters Three and Four showing that student learning in response to a test may be influenced by any number of community factors, this research includes an analysis of the individual at the micro and macro contextual levels of their ‘home,
school and community...looking at the individual within a social network of family members, peers, teachers and others’ (Duff, 2008, p. 38).

Further value in employing qualitative, collective case study strategy to investigate washback is that it encourages, multiple sources and insider meaning (i.e. emic perspectives as discussed later). In particular, the researcher is able to draw upon the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals, and by uncovering the multiple meanings it has for them, broaden our understanding of learning processes and the possible interpretations of human experience (Croker, 2009; Dörnyei, 2007). This is valuable in understanding washback on learning where participants may interact with and react to the influence of a test in any number of ways and interpret their experience through multiple meanings.

Finally, a study on washback benefits from the in-depth nature of analysis associated with case studies (Duff, 2008). For example, Dörnyei (2007) suggests that case studies offer ‘rich and in-depth insights that no other method can yield, allowing researchers to examine how an intricate set of circumstances come together and interact in shaping the social world around us’ (p. 155). As such, they are effective in generating new hypotheses, models and understandings about the target phenomenon (Duff, 2008). Given that much literature on washback in SLA has investigated washback largely through quantitative research methods it has, to a large extent, failed to capture interactive processes that involve individuals within groups and groups within communities (Hall, 1995). Qualitative case study methodology, therefore, has the potential to generate new hypotheses and models of washback on learning absent from current literature in the field.

5.1.3 Limitations and Quality Criteria Associated with Qualitative Research

As with all approaches to research, it is important to address frequently claimed criticisms and limitations. The most salient concern regarding qualitative research is that of sample size and the issue of generalisability. Most qualitative studies investigate small participant samples; therefore, the conditions or insights may not apply broadly to others (Dörnyei, 2007). This is true of case-studies where Mackey and Gass (2005) stipulate:

Any generalizations from the individual or small group (or classroom) to the larger population of second language learners must be made tentatively and with extreme caution. From a single case study, it may be difficult to recognize idiosyncrasies as such, with the potential that they are misinterpreted as typical language learning behavior (p. 172).
Tsagari (2007) corroborates this in a review of studies into washback thus far, noting that the majority have been ‘based on small numbers of participants making it difficult for researchers to generalise their findings’ (p. 42). However, Mackey and Gass (2005) suggest that by combining findings from multiple longitudinal case studies, researchers can draw firmer conclusions from their research. Moreover, as opposed to seeking a generalisable ‘correct interpretation’ (Duff, 2008), it is important to state that a major aim of this study is to represent possible interpretations of human experience in the hope of generating ‘ideas which are sufficient to make us think again’ (Holliday, 2010, pp. 101-102).

A further key limitation of qualitative studies concerns the role of the researcher where the strength of qualitative data essentially rests on the competence with which the analysis is carried out (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Morse and Richards (2002) posit that any study is only as good as the researcher, especially in the case of qualitative studies, where the researcher becomes part of the research instrumentation. Since results may be influenced by the researcher’s personal biases and idiosyncrasies, firm safeguards need to be established in order to increase the validity of qualitative research. Without such safeguards qualitative research may be perceived as lacking methodological rigour, falling victim to anecdotalism. It is these concerns that have led many in the past to label qualitative research as less robust, unprincipled, ‘sloppy’ and ‘fuzzy’; however, as Dörnyei (2007) notes, the past two decades have seen a marked shift toward applying rigorous procedures in qualitative studies, as addressed below

**Taxonomies of Quality Criteria**

There are a number of criteria that must be satisfied to ensure that qualitative research is ‘credible, valid and dependable rather than impressionistic and superficial’ (TESOL Quarterly, 2001, pp. 219-220). Based on taxonomies of quality criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Maxwell (1992), this section describes four key criteria used to guide the validity of the interpretations made as a result of this study.

**Credibility**

Credibility refers to the degree to which confidence is established in the ’truth value’ or factual accuracy of the findings. It relates to Maxwell’s (1992) notion of *theoretical validity*, or to the concept of *internal validity* in quantitative research. Fundamentally, a study is said to have internal validity if ‘the outcome is a function of the variables that are measured, controlled or manipulated in the study’ (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 52). Quantitative research is
characterised by the manipulated, controlled, measurement of variables; however, credibility in qualitative research is established through the researcher’s ability to truthfully account for a theory that explains or describes the phenomenon in question (Dörnyei, 2007). Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis and member checking (as described later) are strategies that support credibility.

Transferability
Transferability refers to showing that findings have applicability in contexts other than the study in which they occurred. As noted above, a major limitation of qualitative research is a lack of generalizability given the typically small number of participants. In order to combine findings from multiple longitudinal case studies and draw firmer conclusions, therefore, it is important that the researcher presents a thick description. Introduced by Geertz (1973), the term thick description refers to a detailed description of a phenomena or event that includes the researcher’s interpretation of what they have observed (Paltridge & Phkiti, 2010, p. 357). Strategies for establishing this are later introduced.

Dependability
Establishing dependability in qualitative research involves presenting findings that are consistent and can be repeated, also commonly referred to as reliability or descriptive validity. In qualitative research, dependability refers to ‘the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions’ (Silverman, 2005, p. 224). A useful strategy for ensuring dependability is using multiple investigators to collect and interpret data (Maxwell, 1992, Dörnyei, 2007), or at the very least, to have a second person check classifications (i.e. peer checking).

Confirmability
Finally, confirmability refers to what Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not the researcher’s bias, motivation, or interest. Maxwell (1992) labels this as interpretive validity. In quantitative research it is also commonly referred to as ‘objectivity’. Identifying potential bias and obtaining participant feedback strengthen confirmability.

5.1.4 Strategies for Establishing Reliability/Validity
In light of the above taxonomy of quality criteria, Dörnyei (2007) suggests three main ways to strengthen the reliability/validity of qualitative research: (a) building a clear image of
researcher integrity; (b) including validity/reliability checks, and (c) incorporating research design-based strategies. Each strategy is explored in relation to the present study.

a) Exhibiting Researcher Integrity
As noted, the credibility of qualitative research largely depends on how subjectivity is managed, and the degree to which the researcher presents an image of integrity. Six strategies used to strengthen the credibility of this study include: maintaining transparency of method, examining potential researcher biases, examining outliers, contextualisation and thick description, leaving an audit trail (Dörnyei, 2007); and demonstrating an emic perspective (TESOL Quarterly, 2001).

Maintaining Transparency of Method
The first strategy, maintaining transparency of method entails describing in detail how research is carried out including decisions regarding data collection and analysis (Holliday, 2010). As such, a central aim of the remainder of this chapter is to provide a clear rationale for the different methodologies employed, and to present detailed descriptions of how and why data was analysed.

Examining Potential Researcher Biases
It is important, as Holliday (2010) notes, to show how the beliefs and influences of the researcher are addressed which involves examining potential researcher biases. As such, a further aim of the methodology is to work toward an inquiry that creates an open and honest narrative (Dörnyei, 2007). A description of the researcher (identifying key potential biases) is included in Part Two of this chapter.

Examining Outliers
Credible research also examines outliers, extreme or negative cases and alternative explanations, i.e. pointing out aspects of the study that run counter to the final conclusions and giving alternative explanations a ‘fair hearing’ (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 60). Built into the methodology, therefore, are procedures for comparing participants with similar and different experiences and histories. A further strategy, while coding, is that of paying attention to the results of participants which run counter to common themes, particularly those emerging from the focus group interviews (see Chapter Six). Comments running counter to common themes are clearly highlighted in the final data displays of coding (see Appendix H as an example).
Contextualisation and Thick Description

Presenting findings in rich contextualised detail is an important aspect of credibility and generalizability since it helps the reader identify with the project (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 60) and as noted, strengthens comparisons other researchers may make in current and future studies. In addition to Chapter Two, which introduced the wider Korean context, contextualisation is built into this study through the detailed description of the university context and the TOEIC within that context (included in Part Two of this chapter). The contexts of the participants involved in the major case studies are also described in detail in subsequent chapters.

As mentioned, providing a thick description is another important strategy associated with generalizability. Essentially, the strategy entails that researchers provide vivid descriptions of the interpretations they create as they collect data (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 322). Davis (1995) distinguishes three essential components of thick description: *particular description*, which includes representative examples from data; *general description*, i.e. information about the patterns in data; and *interpretive commentary* – ‘explanations of the phenomenon researched and interpretation of the meaning of the findings with respect to previous research’ (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 180). Accordingly, Chapters Six to Nine of this thesis provide representative examples of the data, including data display tables that provide detailed information and evidence regarding the types of patterns found in the data. The discussion chapter of this work also provides clear explanations of the meaning of the findings as interpreted in light of previous research.

Leaving an Audit Trail

Leaving an audit trail entails offering a detailed and reflective account of the steps taken to achieve results such as ‘the iterative moves in data collection and analysis, the development of coding frames and the emergence of the main themes’ (Dörnyei, 2007). Accordingly, the third and fourth parts of this chapter, which outline each of the major phases of the research, detail all methodological procedures, and the results of coding processes and analyses are clearly exemplified in the Appendices. Appendices G and J, for example, provide a detailed analysis of comments made by peer-checkers (described below) and describe the actions taken in response.

Demonstrating an Emic Perspective

Although not included by Dörnyei (2007), a final way to present researcher integrity and manage subjectivity is through demonstrating an emic perspective as reported in the TESOL
Quarterly qualitative research guidelines (TESOL Quarterly, 2001). Mackey and Gass, (2005) describe an emic perspective as interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people attach to them, using the categories that are meaningful to the members of the community under study (p. 163). As such, Phase One of this research acted as a form of pilot study where one aim was to become familiar with the terms and meanings that participants attached to the TOEIC. Moreover, during data analysis, where possible, the words of participants were used in the creation of themes and categories.

**Validity/Reliability Checks**

Two types of validity and reliability checks employed to increase the confirmability and dependability of this research include respondent feedback and peer checking.

**Respondent Feedback**

Respondent feedback or ‘member checking’ involves the process of taking the final report or specific descriptions of themes back to participants to determine whether the participant feels that they are accurate (Creswell, 2003). If there is agreement between the participants and the researcher, validity is reinforced; however, disagreement does not necessarily question interpretive validity given that ‘there is no reason to assume that they can interpret their own experiences and circumstances correctly’ (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 61). As a result, one way of dealing with member checks is to ‘treat them as further data that can contribute to the overall validity argument after proper interpretation’ (ibid, p. 61). Member checks were built into the methodology of Phase Two where participants were given a copy of the final data display of emerging themes (as described in more detail in Part Four of this chapter).

**Peer Checking**

Peer checking, used to strengthen issues of dependability, entails asking a colleague or ‘peer debriefer’ (Heigham & Croker, 2009) to perform some part of the researcher’s role. This may entail developing and testing (or verifying) the results of some coding scheme, or performing other activities such as carrying out an observation task, and then comparing the correspondence between the two sets of outcomes (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 61). In the present study, peer checking involved a process of developing coding schemes with both Korean and non-Korean colleagues (profiled later in this chapter), and later asking them to verify the results of the coding schemes (as presented in data tables described in later chapters). In addition, Heigham and Croker (2009) suggest that it is important to use your community of practice by engaging in ‘critical and sustained discussion with valued colleagues in a setting of sufficient
trust so that emerging ideas, tentative hypotheses, and half-developed ideas can be shared’ (p. 269). As such, the researcher presented the research at different stages to other PhD students at the University of Auckland, to Korean and non-Korean colleagues (at the university from which this research takes place), and to a wider Korean-based community at KATE (The Korean Association of Teachers of English) (see Booth, 2011). Feedback from these presentations provided valuable insights. It is also important to highlight that a number of different assistants were involved in the research process and openly contributed their thoughts and perspectives during the collection and analysis of data (as profiled in Part Two of this chapter).

**Research Design-based Strategies**

Three design-based strategies were undertaken to improve the validity of the research including: method and data triangulation; longitudinal research design, prolonged engagement in the field (Dörnyei, 2007), and submission (Holliday, 2010).

*Method and Data Triangulation*

Different types of triangulation have been identified in qualitative research; however, the most common definition of triangulation is that it entails ‘the use of multiple, independent methods of obtaining data in a single investigation in order to arrive at the same research finding’ (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 181). The value of triangulation is that it ‘reduces the observer or interviewer bias and enhances the validity and reliability (accuracy) of the information’ (p. 146). Accordingly, this study employs multiple methods of data collection including focus group interviews, semi-structured journals and individual interviews.

*Longitudinal Research Design and Prolonged Engagement*

A further research-based strategy used to strengthen validity is longitudinal research design and prolonged engagement. Without doubt, a key merit of case study research is that it is typically longitudinal in nature, i.e. observations of the phenomena under investigation are made at periodic intervals for an extended period of time (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Longitudinal studies also tend to naturally support prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field. In two phases, this study takes a longitudinal approach across one school year adding to a limited pool of longitudinal data on washback on learning. It is also worth mentioning that the researcher had spent a number of years living and teaching in the research context prior to the study (as profiled in Part Two of this chapter).
Submission

Holliday (2010) posits that a good piece of qualitative research will have built into its design something that will enable the research to take a life of its own, where the researcher submits to the data and the unexpected is allowed to emerge and perhaps change the direction of the study. While both phases of the present study began with general, exploratory questions or areas of interest which directed data collection, the process was very much iterative and the focus of data collection and analysis developed throughout the process. Where possible, the iterative nature of data collection and analysis is explained and exemplified throughout.

5.2 ORIENTING THE RESEARCH

The aim of the second part of this chapter is to introduce: (a) the research context, (b) the overall research design, (c) the rationale and procedures behind the recruitment of participants, and (d) the ‘team’ involved in the transformation and analysis of data.

5.2.1 The Research Setting

When researching washback, Watanabe (2004) advises that the context where the test is used be described in detail, and suggests that the following questions are addressed: What does the educational system look like? What role does the test play in the system? The macro-context of Korea and the role of the TOEIC within Korean society were explored in Chapter Two. This section introduces the research setting at a more micro-level, i.e. the context of the university.

The University: Description and Rationale

Located in Daegu (Korea’s fourth largest city), the university in which this study took place is one of the largest in Korea consisting of 13 graduate colleges, 20 undergraduate colleges and 68 departments. Originally founded by an American missionary and local church leaders in 1954, the private university accommodates over 28,000 student enrolments annually. This context was selected for the study for both theoretical and personal reasons. Theoretically, Korea has received little attention with regard to the washback of the TOEIC despite its growing popularity and concern over the use of the TOEIC for a variety of gate-keeping purposes in Korean universities outside the construct of the test (Choi, 2008; Lee, 2005). A Korean university, therefore, provides an important setting with which to explore washback. A further reason for basing research within a university setting is that, of the few studies that have investigated the washback of the TOEIC, most have used similar settings (Newfields,
2005; Ikeda, 2005; Iwabe, 2005; Lee, 2005). Given the similarity of contexts, it is hoped that combined findings will contribute to building a much clearer picture of the washback phenomenon among university students and help draw firmer conclusions (Mackey & Gass, 2005). On a personal and practical level, the researcher taught at the university, which was not only logistically convenient for data collection, but also, as noted, a key advantage in establishing prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field. Certainly, given that observation into washback on learning remains at a somewhat impressionistic stage, it was hoped that familiarity with the context would help provide direction to the study.

**English and the TOEIC within the University**

At the time of data collection, with the exception of the International Business College, the English Education Department, and foreign language departments, most undergraduate courses on campus were taught in Korean. There was no specialised English language department, and as a result, students wishing to major in English were encouraged to enrol in the English Literature Department. Students registered in this department were frequently referred to as ‘English-majors’ who took mandatory literature classes (taught mostly in Korean), and four English language classes (taught by Korean and foreign professors). English language classes included conversation and composition at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. The English-major students represented in this study belonged to this department. With regard to students from other departments, all freshmen (campus wide) were expected to take two compulsory English classes (English conversation and academic English) taught by native English speakers. Individual departments could also request and provide further mandatory English classes. Many English literature majors elected to take English classes from other departments in order to strengthen their English language skills.

The TOEIC was used for a range of applications, as observed by this researcher (over a period of five years). Beginning in 2008, all freshmen were asked to participate in a mock⁵ Standard TOEIC test at the beginning of their first semester. The results were used to place students into mandatory English classes as mentioned above. The university also supported and encouraged students to prepare for the TOEIC by promoting test preparation elective courses, and by organising voluntary mock tests twice a semester. At the time of data collection, some departments (such as Police Administration) required students to provide

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⁵ A mock test refers to a simulated test, i.e. where students complete a non-official copy of the test under simulated test conditions.
minimum EFL standardised test scores (such as the standard TOEIC) in order to graduate. English major students, enrolled in the English Literature Department, were not required to do this; however, this department, along with others, began considering introducing a minimum English prerequisite for graduation. In 2010, the English Education Department (where this researcher worked) officially introduced such a policy. In addition to graduation requirements, students wishing to apply for scholarships were also asked to provide minimum EFL test scores (again, including TOEIC as an option). These observations confirm an overall strong presence of the TOEIC within the university and confirm general findings by Choi (2008), that many colleges and universities accept the TOEIC as a legitimate test of qualification for graduation and scholarships. An overall description of the research design developed to function within this context follows below.

5.2.2 The Overall Research Design

This section presents the overall research design, outlining the two major phases of investigation, and describes procedures for recruiting participants. Details of the instruments and exact procedures involved follow later in this chapter, and detailed descriptions of the participants are provided in the results (Chapters, 6, 7, 8 & 9).

Overview of Data Collection

Phase One: Focus Groups

As mentioned, Phase One of the research functioned as a pilot study used to provide a thick description of the context of the study. A further aim was to introduce the researcher to some of the more important issues faced by students, and become familiar with the type of language used by the participants to describe different perceptions and processes involved with preparing for TOEIC (thereby providing an emic perspective). A third aim was to use the results to help direct Phase Two of the study. To meet these objectives, focus group methodology was employed. Focus groups are characterised as carefully designed group discussions used to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Kruegar & Casey, 2000; Green & Hart, 1999; Litosseliti, 2003). To mitigate any idiosyncratic results, as recommended by Dörnyei (2007), four focus group interviews were utilised in this study. Each group contained between four to five students. This included two groups of English-majors and two groups of participants with majors other than English (other-majors hereafter). Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the overall research design.
Figure 5.1
Phases of Data Collection and Analysis

PHASE ONE: FOCUS GROUPS

2 x Focus Groups (A)
Duration: 30-40m each
4-5 English major students per group

2 x Focus Groups (B)
Duration: 30-40m each
4-5 Other major students per group

PHASE TWO: INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

7 x English-major students
6 x Other-major students

(A) Semi-structured Journals
Weekly journals recorded and collected up to when students took the TOEIC.

(B) Interviews
i. Introductory interview
ii. Interview at midpoint
iii. Final interview (upon completion of the TOEIC exam)

DATA ANALYSIS
Quantitative analysis of journal data for the whole group (Ch. 7)

In depth, qualitative analysis of journals and interview data:
3x other-majors (Ch. 8); 2x English-majors (Ch. 9).
Phase Two: Case Studies

Phase Two of the research involved in-depth case studies (seven English majors and six other-majors) aimed at tracing the beliefs, actions, operations and potential outcomes of students preparing for the TOEIC. Stake (2000) emphasises that case studies are not a choice of method but rather a strategy where methods are chosen to study a case. Two methods chosen to investigate the individual case studies were: semi-structured journals (piloted in early 2009), and semi-structured interviews (conducted in three stages). Figure 5.2 presents a chronological time line of events showing at what stage the different phases and methods were introduced.

Figure 5.2
Period of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oct-08</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Jan-09 &amp; Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>April - Oct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase One</td>
<td>Ethics Approval (1)</td>
<td>Recruit Participants</td>
<td>Focus Group Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Two</td>
<td>Ethics Approval (2)</td>
<td>Recruit Participants</td>
<td>Trial Diaries</td>
<td>Preliminary Interviews</td>
<td>Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The timeline extends from October 2008 to October 2009, and details the following events: confirmation of ethics approval (Oct & Nov, 2008), recruitment of participants for each phase (Nov & Dec 2008, respectively), focus group interviews (Dec, 2008), piloting of Phase Two (Jan & Feb, 2009), initial interviews (March, 2009), collection of journal entries (April – October, 2009), interviews at midpoint (June & July, 2009) and final interviews (June – October, 2009). Data analysis, as shown in Figure 5.1, occurred in two stages. The results of Phase One were qualitatively analysed (see Chapter 6) and used to help guide the direction of the second phase. The results of the journal data were quantitatively analysed for the entire group (see Chapter 7), and the combined data set (journals and interviews) belonging to five individual case studies were qualitatively analysed (see Chapters 8 & 9).

Recruitment of Student Participants

As shown in Figure 5.2, participants were recruited in November and December 2008. This section describes the rationale behind recruiting English and other-majors, the criteria for selection in both phases, and procedures for recruitment.
Rationale behind recruiting English and Other-Majors

In the case of washback methodology, Watanabe (2004) explains that selecting information-rich cases for in depth study is not to be made at random, but purposefully (see also Patton, 1987). In the case of the present study, English and other-major students were purposefully selected for both phases. The rationale behind canvassing other-major students stems from Shih’s (2007) study where the author suggests the need for more research investigating washback on students with majors other than English. As mentioned in Chapter Three, in the case of English majors Shih found that many students preparing for the GEPT (in Taiwan) relied on their routine English study as opposed to specifically preparing for the test. Therefore, in order to investigate students whose learning practices perhaps run counter to this, other-major students were recruited. The rationale behind selecting English-major participants was to combine and compare results to similar studies, and to provide a rich source of data with which to compare the results of the two groups. As Dörnyei (2007) suggests, strategies that involve within-group homogeneity and intergroup heterogeneity (i.e. segmentation) are likely to obtain a wider range of information. English majors were recruited from the English Literature Department (as discussed earlier) and other-majors were canvassed from a range of departments in order to provide a wide cross-section of students within the university setting. The criterion for recruitment for each phase is described below.

Criteria for Selection: Phase One

As mentioned, Phase One of the research involved four focus group sessions including two groups of English-majors, and two groups of other-major students. Students who had had previous experience preparing for the TOEIC were specifically selected for this phase. A further requirement was that they were seniors (students in their final year). A key reason for this was that it was hoped they would draw from a wider range of experiences within the university setting. Moreover, it was important that students were of equal status in terms of seniority due to the fact that in Korean culture, seniority plays an important social role. One concern was that if students were of mixed seniority those with junior status would be less likely to contribute opinions counter to those older or more senior. This is an important issue particularly in the case of focus group methodology as later discussed.

Criteria for Selection: Phase Two

The remaining and more substantial phase of research entailed the recruitment of up to ten English-major students and ten other-major students. The criteria for selection was that
students be planning to take the official ETS verified TOEIC test before the beginning of the second semester (September, 2009), and be a sophomore (second year) or junior (third year). The rationale behind choosing second or third year students, and not freshmen (first year students), was that it was impossible to recruit freshmen in time for the study. Seniors were also originally excluded due to concern that pressures associated with being final year students (such as applying for jobs and raising GPA scores) may have impacted time available to commit to keeping journals over an extensive period of time. As results will show, however, a small number of seniors volunteered for the study and were included due to low numbers of volunteers. Given that these students were close to graduating and preparing for the workforce, their contributions, in actual fact, proved to be very insightful.

*Recruitment Procedures*

Although there were two phases of investigation, requiring two different groups of participants, recruitment for both phases was carried out at the same time in order to utilise access to classes (requiring ethics approval from the heads of departments and teachers). To recruit participants, the researcher visited over eighteen classes explaining the two different phases of the research and the criteria necessary to participate in either phase. In order to provide a cross-section of different majors, the following classes were canvassed: English composition/conversation classes in the English Literature Department (these classes were also open to other majors), and classes in education, science, content-based English courses, business management, tourism, police administration and foreign language courses. In each class, the researcher (with the aid of an interpreter) explained the purpose of the study and invited students to record their names, majors and phone numbers on designated forms.

The purpose of inviting students to voluntarily participate in the research, rather than directly asking students, was to avoid placing students in the socially tenuous position of refusing a teacher. Moreover, as the second phase of data collection involved journal methodology, which can be somewhat time consuming for participants, it was advantageous to have students who were personally motivated to be a part of the research. However, one potential caveat with regard to the selection process was the possibility of sampling bias, in that the research project may have drawn ‘keen’ students. However, again, given the commitment expected of participants to keep journals over an extended period of time, it was deemed that a relative amount of ‘keenness’ was necessary in order to collect the information-rich data needed for qualitative data analysis.
After canvassing classes for participants, over twenty students applied for, and were recruited for Phase One. A description of these students can be found in Chapter Six. However, only 16 students volunteered for Phase Two. Accordingly, in Dec 2009, in order to recruit more participants, two TOEIC classes (on campus) were canvassed, and a notice asking for volunteers was placed on the university website and at the International Lounge (a cafe-style lounge developed for students to practice their second languages). Following this process, in total twenty two students volunteered for Phase Two (twelve English-majors and ten other-majors). All ten other-majors were selected for the study, and all English majors were contacted and those who appeared most interested and flexible were recruited. As the results will show, however, six students later dropped out, and one student was cut from the research leaving seven English-major and six other-major students. Chapter Seven provides a profile of the participants, including details about where they were recruited from.

5.2.3 The Research Team

This section is devoted to providing a profile of the ‘research team’, including the researcher (described in the first person), the interpreter, the transcribers/translator, and colleagues involved in peer checking.

The Researcher

For qualitative observation studies in particular, Watanabe (2004) stresses the importance of establishing a researcher’s ‘base-line’. This involves explicitly stating previous training, experiences and attitudes that may contribute to the way we view the events we observe (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Accordingly, beginning with a brief overview of previous training at the time of research, I (the researcher) had over sixteen years teaching experience in general education and English teaching - most of which had focused on teaching English in both ESL and EFL contexts in New Zealand and Korea. I had lived in Korea for over three years, and had taught at the university described in this chapter for two years. It was my first experience teaching at the university level. My teaching duties included teaching general English (in the English Literature Department), and later, content and integrated classes in the English Education Department to both graduate and undergraduate students. During that time, I became interested in students’ attitudes towards testing when I discovered that many appeared to favour pencil and paper tests over performance based testing – something that I was more familiar with and preferred to use in the language classroom. While teaching, I found that I needed to account for these differences in order to increase the face validity of
the tests I created. This interest, in what appeared to be cultural differences in testing, was a key motivating factor behind wanting to explore testing within the Korean context from a sociocultural perspective.

My experience with TOEIC at the outset of the study was somewhat limited. However, I had previously taught a TOEIC class to visiting Japanese students in NZ at an English language academy in 2003. The textbook I was asked to use was focused on strategies for passing the test. Although the duration of the course was just under one month, I watched students’ scores increase up to 100 points, which at the time had raised my curiosity regarding the test and methods of test preparation. The fact that Japanese students were spending their time in NZ focusing solely on the test also sparked my interest in the importance and consequences of the test. As a result of teaching this TOEIC preparation class, and from observations in Korea, at the beginning of this research project, my personal view of TOEIC was that it was not a particularly accurate measure of a person’s communicative ability and that many students could increase scores through test strategies that did not reflect real English language ability. I also viewed the TOEIC as having a great deal of negative washback on students’ lives. Very aware of this bias, I worked hard at presenting a neutral attitude toward the TOEIC during interviews and encouraged my interpreter to do the same.

In terms of my understanding of Korean culture and language, although I found myself learning more about Korean culture the longer I lived there, I feel that at the outset of the research project I had a more than rudimentary understanding of what it means to be Korean. This understanding came not only from my experiences living in Korea, but also from close Korean ties in NZ. At the time of this research, my Korean language ability was at a pre-intermediate level as assessed by two university courses that I participated in while living in Korea. Since this level of Korean was only enough to survive at a basic level, a team of interpreters and translators were recruited, as profiled below.

**Interpreters, Translators, and Transcribers**

An important feature of the research design is the use of interpreters, transcribers and translators. Four paid research assistants were involved in the study. The following is a detailed description of each assistant and their respective roles in the research (pseudonyms are assigned throughout). Two colleagues were also involved in peer checking and are profiled in this section. Precise details of collaboration and training procedures are described in Parts Three and Four of this chapter.
Joo: Interpreter, Translator and Transcriber

In order to provide continuity for the participants and provide a comfortable and familiar setting during interviews for both the students and the researcher, the same interpreter was used throughout all interviews. This entailed recruiting a Korean person fluent in both Korean and English and one who could commit to the entire project and be flexible enough to work around student schedules. Joo, a thirty-seven year old Korean female and private English teacher with a flexible schedule, fitted this requirement well. A particular benefit to employing Joo was that she represented a friendly Korean ‘aunt’ (emo) figure. Students appeared to feel comfortable expressing their opinions to her, perhaps more so than facing a ‘foreign professor’ alone. A further reason for selecting Joo as the main interpreter was her strong understanding of both Korean and Western values, having been married to a native English speaker for over seven years. Finally, Joo was personally known to the researcher and considered someone who would work well in collaboration. Throughout the study, Joo moderated and interpreted all focus group interviews in Phase One, and transcribed and translated the raw data. She also interpreted all interviews (as required) in Phase Two.

Sam: Transcriber and Translator

Sam took the role of transcriber and translator for Phase Two of the study. As a 30-year-old student in the International Business College at the university (where all classes are taught in English), his role was to translate the student journals into English and also transcribe and translate recordings from student interviews. Recruiting someone for this role was challenging given that it was difficult to find a Korean second language speaker of English with adequate fluency and free time to complete the task. Sam, having lived in the United States for more than ten years with near perfect scores in both TOEFL and TOEIC, and experience translating for the American military, suited the role. He transcribed and translated half of the diary entries and ten interviews.

Stanley: Transcriber and Translator

Stanley, a 25-year-old student (also enrolled in the International Business College), also took the role of transcriber and translator for Phase Two of the study. Stanley had lived in New Zealand for over seven years (the country of origin of the researcher), had a near native-level of English proficiency, and a flexible timetable with which to support the study. Stanley transcribed and translated all remaining interviews.
Ari: Transcriber and Translator

Although the researcher aimed to have as few transcribers and translators for Phase Two as possible (to keep consistency), due to the large amount of data collected and time restrictions, Ari, with previous experience in translating in America, was also recruited. Ari, a 38-year-old Korean woman married to a native English speaker, had lived in Canada and the United States for over 10 years. Over the course of the study, she transcribed and translated approximately half of the journal entries.

Peer and Translation Checkers

To strengthen inter-coder reliability, two peer checkers contributed to this study. Sally, an American native speaker of English with advanced Korean language skills, checked the results of the focus group interviews. She was a colleague at the university with over six years of English language teaching experience and had completed her master’s degree in applied linguistics. The second peer checker, Grace, a Korean colleague (in the same department as the researcher) checked the results of the coding for Phase Two. Grace also checked the quality of the translations (of the interviews) for the five case studies chosen to represent the qualitative results of Phase Two. Grace had over 15 years of teaching experience, was the head of the Department of English Education and received her PhD in applied linguistics from the University of Texas, Austin. The advantage of having a highly respected, near-native English speaking Korean peer checker for Phase Two of the study was that she was able to add a valuable Korean perspective on the results. Brian, a professional author of Korean high school English textbooks (living in NZ), was another assistant employed in this study. His role was to check the translations of the focus group interviews and the journal translations of the five case studies chosen for Phase Two.

5.2.4 Ethical Considerations

Approval for both phases of the research was given by the ethics board at the University of Auckland in Oct & Nov 2008. A number of ethical considerations were observed, and consent forms (translated into Korean) were signed by key participating figures. This included: gaining consent to research within the university; permission to enter classes in order to recruit students; signed consent by participants in Phase One and Phase Two of data collection; and signed forms of non-disclosure by interpreters and translators. Details concerning the ethical aspects of this thesis are held at the University of Auckland under the approval numbers: 2008/478 and 2008/492.
5.3 METHODOLOGY PHASE ONE: Focus Group Strategy

Part three of this chapter describes the methodology of Phase One. It presents the logic of the design and the guiding questions, and describes the instruments and procedures involved in the collection and transformation of data.

5.3.1 Logic of Design and Guiding Questions

A key aim of Phase One, as mentioned, was not to form conclusions but rather to provide a thick description of the context and help guide Phase Two of the research. The following research questions were designed to help accomplish this:

1. What perceptions do English and other-major students have with regard to the TOEIC and preparing for the TOEIC?
2. How do English and other-major students prepare for the TOEIC?
3. What perceptions do English and other-major students at one Korean university have regarding the influence of the TOEIC on their learning?

To explore these questions, focus group interviews were employed since they often result in an economical, rich source of data, encouraging an early thick description of the context. Moreover, within-group interaction, as Dorneyi (2007) notes, can yield high-quality data as group members influence each other by responding to the ideas and comments of others (see also Krueger & Casey, 2000).

5.3.2 Instruments and Procedures

As shown in Figure 5.1, Phase One incorporated four focus group interviews, each conducted on a different day on the university premises and in the students’ first language (Korean). Accordingly, students were placed in a familiar location, and concerns about English proficiency impacting the quality and quantity of the data were removed (Mackey & Gass, 2005). During each focus group, the researcher first introduced the parameters of the research in English (interpreted by Joo) and introductions were encouraged to promote familiarity and a comfortable setting. After this, the participants were told of their ethical rights and signed confidentiality agreements, again in their first language. Finally, students were informed that the discussion was about personal views and that all answers were acceptable, i.e. there were no right or wrong responses. A recording device was placed in plain sight and the researcher left the discussion table, but remained in the room. Guided by the questioning route (Table 5.1) Joo (profiled above) moderated the interview.
Table 5.1

*Focus Group Questioning Route*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I say TOEIC, what images or feelings does the word conjure?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many times have you taken the TOEIC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell me about your TOEIC experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What reasons do you have for taking the TOEIC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do you feel this influences your learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important do you feel the TOEIC is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What influence do you feel this has on you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think back to the last TOEIC test. Tell me about how you prepared for it and why you prepared in this way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think back to the strategies you used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How successful do you feel your preparation was?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you changed the way you have prepared for the test during your time at university? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel preparing for the TOEIC was successful or unsuccessful in improving your general English?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rationale behind placing the interpreter in the role of moderator stemmed from concern that had the students’ responses been interpreted (and perhaps interrupted) during the interview, it may have discouraged a natural flow of discussion and debate – a key strength to using focus group methodology in the first place. Accordingly, since research methodologists suggest that a focus group is only as good as its moderator (Dörnyei, 2007), Joo was carefully instructed on how to conduct the focus groups. In particular, she was requested to base discussion on the questioning route, but was also directed to actively encourage students to think critically should ‘group think’ begin to dominate discussion (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). Joo was further instructed to keep the conversation focused on the TOEIC (re-directing students who became overly tangential) and asked to encourage all participants to contribute, in order to avoid one or two participants dominating the discussion.

Questioning, as suggested by Krueger and Casey (2000), began with general open-ended questions (asking students to share their perspectives on the TOEIC in general) and moved toward more specific open-ended questioning, such as those exploring the different ways students prepared for the TOEIC and their thoughts on the effect that preparing for the TOEIC had on their general English ability. Included in the questioning route were ‘think back to when’ forms of questioning to encourage participants to focus on the recent past. This form of questioning aims to increase the reliability of responses as ‘it asks about specific experiences as opposed to current intentions or future possibilities’ (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 58).
It is important to point out limitations connected to focus group methodology. Criticism of this strategy includes doubt that not all participants become highly involved with the topic; concern that findings come from the subjective opinions of the students and the researcher; and doubt that group discussions will give an in-depth understanding of an individual’s opinions since they are unnaturally controlled to a large extent by the researcher (Ho, 2006). At the same time Ho (2006) argues that with careful consideration of these caveats, focus groups remain a viable and verifiable tool in qualitative research. In the case of the present study, in order to encourage participants to become highly involved in the topic, as mentioned, participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. The rationale behind this was that students who volunteered were likely to be interested in the topic and therefore more likely to become involved in the topic. Secondly, as previously noted, the participants were recruited from the same year where equal status was hoped to encourage in-depth debate. Joo was also directed to speak as little as possible, and to show no judgement so as not to control the interview too much. At the same time, as mentioned, she was encouraged to direct discussion toward deeper critical thinking if ‘group think’ dominated discussion, in order to provide in-depth understanding of student perspectives. The rich source of data that emerged from Phase One appears to show that she achieved this difficult balance well. Finally, with regard to avoiding the subjective opinions of the researcher, validity and reliability checks were established as described below.

5.3.3 Procedures of Data Transformation and Analysis

Transcription and Translation

In order to maintain continuity, all audio data from the focus groups was directly transcribed into Korean and then translated into English by Joo – who was present at all interviews. As Larkin (2007) notes, an in-depth understanding of the context helps counteract some of the difficulties of transcribing without visual cues, and strengthens the construction of nuance and meaning when translating. Joo was asked to transcribe and translate each recording in its entirety in order to not lose any potentially meaningful data. With regard to the transcription process, as the focus of analysis was on content rather than the form of the verbal data, Joo was advised to suture ‘imperfect’ speech such as false starts, word repetition (not used for emphasis), stammering or language mistakes in order to make the meaning clear. In terms of suprasegmentals such as stress and intonation which added meaning to the content, Joo was asked to indicate this in the transcripts. Moreover, where she felt the recording was unclear or
could not easily hear or interpret the responses of participants, she was also requested to make note of this.

With regard to the translation process, since decisions about translation have a direct impact on the trustworthiness of research and there is no neutral position from which to translate (Temple & Edwards, 2002), Brian (profiled above) was professionally employed to check the quality of the translations and contribute a different perspective. Given the cost of this procedure, he was asked to check 50% of the translated interview data. Again, since the focus of analysis was on content rather than the form of the verbal data, he was asked to highlight areas where he felt the meaning of the translation was not accurate (particularly with regard to the nuance of words), or could have been interpreted in different ways. The results of translation checks are presented in Chapter Six.

Data Analysis and Procedures for Code Checking

Qualitative data analysis of the focus groups followed two levels of coding (Dörnyei, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richards, 2003). The first, initial level of coding, also known as open coding, involved repeatedly reading the transcripts and making informative remarks in the margins to explore the shape and scope of emerging categories. From these notes, the researcher then created a list of descriptive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or categories such as: influences behind taking TOEIC, focus of content, strategies, etc. Participant comments relating to each of these descriptive codes or categories were highlighted using multicoloured pens. The second level of data analysis involved pattern coding (ibid.) or axial coding (Straus & Corbin, 1998). The aim of pattern coding was to capture more abstract commonalities where comments under each of the initial descriptive categories were clustered together to form inferential and explanatory themes. For example, under the descriptive category of ‘influences behind taking the TOEIC’, one theme to emerge was that ‘peers influenced motivation behind taking the TOEIC’. It is important to note that due to the iterative nature of qualitative analysis, the researcher often went back to the original data for reanalysis as the research developed.

In keeping an ‘audit trail’ (Dörnyei, 2007), dominant categories and themes were organised into a data display presenting the major categories and associated themes, and evidence in the form of the participants’ comments (see Appendix H). Participant comments were recorded in the data table as ‘meaning units’ – units of speech that preserve the ‘psychological integrity of the idea being expressed’ (Ratner, 2002, p. 169). According to Ratner (2002) they
must neither fragment the idea into meaningless, truncated segments nor confuse it with other ideas that express different themes. As such, participant comments were included as meaning units and, where necessary, clarifying comments were also added. To build interpretive and descriptive validity, the meaning units and coded themes were checked by a colleague in the field – Sally (profiled earlier). Sally was asked to highlight any quote that she felt was not strongly supported by its corresponding theme or category. She was also asked to comment on any disagreement concerning the validity or wording of any theme or category and asked to offer any other comments or observations that she felt may have been important to the study. The results of peer checking are presented in Chapter Six.

5.4 METHODOLOGY PHASE TWO: Individual Case Studies

Part Four of this chapter presents the methodology of the major phase of the research – individual case studies. It outlines the focus and structure of Phase Two, and describes the two major research strategies: semi-structured journals and interviews.

5.4.1 The Focus and Structure of Phase Two

Given the cyclical, open-ended processes involved in qualitative research, recurrent debate in the field questions just how pre-structured qualitative research design should be. Some argue that pre-existent conceptual frameworks, research questions, and predesigned devices for data collection, may blind researchers to important features of the case, or may cause the misreading of the informants’ perceptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 16-17). On the other hand, a lack of focus or bounding may lead to indiscriminate data collection and data overload or perhaps greater subjectivity in data analysis. An important task for qualitative researchers, therefore, is determining just how loosely or tightly structured their study will be. Some qualitative researchers go as far as to suggest that the results should naturally emerge without any biased interference from theory as this may ‘contaminate’ the emergent nature of qualitative research (see Glasser & Strauss, 1967). However, in the case of the present study, this was viewed as impractical given the researcher’s extensive prior reading and prolonged engagement in the field, especially at the point of data collection for Phase Two. It was also believed to be self-defeating since a researcher’s background and theoretical knowledge can help decide what kind of questions to ask, and further help him or her to see and decipher details, complexities, and subtleties as well as decide which incidents to attend to closely (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Accordingly, Phase Two took a somewhat structured path in
that it was significantly influenced and supported by the researcher’s growing knowledge of theory.

At the same time, it is important to point out that while this thesis is presented in what appears to be a linear progression of inquiry (founded on the preceding review of literature), in actual fact, inquiry submitted to a nonlinear process of induction, deduction, reflection and inspiration (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). For example, it was not until after the results of Phase One and Two (and discussion with colleagues) that a socio-cultural perspective on the washback of the TOEIC on learning was first introduced into the study and used as a guiding framework for data analysis (described later). This reflects the emergent nature of the qualitative research process where understanding emerges as the research proceeds (Croker, 2009). The task of reporting this is somewhat of a challenge. However, in acknowledgment of the need to provide a thick description, where possible, the iterative processes involved in Phase Two of data collection and analysis are highlighted for the reader.

**Initial Guiding Research Questions**

Directed by previous studies theorising and investigating washback on learning (see Chapter Three of this work), Phase Two began with two major research questions covering seven points of focus:

1) For a group of English and other-major Korean university students preparing for the TOEIC, what is their experience with regard to each of the following areas of learning?
   a) content of learning
   b) learning strategies
   c) learning motivation
   d) test anxiety
   e) total time of learning
   f) the promotion of English skills

2) What intrinsic and extrinsic factors may influence these experiences?

These questions stemmed from Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses relating to various test consequences and effects on a person, i.e. that a test will influence *what* learners learn (Q1a & e); *how* learners learn (Q1a & c); *rate and sequence* of learning (Q1e); *degree and depth* of learning (Q1f); and *attitudes* (Q1c & d). They were also very strongly influenced by Shih’s (2007) model of students’ learning (p. 65 of this work), where Shih identified five areas in which tests will washback on students’ learning and psychology: content (Q1a), total time (Q1e), learning strategies (Q1b), learning motivation (Q1c) and test anxiety (Q1d). As
highlighted in Chapter Three, however, there can be a myriad of factors that may intervene in the effects that a test has on learning. A major aim of the second guiding question, therefore, was to investigate factors (such as those presented in Shih’s model) that may intervene or influence learning processes involved with preparing for a test. The two research methods chosen to investigate these questions are described below.

5.4.2 Research Strategy One: Semi-structured Journals

The aim of this section is to present the logic of using semi-controlled journals as part of the research design, and to outline data collection techniques. Details of data transformation and data analysis are outlined toward the end of the chapter.

Logic of the Design

*Defining Diaries/Journals*

Diaries and journals are labels often used interchangeably in research methodology texts; however, in the context of SLA they essentially refer to: ‘a first-person account of a language learning and teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analysed for recurring patterns or salient events’ (Bailey, 1991, p. 77). In terms of classifying different types of journal/diary studies, Bailey (1991) divides them into two categories according to methods of analysis, i.e. those involving introspective analyses (where the diarist and the analyst are one and the same person); and those with non-introspective analyses, where the researcher does the analysis of diaries kept by a different person (p. 62). McDonough and McDonough (1997) further differentiate journals/diaries as either open-ended narrative in which any kind of information may be included (facts, feelings, attitudes, reactions), or those commissioned for research purposes, where the ‘domain is quite tightly specified by the researcher’ (p. 122). They argue that in the case of controlled diary data collection (with research questions and hypotheses in mind), systematisation and clear, detailed guidance is particularly helpful. In the case of the present study, semi-structured (or semi-controlled) journal templates were used - the aim being to provide clear systematised, detailed guidance (in order to direct the journalists’ focus on the research questions), while at the same time remaining open-ended enough to allow for ‘any kind of information – factual, feelings, attitudes, reactions’ (McDonough and McDonough, 1997, p. 122).

Although the terms ‘journal’ and ‘diary’ are often used interchangeably, it is important to point out the distinction that Wallace (1998) makes between the two forms of data collection.
Diaries, he notes, are ‘essentially private documents’ more suitable for affective data; whereas journals are written ‘to be read as public documents – albeit, possibly, by a restricted readership of collaborator-researchers’ (p. 62). In relation to the present study, given that students were asked to record specific information at specific times, for a wider readership, as opposed to voluntarily recording private events, ‘journal’ seemed to provide a more systematic, structured description to use with students as opposed to diary. Therefore, in light of the above definitions and descriptions, the methodology used in this study is described as non-introspective (Bailey, 1991), semi-controlled, language learner journals, commissioned for research purposes (McDonough & McDonough, 1997).

Rationalising Journals as a Research Strategy
Interest in diary/journal studies as a qualitative research strategy for collecting data is a relatively recent development in SLA. Although Schumann and Schumann (1977) were the first in language learning to use diaries as a research instrument, Bailey’s (1980) study, where she retrospectively analysed her experience as a language learner of French, is perhaps the most frequently quoted in applied linguistics research (Gosa, 2004). It was not until the mid 1990s that there was a steady growth in the use of diary studies as a methodological research strategy in language learning (see, Appel, 1995; Jeffery and Hadley, 2002; Matei, 2002; Block, 1996; Campbell, 1996; Peck, 1996; Brown, 1998; Desmond, 1988; Halbach, 1999). Although the use of diaries and journals is an ‘emergent craft’, Bailey (1991) argues they are:

...absolutely essential to advancing our understanding of classroom language learning…Properly done, the diary studies provide us with important missing pieces in this incredible complex mosaic – pieces which may not be accessible by any other means (p. 87).

For example, in comparison with interviews, where the aim is to elicit data based on carefully tailored and structured questions that researchers choose, student diaries/journals enable learners, language professionals and teachers to ‘write about their language experiences without the constraints imposed by specific questions’, which potentially enables a rich source of data that may be ‘inaccessible from the researcher’s perspective alone’ (Mackey & Gass, 2005, pp.177-178). As such, diaries/journals greatly support an emic perspective.

Aims of the Journals
The general aim of using journals in the present study was to provide as much information and context surrounding the activities of student test preparation as possible. Quantitatively, one focus was to capture a record of the types of activities students participated in and the
length of time they spent on different activities. Qualitatively, the journals provided a place for students to record information about the content of their learning, strategies used, attitudes toward preparing for the TOEIC, and their perspectives on the potential promotion of language skills (Q1). The journals also provided a place for students to describe factors influencing the choices they made while preparing for TOEIC (Q2).

Data Collection Techniques

Construction and Piloting of Journals

Research began with the construction and piloting of a semi-structured journal template (see Appendix A). As found by Shih (2007) and from the results of Phase One of this study, English major students may tend to rely on their general English study as a way of supporting their test preparation. To capture this, the journal template was designed for students to log any activity they felt contributed to their preparation for the TOEIC, whether the initial focus be on preparing for the TOEIC or not. This was hoped to identify the types of English study students felt indirectly contributed to their preparation for the TOEIC, in addition to the types of activities they felt directly supported test preparation. To identify this, the journal template included a convenient check box for students to first log the date and time of their activity (Q1e), and a section for them to classify the first aim of the activity as: improving general English, preparing for the TOEIC, or other.

Following this, the journal template was designed for students to indicate whether the activity had been mandatory or had come as a result of their own choice, and to indicate the context of their study. The template included a list of possible contexts for them to circle: independent study, mandatory TOEIC class, voluntary TOEIC class, mandatory English class, voluntary English class etc. These items came from the results of the focus groups and experience in the field and were included to establish the different types of teaching and learning communities that students may become involved in. The next section on the template was designed for participants to describe the activity and any resources used (relating to Q1a). To the far left of the template, the journal also provided a place for participants to indicate the areas of English or the TOEIC that they felt an activity had focused on improving (Q1a&f). Finally, the template was also designed to provide ample space for the students to freely write about the activity as guided by the following prompts: ‘Reasons for participating. Area of focus and why? Strategies used and why? Success of the activity in terms of TOEIC? Success of the activity in terms of English in general. Any other feelings about today’s activity’.
These prompts were designed to investigate some of the influential factors behind why students engaged in certain activities (Q2), the types of strategies they used (Q1b), and their perception of how preparing for the TOEIC may have promoted English skills (Q1f).

The template was translated into Korean and three students (in the process of preparing for the TOEIC) were asked to trial it over a period of three weeks (November 2008). The participants included two engineering majors and one English major. They were specifically instructed to fill out the journal template in Korean for each and every activity they felt helped prepare them for the TOEIC. The data was translated, and the results and feedback from the participatory students (and colleagues) led to three major amendments. First, instead of having a check list for blocks of time, the format was changed to allow the participants to record the exact time in terms of hours and minutes. This was thought to provide a more accurate measure of the time spent on activities. Second, the activity section was divided into mandatory and voluntary study to make the contexts of learning clearer. Moreover, the section where participants were asked to record the areas of English or TOEIC that they felt their study had focused on improving was divided into two sections, i.e. separating general English from the TOEIC. The reason for this was that from the results of piloting, it was unclear if the students had felt their preparation contributed to improving general English or the TOEIC. It was deemed necessary to differentiate this since the results of Phase One (Chapter Six) revealed that some students believed their preparation had only contributed to raising TOEIC scores and not their general English ability. Therefore, in order to more clearly establish student perspectives on the outcomes of their learning, this section was separated. Minor changes to the prompts for the response section and general layout issues were also amended. The revised format (Appendix B) became the final version used in Phase Two of the research (March, 2009).

Procedures
After the students were recruited for Phase Two, initial interviews took place in April 2009. At the end of the first interview, the participants were given the translated versions of the journal template and asked to complete one template for each and every activity they participated in that they felt contributed to their overall preparation for the TOEIC. This was explained in Korean through Joo, the interpreter. Students were offered a hard copy or an electronic version according to their preference. To ensure that the journals were maintained on a regular basis they were collected fortnightly by the researcher via hand or through email.
When students did not participate in any activity over that time, they were asked to send a short email or record it in their journal. Gentle reminders were given when students failed to pass on their journals.

Caveats
One concern with journal/diary research, as highlighted by Mackey and Gass (2005), is that keeping them can often place a significant burden on the participants who keep them. This is perhaps pertinent in the case of students with encroaching assignment deadlines and exams. To minimise the inconvenience of maintaining a journal for an extended period of time, the template was designed to be as user friendly as possible with the use of check boxes. A further benefit of this includes the potential for clearer data analysis, i.e. where there is a lack of structure in diary entries, ‘data analysis can become a complex affair, making it more difficult for researchers to find and validate patterns in the data’ (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 178). One aim was to try to capture the frequency with which the participants engaged in different activities; therefore, at the risk of students not completing a journal entry because of fatigue, they were told that if they were tired of the journal writing to just write a minimum response, and at the very least include the details of the activity.

A further issue with diary studies relates to the ethical dilemma of asking participants to share private information while at the same time knowing that it will be read and analysed by the researcher and possibly published. In consideration of this, the participants were assured that they would not be identified in any way and that they retained the right to blank out any entry they did not wish to be read or published. A further concern for the researcher was that students may have felt as if they had to do something to prepare for the TOEIC in order to complete the journal. In this case, it was made very clear to all participants that this was not the case and to carry on with their TOEIC preparation as if they did not have to complete the journal templates. This was reiterated a number of times. Finally, a further caveat associated with journals is that they are entirely based on the subjective analysis of the learner, and the extent to which individuals can analyse all the processes involved in their own language learning is questionable (Heigham & Croker, 2009). As such, by way of triangulating data, semi-structured interviews were also conducted. Interviews allowed the researcher to further analyse the processes students engaged in while preparing for the TOEIC through carefully constructed questions, as described below.
5.4.3 Research Strategy Two: Semi-structured Interviews

As with the first research strategy, the use of semi-structured interviews is described in terms of the logic of the design and data collection techniques.

Logic of the Design

Defining and Rationalising Semi-structured Interviews

Mackey and Gass (2005) describe structured interviews as resembling ‘verbal questionnaires’ that ‘allow researchers to compare answers from different participants’ (p. 173). Certainly, a key aim of the study was to compare the different perspectives of learners in relation to their test preparation; however, data collection also needed to be flexible enough to digress and probe for more information and be free to follow interesting tangents. The type of interview used in this study, therefore, was semi-structured. Despite the flexibility involved in semi-structured interviews, as Heigham and Croker (2009) note, a degree of comparison is still possible since the researcher ‘knows what topics need to be covered and to a large extent what questions need to be asked’ (p. 185).

The advantages of using interviews first include the opportunity for researchers to ‘investigate phenomena that are not directly observable, such as learners’ self-reported perceptions or attitudes’ (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 173). This relates well to the present study in that it is difficult to investigate the many factors that may influence different aspects of learning through observation or even through journals alone. A further advantage of interviews is that they allow the interviewer to observe and gain insights from non-verbal cues (Gochros, 2005). Certain non-verbal cues may persuade the interviewer to question further in a way that would not be encouraged in other methodologies. Similarly, where answers are ‘vague, incomplete, off topic, or not specific enough’, interviewers may elicit additional information (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 173). Interviews also take into consideration the individual differences of participants where questions can be rearranged, eliminated, or rephrased to adapt to each interviewee when necessary (Shih, 2006). This is important since factors that influence washback can vary across individual learners. Interviews can also evoke in-depth information about participants’ ‘thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings about a topic’ (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) - an important advantage with regard to investigating motivation and anxiety (Q1c & d), and the different influences behind learner action (Q2).
**Aim of Interviews**

The aim of the second strategy was to interview each participant three times during their experience of preparing for and taking the TOEIC. This included an introductory interview (involving preliminary questions), an interview at mid point, and a final interview upon completion of the TOEIC test. The aim of the preliminary research questions was to collect bio data and background information about the participants and influencing factors behind their decision to take the TOEIC (Q2). The aim of the interviews at midpoint was to follow up on the progress of the student journals and question participants about the type of actions they took, the type of content they focused on (Q1a), the type of strategies they were using (Q1b), and the different influential factors behind these actions (Q2). Questions about their overall learning motivation were also asked in this interview (Q1c). The aim of the final interview (after completing the TOEIC test) was to discuss the students’ experience of taking the test (Q1d), and what they believed to be the overall result of their test preparation in terms of increasing their TOEIC scores, and in strengthening their general English skills (Q1f).

**Data Collection Techniques**

**Instruments**

Questioning routes were constructed for each stage of interviewing, and revised as data collection proceeded. Appendix C provides an outline of the questioning route used in the first interview. To meet the above aims, it was divided three sections. It begins by profiling the participant in terms of identifying major, perceived importance of English within the major, English learning history and perceptions with regard to their strengths and weaknesses in English. The second section includes questions relating to the students’ background experience with the TOEIC, investigating their previous TOEIC experiences, their reasons for taking the test and their perception of the stakes of the test. The final section of the preliminary questioning route includes questions regarding the participants’ previous preparation for the TOEIC focusing on each of the aspects of learning established in the guiding research questions.

Appendix D presents the questioning route used at mid point (eight to ten weeks, depending on when students intended to take the TOEIC). The questioning route begins with a general open question asking students about their preparation up to that point. The second and third questions probe for information about the student’s actions, strategy use and focus, and their perspective on the effect of these actions. Questions four and five of the questioning route
further probe learner actions directly related to the information they provided in their journals. Here the researcher had the opportunity to query information in the journals that was of interest, or clarify any points that were unclear. The sixth question inquires how the students felt their preparation for the TOEIC may have differed from previous experiences preparing for the test, and the final question explores people who may have influenced the actions of the learner throughout the process. Midpoint interviews also provided participants with the opportunity to give feedback on the research process.

After taking the TOEIC test, students were interviewed for a final time following the questioning route found in Appendix E. It begins with an open introductory question regarding the participant’s experience taking the test, and moves to specific questions relating to test anxiety, strategies, time on learning and learning motivation, i.e. each of the different facets of learning outlined in the first guiding question. It further probes influential factors behind learner action. The final question in the route probes learner perspectives regarding the overall effect they felt their preparation had on their English language learning in general.

**Procedures**

A clear aim of the researcher at the start of the interview was to build rapport and make the participant feel comfortable. Given the longitudinal nature of the research, losing participant interest or having participants leave the research was a particular area of concern. Therefore, at the beginning of the interview, in addition to making students feel comfortable, the researcher relayed how important and valuable their experiences were. This procedure came from the advice of a colleague who had lost key participants in a long term study. After reconnecting with one participant years later, they had informed him that they had lost interest in the project because they had felt they had had nothing to say and were not valuable or needed. Dörnyei (2007) reiterates this by stating that at the beginning of an interview ‘we must demonstrate that we are really interested in what the interviewer has to say and also that we are a reasonably nice and non-threatening person’ (p. 140).

Moreover, since interviewees may be nervous at the beginning of an interview (or tired by the end), the questions were placed in the middle of the table for the participant to look at, as suggested by Mackey and Gass (2005). MP3 recorders were also placed in the centre of the table at the beginning of the interview, and participants were informed that they could turn the recording off at any point if they wanted to share something confidentially (some did this). Interviews began with opening questions which provided a natural springboard for further
questions (Richards, 2003) and moved to different forms of questioning types including: content questions (Dörnyei, 2007), checking and reflecting, following up, probing and structuring (see, Richards, 2003; Heigham & Croker, 2009) as directed by the interview routes.

Most interviews were conducted with the use of the interpreter Joo (except for three participants who completed interviews in English). While Joo was instructed to carefully relay the questions asked in as close an approximation as possible, during early data collection, she would sometimes turn open-ended questions into closed questions and would sometimes suggest possible answers after long stretches of silence. These issues were discussed, and over time our shared interview techniques improved, and she became a valuable asset. Moreover, to maximise the advantage of having a collaborator in the project (thereby strengthening confirmability), she was also encouraged to ask her own questions, especially checking and reflecting questions to check understanding or seek clarification. The recorded interviews were transcribed and translated, and analysed following procedures outlined in the next section.

Caveats
It is important to point out limitations associated with interview methodology. The main weakness, according to Dörnyei, (2007) is that they are time consuming and require good communication skills. Moreover, because the interview format is not anonymous, respondents may try to display themselves ‘in a better than real light’ (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144). Hall and Rist (1999) also draw attention to potential drawbacks such as: selective recall, self-delusion, perceptual distortions, and memory loss from the participants (p. 297). A number of procedures were introduced to counteract these limitations in the present study. Most interviews, for example, were conducted during semester time, on campus, where it was convenient for students (and for the interviewer) and saved time getting to and from the interviews. With regard to the communication skills of the interviewer, the researcher had had previous experience conducting over 30 interviews with classroom teachers for her master’s thesis. This experience allowed for the development of interview techniques, and the researcher aimed to continually improve these techniques in collaboration with the interpreter in the case of the present study. As Heigham and Croker (2009) note, ‘you should treat each interview as an opportunity to develop your technique as an interviewer’ (p. 189). In further response to the potential caveats of interviews, journals provided triangulated data to support
the memory and recall of events. In other words, using the results of the journals to help the participants recollect the events of the semester made it less likely for them to display themselves in a better light, such as portraying themselves as having prepared for the TOEIC more than what they had. To further assist memory, questions in the final interview drew upon the students’ experience of having recently taken the TOEIC.

5.4.4 Data Transformation and Translation Checks
As noted earlier, all journal data was translated by Sam and Ari. The journal data belonging to the five students chosen for in depth qualitative analysis was further quality checked by Brian. The results of these translation checks are presented in Chapters Eight and Nine. The interview data was transcribed and translated by Sam and Stanley who were asked to transcribe and (where necessary) translate all turns including the information interpreted by Joo during the interviews. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to see what may have been missed during interpretation (given the time restraints involved in the interviewing process) and to also check the accuracy of the interpretation. Where transcribers/translators felt something had been missed or interpreted incorrectly, they were also asked to indicate this in the transcripts.

As in the case of focus group analysis, to economise on the transcription process and for the transcripts to be more reader friendly, the transcribers were told to exclude ‘imperfect’ speech such as false starts, word repetition (not used for emphasis), or stammering in order to make the meaning clear. In terms of suprasegmentals, such as stress and intonation which added meaning to the content, they were asked to indicate this in the transcripts. Moreover, where they felt the recording was unclear and difficult to transcribe, they were requested to make note of this. The translations of the transcripts belonging to the five case-studies were quality checked by Grace, who was also involved in the code-checking process as described below.

5.4.5 Data Analysis
As results emerged, and from discussions with colleagues and reading in SCT (summarised in Chapter Four), the focus of the study (while complementing the initial questions) was refined and narrowed. As mentioned, some qualitative researchers may believe that results should naturally emerge without any biased interference from theory or research questions; however, this research takes a similar stance to Chaudron (2000) who notes that the qualitative
researcher always takes account of the relevant theories regarding the context or topic under study. A somewhat tighter structure also allows for easier cross-case comparability within multiple case studies such as this one (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). Activity Theory, in particular, was found to provide a useful framework to help analyse and compare the learning processes of students in response to the TOEIC in situ. Based on the tenets of Activity Theory (pp. 91 - 92 of this work), data analysis for Phase Two was guided by the following questions:

1) What factors influence the motives and goals of English and other-major students to take and prepare for the TOEIC?

2) What actions do English and other-major students take toward their preparation toward TOEIC; and what may be key influencing factors behind this?

3) What operations do English and other-major students engage in when preparing for TOEIC; and what may be key influencing factors behind this?

4) What are the perceived outcomes of preparing for the TOEIC for English and other-major students?

As posited in Chapter Four (pp. 92 - 94), it is the stakes of the TOEIC and the perceived need for TOEIC scores that essentially drives individual learner motive toward the goal of voluntarily preparing for and taking the test. Without such motive, there would be no test activity (Leont’ev, 1977), and therefore, no washback, i.e. tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Question One, therefore, directs the focus of analysis on factors that may influence individual test stakes and drive student activity.

Research Question Two directs the focus of analysis toward learner actions, i.e. the socioculturally designed means by which students go about fulfilling their motives and subsequent goals (Miettinen, 2005; Lantolf, 2000), or in the case of the present study, the specific course of action taken by students in response to the motive for test scores and the goal of preparing for and taking the TOEIC. This might include, for example, attending a language institute, studying independently through books, creating a study group etc. This question, in essence, explores the conditions in which learning takes place, or the ‘particular learning community’ students enter (Breen, 2001). Question Two also explores specific test/individual/community factors that may influence these actions (such as those presented by Shih, 2007, and Breen, 2001).
The third question directs the focus of analysis toward the operations that students engage in within these particular learning communities, i.e. the specific processes through which actions are carried out under meditational means (Lantolf, 2000). Drawing on previous studies on washback, operations may include: the focus of learner content (e.g. Cheng, 1998a; Cho, 2010; Gosa, 2004; Green, 2007; Shih, 2007), strategy use (e.g. Cho, 2010, Green, 2007; Gosa, 2004; Shih, 2007; Watanabe, 1992) and the rate and sequence of learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993). The question also directs the focus of data analysis toward specific test/individual/community factors that may influence the decisions learners make in context (Breen, 2001).

The final question directs the focus of analysis toward the students’ perceptions on the outcomes of their test activity, and the product of their learning (Bailey, 1996; Hughes, 1993). This question specifically relates to Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses that a test will influence: what students learn; the degree and depth of learning, and attitudes. Based on the above questions, the data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively as presented below.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis was used to document the actions and operations of the students (i.e. Q2 & Q3). This involved categorising and tallying the different types of activities students reported engaging in, the focus of their study, and the amount of time spent on each type of activity. Descriptive statistics were used to present the number of activities that students reported as directly focused on the TOEIC (direct preparation), and the number of activities that were not directly focused on the test, but were perceived to support test preparation (indirect preparation). Descriptive statistics were also used to present an overview of the different approaches students took toward test preparation, and the area(s) of language they focused on. The overall analysis of the journals provide a profile of each individual student’s test activity, and the combined results provide a profile of the English and other-major groups and of the group as a whole. Given the nature of journal methodology, where it is not possible to verify that students maintained journals for every activity they engaged in, it is important to point out that the results of the analysis (included in Chapter Seven) cannot provide an exact representation of all student activity, rather they provide an indication of the types of actions students may engage in over an extended period of time.
Qualitative Analysis

The second aim of analysis was to explore the remaining guiding questions and different interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that may have influenced the actions, operations and perceived outcomes of students preparing for the TOEIC. Given the extensive amount of data, five individual case studies were selected for in depth analysis (three other-majors and two English-majors). Reasons for their selection are explained in Chapters Eight and Nine. The translated journals and interview transcripts for each participant were combined for analysis. The aim of coding was to build a clear description of each individual student as guided by the questions, and then use the profiles for cross-comparison. As with the focus groups, two levels of coding were established: initial descriptive coding, and pattern or axial coding. Initial coding involved a process of making descriptive codes in the margins of both the journals and interviews and then grouping them together in tables for axial coding where they were rearranged in the form of categories and themes. During the coding process the researcher made every effort to show changes in the participants’ perspectives and highlighted cases where data appeared to contradict.

In keeping an ‘audit trail’ (Dörnyei, 2007), the dominant categories and themes were organised into a data display presenting: major categories, associated themes, and evidence in the form of the participants’ comments (see Appendix K & L as examples). Importantly, the details of which interview each comment came from or where in the journal process they were entered was also indicated in the data display. This was important in being able to analyse consistency in the participants’ Test Activity or to highlight changes (or potential conflict). As established in Chapter Four, a key principle of AT is that tension and contradictions may evolve within activity systems that drive development and transformation. Changes and contradictions, therefore, were of interest in the data analysis.

As with the focus group methodology, participant comments were recorded in the data table as meaning units. To build interpretive and descriptive validity, the meaning units and coded themes were checked by a colleague in the field – Grace (profiled earlier). Grace was asked to highlight any quote that she felt was not strongly supported by its corresponding theme or category. She was also asked to comment on any disagreement concerning the validity or wording of any theme or category and asked to offer any other comments or observations that she felt may have been important to the study. The results of peer code-checking are presented in detail in Chapters Eight and Nine. In addition to peer checking, the data tables
(with the themes and categories translated into Korean) were sent to each of the participants by email. Participants were asked to comment on any of the categories or themes that they did not agree with. Where possible (in the case of Sunny and Steave) the researcher met with the participant face to face. The results of member checking are also presented in Chapters Eight and Nine.

5.5 Chapter Summary

The aim of this chapter was to present the reader with a clear description of the research paradigm and methodology. Part One presented the rationale behind using a qualitative, case study approach to investigating the washback of the TOEIC on learning. It also attended to issues of credibility in qualitative research and presented strategies for increasing the overall validity of the research. Parts Two, Three and Four introduced the research design and described in detail the procedures used during data collection and analysis. The remaining chapters of Part II of this thesis present the results of this methodology. Specifically, Chapter Six presents the results of Phase One (focus group methodology), Chapter Seven presents the results of the quantitative analysis of Phase Two (semi-structured journals), and Chapters Eight and Nine present the results of the qualitative analysis of journals and interviews for three other-majors, and two English-majors respectively.
Chapter Six

PHASE ONE: FOCUS GROUPS

Participants & Results

6.0 Overview

Chapter Six presents the results of Phase One: focus groups. As outlined in the methodology, a key aim of the first phase was to provide a thick description of the context, be introduced to some of the issues involved, and provide an emic perspective. The second major aim of focus groups was to direct Phase Two of data collection. This chapter unfolds with background information behind Phase One including a restatement of the guiding research questions and an overview of the participants. Part Two of the chapter presents the results including a description of the data transformation, translation and peer coding checks; and an overview and description of the final categories and themes that emerged from data analysis. The chapter concludes with an extended summary of key findings.

6.1 BACKGROUND

6.1.1 Guiding Research Questions

As presented in Chapter Five, the guiding questions for Phase One of the study were:

1) What perceptions do English and other-major students have with regard to the TOEIC and preparing for the TOEIC?
2) How do English and other-major students prepare for the TOEIC?
3) What perceptions do English and other-major students have regarding the influence of the TOEIC on learning?

6.1.2 Participants

Led by recruitment procedures established in Chapter Five, fifteen English majors and twelve other-majors volunteered for Phase One of the study. Given the limited number of volunteers, all were contacted and those who could most easily be scheduled together were recruited for the interviews. Although five participants for each group were scheduled, two participants failed to attend their scheduled interviews. As a result, nine English-major students and nine other-major students participated in Phase One of the study (see Table 6.1).
Table 6.1
Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th># times taken</th>
<th>NEW S/W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1-F1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1-F2</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1-M1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1-M2</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 – 3 times a year</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1-M3</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Monthly/ bi-monthly</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2-F1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2-F2</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Many times</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2-F3</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2x a semester</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2-M1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Many times</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1-F1</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1-F2</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1-F3</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>1x</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<td>2x</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<td>N1-M2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2x</td>
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</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2-M1</td>
<td>Art and Animation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2-M2</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E1 = First focus group (English major)  E2 = Second focus group (English major)
N1 = First focus group (other-major)   N2 = Second focus group (other-major)
M = male   F = female

All but two English-majors (E1-M1 & E2-M1) were seniors in their fourth and final year. One criterion was that all participants be seniors (in order to create equal status among participants); however, since the two third-year students would become seniors the following semester, and were confident males that could easily fit with the scheduling where others would not, they were invited to participate. As shown in Table 6.1, a limited but somewhat diverse range of other-majors were represented: law, education, business, Chinese, German literature, art and animation, and music. Although science classes were approached, most volunteers came from the arts or humanities. All English-major students were English literature majors as established in Chapter Five.

Both English and other-major students had varying experience of the TOEIC. During interviews, participants were asked how many times they had taken the TOEIC. Of interest, other-majors tended to give the precise number of days, whereas many English-majors reported the frequency with which they were taking the TOEIC. Overall, experience taking the TOEIC ranged from zero\(^6\) to ‘monthly or bi-monthly’ sittings of the test. Of note, only

\(^6\) Despite the fact that one criterion for selection was that participants have previous experience taking the TOEIC, one art and animation student (N2-M1), who had not taken the TOEIC, eluded the selection process. Her perspective was considered valuable in that she was able to express what she felt to be the influence of the test within the university setting and beyond.
one participant (E2M1) had experience with TOEIC Speaking. None of the participants had had experience taking TOEIC Writing. Therefore, where most participants referred to their experience of the test they were referring to the Standard TOEIC. Of further note, other-major N2F2 arrived late and, unknown to the researcher or moderator at the time, mistakenly attended the first group with English-majors. This was not clear until the end of the interview. Although she participated in a different group, comments from this student were coded as part of her original group for purposes of comparing and differentiating comments between English and other-majors

6.2 RESULTS

6.2.1 Transformation of Data

Data collection resulted in over 2.5 hours of recorded interview data which was transcribed and translated by interpreter/moderator - Joo. As noted in the methodology, the translations were checked by Brian. Overall, the quality of the translations was deemed to be of a very high standard; however, Brian highlighted nine minor discrepancies. Four concerns were at the word level of meaning and five concerns were at the sentence level. Appendix F provides an outline of each concern and the amendments made to the translations.

6.2.2 Data Analysis & Peer Checking

Following procedures outlined in Chapter Five, data analysis resulted in six categories, 22 themes and 194 corresponding comments which were peer checked by Sally (profiled in Chapter Five). Peer checking resulted in 11 remarks where concerns or disagreements were raised. Divided into four areas, they included: disagreement over the wording of a theme; disagreement over the validity of a theme; concern whether the theme and corresponding quote matched; and concern over the accuracy of the transcription/translation (see Table 6.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wording of theme</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity of Theme</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote does not fit theme</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy of transcription/translation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2 Results of Peer Checking: Focus Group Journals

Specifically, two comments were raised regarding the wording of themes including minor suggestions such as changing ‘website links’ to ‘websites or web resources’. Three comments
related to the validity of a theme, where the checker queried the underlying concept. For example, in the theme: ‘Students avoid or do not spend time and money on preparation for the TOEIC’, the peer checker questioned whether it were also possible (given related comments) that students were also not able to spend time and/or money preparing for the TOEIC. In other words, it was perhaps not only their choice but also a case of circumstance. In this case the researcher agreed with the peer checker. Sally also made four comments casting doubt over whether the displayed quote clearly supported the theme. This included, for example, the following quote: ‘I still have two years left to graduate. I will keep studying English and this will affect my TOEIC score’. Coded under the theme - ‘TOEIC is related to general English ability’, the peer checker questioned if the quote clearly ‘fit’ with the theme. Finally, two comments emerged regarding the accuracy of the transcription/translation. As a result of peer checking, one theme was reassessed and removed from the data display, six themes were reworded or reframed, one theme was changed to a different category, and one quote was removed from the data display. An overview of the details of each concern and the actions taken as a result are provided in Appendix G.

6.2.3 Final Categories and Themes

Following the results of peer and translation checks, data analysis resulted in the final coding of six categories and 20 corresponding themes - representative of 188 comments across the four groups (see Table 6.3). A sample of the data display is included in Appendix H. The final categories include: (a) reasons/influences behind taking the TOEIC, (b) time and money, (c) approaches to the TOEIC, (d) focus of study, (e) relationship between the TOEIC and general English ability, and (f) affective factors associated with the TOEIC. Each category (and related themes) is described in detail below.
Table 6.3
Categories and Themes from Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY AND THEMES</th>
<th>Total comments</th>
<th>NON-ENGLISH 1 (N1)</th>
<th>NON-ENGLISH 2 (N2)</th>
<th>ENGLISH 1 (E1)</th>
<th>ENGLISH 2 (E2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>F2</td>
<td>F3</td>
<td>M1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reasons/influences behind taking TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To secure employment</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements other than employment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal pressure/expectations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide an indication of English ability</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Time and money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for the TOEIC takes time and money</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of enrolment for the test is important</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation during vacation period</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Approaches to TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language institutes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks and web resources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study groups</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying English in general</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Focus of Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and/or vocabulary as a focus of preparation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar as a focus of content</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience abroad influences focus of content</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locating patterns</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Relationship between TOEIC and General English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC is related to general English ability</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC scores are not a ‘good’ indication of general English ability</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC promotes general English ability</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC is not useful or practical</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Affective Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students experience a range of negative affective factors</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Comments</td>
<td>188</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CATEGORY ONE: Reasons/Influences Behind Taking the TOEIC

Four major themes emerged under the category of reasons for taking the TOEIC: (a) employment, (b) to provide prerequisite scores and/or promote other benefits, (c) to conform to societal expectations, and (d) to provide an indication of English ability.

a) Employment

Securing employment featured as the overriding motivation for preparing for the TOEIC. This theme generated the highest number of comments throughout all groups (24 comments) and was the most representative theme among all participants, (i.e. 14 out of 18 participants contributed to this theme). Comments, in part, most simply related to the need or ‘demand’ (E2F2) for TOEIC scores in order to apply for a job:

These days, everywhere asks for your TOEIC score. If you want to apply for a job, you need a TOEIC score (E2F3); If there wasn’t a box for TOEIC scores on job application forms, nobody would take it (N1F1).

Connected to this, participants presented the TOEIC as a form of gate keeping or ‘filtering’ device: ‘The TOEIC score is a filter’ (N1M2); ‘…big companies filter applicants’ resumes using a computer system’ (E1M1); ‘Without a TOEIC score, you can’t send out your resume to companies. It is said you have a chance to be hired if you have 800’ (N2F1). Yet while many agreed there was a need to provide TOEIC scores to prospective employers, differences of opinion emerged regarding how many points were necessary. For example, while N2F1 noted a score of 800 provided an applicant with a chance of securing a job, N1M2 and E1M1 suggested successful applicants’ usually scored over 900: ‘Getting a good TOEIC score is like a war. If you don’t get over 900, you cannot pass the first round…if you want a job, you should get above 900’. Difference of opinion may relate, in part, to the type of company students wish to work for, i.e. ‘Most companies demand over 800, small places require around 750’ (N1M2).

Given the perceived demand for TOEIC scores for purposes of employment, N1M2 described the TOEIC as ‘essential…a desperate thing, like life or death’. However, this was not the case for all students. One participant noted that due to a change in career choice he no longer studied or needed the TOEIC: ‘I recently changed my mind to become a civil servant. It doesn’t require a TOEIC score so I don’t study it anymore’ (N2M2). Two participants also questioned the relationship between successful job applicants and TOEIC scores. For example, N1M1 noted a case where out of two friends applying for the same job, the friend
with a TOEIC score of 720 secured the job over the friend with a TOEIC score of 900. Similarly, N2M1 questioned the popularity of the test among certain companies:

This is my friend’s case – his major is engineering. He studied TOEIC hard for one year to get a job. His highest score was 780. During the job interview, he heard from the interviewer of the company in Seoul that they don’t trust TOEIC scores (N2M1).

Therefore, although securing a job was a key motive behind preparing for the TOEIC, different career paths and different perspectives over the popularity of the test among different companies appeared to influence the stakes of the TOEIC among different students.

b) Requirements other than employment

Nine comments from five students across two focus groups (four other-majors and one English-major) were coded under the theme of meeting university requirements and/or securing other benefits. For one student, TOEIC scores were required to transfer universities: ‘The original reason to take the TOEIC was that I wanted to transfer to another university. The university requires a GPA and TOEIC score’ (E2F2). For another student TOEIC scores were ‘important for graduation’, and for scholarships: ‘TOEIC decides scholarships too. If A has a 4.3 GPA and B has 4.2, and B’s TOEIC score is 100 points higher, in that case, B gets the scholarship’ (N1F1). Other reasons for preparing for the TOEIC included: securing ‘extra points’ for other tests, or gaining eligibility to take other tests. N1F1, for example, noted that without a TOEIC score of 700 (or other equivalent EFL test score) students were not eligible to take the state law examination. For other examinations, such as the civil service test and secondary school teacher test7, participants noted that final scores may be adjusted according to the contribution of TOEIC scores. As one participant noted, the TOEIC provides ‘extra points for the civil service test….over 600 you get 2 [points]; over 700 or 800 you get 3 [points]. Depending on your TOEIC score, you get different points’ (N1F1). Results show, therefore, that TOEIC scores may influence entry into other universities and courses, other examinations, and contribute toward graduation and access to resources such as scholarships.

c) Conforming to societal pressure/expectations

Two other-major students and two English-major students across two groups contributed six comments revealing how societal pressure and expectations featured as a key motivation to taking the TOEIC. In addition to a perceived demand from companies, one participant noted that she took the TOEIC ‘because everyone else did’ (E2F1); another commented that

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7 Since the time of interviews, TOEIC scores no longer contribute to points on the secondary school teacher’s test.
‘personal development and social pressure’ were reasons to study the TOEIC (E2F3). N2F2 further noted that tests such as the TOEIC and TOEFL were ‘essential to society’ (N2F2). Competition and fear of being judged by peers also featured as a key motivation. For example, N2M2 explained how TOEIC scores were ‘compared’ and how ‘strong competition’ was felt. N2F2 further discussed how peers ‘seem to judge’ English ability. Feelings of competition and judgment were particularly linked with being an English-major for one student:

My major is English literature so people ask my TOEIC score. If you don’t have a TOEIC score, they will laugh at you and say ‘What are you doing? Your major is English. You should have one…I have pressure to have a better score than students in other majors like engineering (E2F3).

Results show, therefore, that for some students, expectations of others, competition among peers, and the fear of potential ridicule (perhaps particularly in the case of English-majors) may be key motivating factors behind taking the TOEIC.

d) To provide an indication of English ability

Three students contributed to the final theme in the category of reasons/influences behind preparing for the TOEIC, each portraying the TOEIC as a valuable, necessary and useful measurement of English language ability. For one participant providing an indication of English ability was an additional reason for taking the TOEIC. For E2M1 providing an indication of English ability appeared to be his primary reason for taking the TOEIC: ‘I take the TOEIC once a month to know my English ability with a relaxed attitude – not to take the TOEIC with pressure to get a certain score to get a job’. For N2M1, the TOEIC was seen, and used, as an ‘objective evaluation tool’ to ‘know [his] English ability’ in comparison with others. He further commented, ‘I think I can use TOEIC as the most objective evaluation tool for English’. Similarly, E2M1 noted the positive value of having a ‘visible evaluation tool’ that could be used to differentiate English ability, particularly with regard to applying for jobs:

I don’t agree with the opinion that we need to get rid of all tests. We need visible evaluation tools. In interviews, without visible evaluations, interviews can be influenced by personal feelings and emotions. It is unfair. TOEIC can show your victory against yourself. TOEIC scores give you competitiveness.

CATEGORY TWO: Time and Money

Two themes emerged regarding time and money: (a) TOEIC requires time and money, and (b) time of enrolment matters.
a) Preparing for the TOEIC requires time and money

Six participants, (three English and three other-majors) made ten comments regarding the need for time and/or money. One student mentioned travelling to a different city during summer vacation and spending ten hours a day at a TOEIC institute (N1M1). Another participant (E2F2) spoke of friends taking time off university in order to prepare for the TOEIC, and others spoke of needing ‘two years’ to get ‘reasonable’ TOEIC scores (E1F2; N1F1). Not surprisingly, in some cases, the year of the student may influence the amount of time available to prepare for the TOEIC and the type of preparatory actions taken. For example, E1F1 noted how seniors or graduates who are in a ‘hurry to get a job’ (E1F1) need a ‘reasonable’ score in short time. As a result, another participant noted that where students are under time pressure to get ‘their ideal score’, they ‘need to be trained to choose the right answers’ (E1F2). On the other hand, another participant noted how growing numbers of students begin preparing for the TOEIC in their freshman year (E2F2), and are able to study the TOEIC in ‘various ways’ given less time constraints. The year that students begin preparing for the TOEIC may be an important factor influencing how students prepare.

Also connected to this theme, N1M2 expressed feelings of regret associated with time spent preparing for the TOEIC:

If I hadn’t needed to study the TOEIC I could have studied for my major. I studied for 10 hours a day in Seoul. If I had studied for my major at that time, I would have got other qualifications related to my major and could be more competitive now. I feel bad about that.

This may be a particular issue with regard to other-majors (as perceived by an English major): ‘I feel sorry for students whose major is engineering who worry about TOEIC scores too much and spend too much time studying for TOEIC instead of their major’ (E2F2). Other factors influencing the time students had available to prepare for the TOEIC included part time jobs and study related to major classes during the semester (E1M2, E1M3 & E2F2). Vacation time, therefore, appeared to be an important time to focus on the TOEIC.

In addition to spending time, participants also commented on financial costs. For some students, preparing for the TOEIC was described as ‘expensive’ (E1F2) and ‘costing a lot of money’ (N2F1; N1M2). Costs were associated with TOEIC books, language institutes and living away from home while studying in a different city. One student (N1M2) mentioned spending a total of 1.3 million won (approximately $1,300 US) a month during one summer vacation period. Others, however, shared how they did not, or in some cases, could not spend
time or money on the TOEIC. For example, N1F1 noted, ‘I don’t spend money on it [TOEIC]’; and E1M1 explained, ‘I don’t want to spend money studying English’. N1F3 noted that he would not go to a language institute because he did not want to ‘waste money’. E1F2 also explained how she did not buy TOEIC listening books given that they were too expensive and instead borrowed them from the library. The amount of resources available to students in terms of time and money appears to be a key influence behind how and when they prepare for the TOEIC.

b) Time of enrolment matters

Four participants (two English and two other-majors from two focus groups) contributed to the theme - time of enrolment for the TOEIC test is important, as summarised by N1M2: ‘The month you take TOEIC is a very important factor to the TOEIC score. There are Debak months (lucky months) because it is easier to get a good score, and Jjokbak (doomed) months’. E1F2, E1F1 used the term ‘lucky months’ to explain periods where ‘you can get a good score easily’ (E1F2). Lucky months (October, November, December & January), as E1F1 explained, are those where fewer students take the TOEIC because of the many other important tests that are taken at that time. Two participants suggested that lucky and unlucky months were a result of TOEIC being a ‘relative’ (or norm referenced) test (E1F2; N1M1). The most unlucky (or doomed) month reported by participants was September since many students took the test at this time after studying intensively over the vacation period.

CATEGORY THREE: Approaches to the TOEIC

Participants described a range of different approaches when preparing for the TOEIC. Four major themes emerged including: (a) attending language institutes, (b) textbooks and web resources, (c) study groups, and (d) studying English in general.

a) Language institutes specialising in the TOEIC

Thirteen comments made by seven students across three groups were coded under the theme of language institutes specialising in the TOEIC. This theme was dominated by other-majors, with only four comments made by English-major students. Students frequently discussed the reputation of language institutes noting their abundance, and popularity. The word 유명한 (commonly translated as ‘famous’) was mentioned with regard to the popularity of schools, classes and instructors: ‘There are so many famous institutes and famous instructors’ (N1F3). Another student (N1M2) commented on how the size of ‘famous’ instructors’ classes reached 250 students where after 5 minutes of open enrolment the class was full (N1M2), and another
student noted how specialised intensive courses in Seoul had waiting lists (N1F2). As a result, N1F3 shared how language institutes specialising in the TOEIC had ‘commercialised the TOEIC’ and played a big role in ‘forming public opinion’.

Linked to the popularity and reputation of language institutes was the perception that language institutes effectively (and often dramatically) raised scores, e.g. ‘you follow what they say and you get a high score’ (N2F2). After studying at a language school in Seoul for two months N1M2 realised their reputations were ‘deserved’: ‘Once I finished the course, my TOEIC score increased even though I didn’t study for it’. N1F3 corroborated this:

Without special training for the TOEIC people who already have good English ability or have lived in English speaking countries don’t get fantastic results. They get better results when they have finished those courses in language schools.

In particular, participants linked language institutes to increasing scores over a short period of time. One English major student (E1F1), for example, compared the effectiveness of studying at an institute with studying at the university in the following way:

I studied both with professors at my university and with instructors in language institutes. At university, professors teach you grammar, but it doesn’t help improve your TOEIC scores. Instructors in language institutes teach you patterns…it is much more effective studying in a language institute for 15 days than in university for three months.

Other participants mentioned institutes as a place for ‘people in a hurry’ to get ‘a high score’ (N1F3; N2F2).

Linked to a later theme, much of the effectiveness of language institutes specialising in TOEIC appeared to be linked to ‘patterns’, ‘tricks’ (N1F2), ‘skills’ (E1M1), ‘trends’ (N2F2) or test ‘strategies’ (N1F2, N1M2, N1F1), aimed at helping students ‘predict’ (N1M2, N2F2) or ‘choose’ (N1F2) the right answers. E1F1 summarises this well:

Instructors at language institutes have studied and analysed TOEIC for five or six years…[they] teach you TOEIC patterns. They teach you the patterns that should always be the right answer. They can tell you that a certain word form is always followed by particular words, so you must choose those ones as the right answers.

Other strategies mentioned in relation to studying at language institutes included: assignments based on previous TOEIC questions (N1M2); listening, repeating, memorising, and solving questions (N1F2).
b) TOEIC textbooks and web resources

Six participants (three English and three other-majors) mentioned the use of textbooks and/or web resources as a study approach. Four comments specifically referred to Hackers TOEIC books, which one student described as ‘TOEIC bibles’ (E1M1); two comments did not include the brand of the TOEIC book. In two other comments (E1F2, N2F1) students mentioned that in addition to books, they also visited websites devoted to TOEIC to study updated reading and listening questions and to take practice tests.

c) Study groups

Seven comments from four English-majors and one comment from one other-major relate to study groups as an action toward preparing for the TOEIC. The other-major simply noted that he studied for one hour with his study group. English-major students elaborated more specifically on why they joined study groups, and the focus of their study. One reason behind forming study groups included a dislike of studying alone (E1M2; E2F2). E2F2, for example, found it ‘interesting’ and ‘good’ to be ‘responsible for teaching other group members’. A further motivation for this student was ‘despair’ over her low TOEIC score and the belief that joining a study group would help improve scores. The types of resources, content and strategies that students focused on during study groups included; taking practice tests (E1F1); debating/answering TOEIC questions (E1F1; E1M2); explaining how to solve questions (E1F1); using TOEIC books (E1M1; E1M2); and listening to recordings (E1M2).

d) General English resources/study supports TOEIC preparation

A further theme (dominated by English-major students) was that of using general English resources or learning contexts in support of the TOEIC. Six English-majors and one other-major student (N1M1) contributed nine comments to this theme. Three English-majors and the one other-major indicated that they focused solely on non-TOEIC materials (and learning contexts). The other-major used English conversation books as a direct method of increasing his TOEIC scores:

I didn’t want to use patterns to solve TOEIC questions. I decided to study the TOEIC as conversation…I studied the TOEIC with conversation text books on the net, not with TOEIC books.

In the case of E1M1, however, rather than using non-TOEIC materials as a way of directly preparing for the TOEIC, his first aim was to improve English believing that this would also indirectly benefit his ability to do well in the TOEIC. Similarly, E2M1 and E2F2 mentioned
that due to their major being English, it ‘allowed’ them to not have to study for the TOEIC separately:

My major is English so I try to study English as much as I can every day. For example, I try to read newspapers in English and watch EBS English programs, CNN and BBC…I don’t listen to English for the TOEIC but to increase my interest in English. That allows me to not study for the TOEIC separately. I read newspapers in English, books about my major and English novels…it helps improve my English and TOEIC score.

Others noted that although they used TOEIC materials, they also found it ‘helpful’ to use non-TOEIC materials (E1M1; E1F2; E1M3; E2M1; E2F3). English-major F3, for example, stated, ‘Studying for my major is helpful’ and E1F2 commented on how English speaking or writing classes with native speakers were also ‘helpful’. Similarly, after listing a variety of strategies for studying English in general, E1M1 commented that they ‘all relate to TOEIC scores’. E1M3 also found English-major classes such as the history of English and writing helpful for the reading section of the TOEIC. Interestingly, he noted ‘I didn’t think those classes related to TOEIC at first, but I found out they are really helpful’. These comments link closely to a later category exploring the relationship between the TOEIC and English for purposes other than the TOEIC.

**CATEGORY THREE: Focus of Study**

While the above category refers to the major approaches students took toward their preparation for TOEIC, the third category refers to the focus of content and strategies within these approaches. Four themes emerged: (a) focus on reading and/or vocabulary; (b) focus on grammar (c) experience abroad influences focus of content; and (d) locating patterns. Of note, only incidental comments emerged with regard to the listening section of the TOEIC, which did not eventuate into any major theme.

**a) Reading and/or vocabulary as a focus of language content**

Results show that reading and/or vocabulary featured as key areas of focus with regard to language content, especially in the case of English-majors. Twelve comments made by eight participants, (two other-majors and six English-majors) relate to this theme. Four comments link specifically to reading as a major focus; five comments link to vocabulary and two comments include both reading and vocabulary as a focus. Comments coded under this theme include statements describing reading and/or vocabulary as: ‘important’ (E2M1), a ‘focus’ of study (N1F1), something ‘needed’ (E1M3) or something to ‘concentrate on’ (E1M3). In terms of frequency, for some, this included daily activity, ‘I keep studying at least five words
Another student (N2M2) noted studying reading for two hours a day from Monday to Thursday or Friday. Parts 5 and 6 in the reading section were a particular focus for this student. Another student (E1M1) noted spending most of his study group time (three hours a week) on vocabulary and ‘two hours on the Hackers reading book’.

For some (N1F1, E2F2, E1M3), increasing scores was a key motivation behind focusing on reading and/or vocabulary. This, according to one participant, was especially the case for those ‘in a hurry to get a job’. As N1F1 noted, ‘those people who desperately need to get above 700 give up on the listening part and focus on the reading part only’ (N1F1). Similarly, for E2F2 the reading section of the TOEIC became a focus after she discovered that simply being an English-major student was not enough to secure a high score:

> When I first took the TOEIC I thought I would get a decent score because my major was English, so I didn’t study at all and I got a low score. From that time, I took grammar and reading in a language school.

Similarly, with regard to vocabulary, E1M3 noted, ‘I know that strategies and patterns are not enough for a really high score. I think I need to study vocabulary’. E1M1, from a different group, similarly commented, ‘To raise your TOEIC score much higher, I admit you should study TOEIC vocabulary’. Certainly, for some (particularly English-majors), reading and/or vocabulary featured as an area of focus – often associated with the aim of quickly raising scores and the perception that focusing on other content may not be as successful.

**b) Grammar as a focus of language content**

Eight comments across seven participants representing all focus groups contributed to the theme of grammar as a focus of language when preparing for the TOEIC. Various opinions emerged regarding the importance and necessity of focusing on grammar and reasons behind this. N2F2 noted taking grammar classes at a language institute due to the belief that she was especially weak in grammar. Similarly, E2F2 took grammar classes in response to receiving lower than expected scores on the TOEIC. E2F3 further explained that although it were possible to listen to authentic texts such as in movies or songs, in support of TOEIC Listening, the grammar sections required specialised study through TOEIC grammar books.

Not all participants agreed with this view. E1F1, for example, found that preparing for the TOEIC with professors who focused on grammar did not help improve TOEIC scores. She preferred, as a result, to study at language institutes which taught TOEIC patterns. N1M2,
highlighted the importance of understanding patterns or formulas in relation to the grammar sections of the test as follows:

One of the worst strategies for the TOEIC is remembering all the words in Part 5 and the grammar part. That part is a weak point for people who are good at English because they don’t know the pattern or formula of TOEIC.

In other words, the participant suggests that a high level of English ability (including grammar) is perhaps not enough to secure good results in TOEIC, i.e. students also require knowledge of test-taking strategies specific to the TOEIC. This perhaps reflects the earlier comment by E2F2 who was surprised at how low her score was despite feeling confident in her English ability.

N1F1 further questioned the necessity of focusing on grammar. She explained how at first she studied grammar and memorised vocabulary ‘just like everyone else’, but later changed her method to studying conversation instead, which she found worked better. Focusing on grammar, ‘like everyone else’ may be linked to a familiar learning culture in Korea, as expressed by N2M2 and N2M1:

There are too many grammar terms. I think we all wasted our time in memorising them. I don’t think I got a well organised English education when I was in a high school (N2M2). Korea’s English education just puts emphasis on the detail of English grammar. In Korea’s English education system, it is difficult to understand English. It is easy to be confused (N2M1).

An emphasis on grammar as experienced by participants in their previous English education may be one factor behind why, as N1M1 notes, ‘some students just focus on how to choose the right answer when they study the TOEIC - they just study grammar’. At the same time, results also show students trying different methods of study to what they were perhaps familiar with such as preparing for TOEIC through conversation.

c) Experience abroad influences focus on content

Five comments from five participants relate to the theme of how time abroad may influence the type of content students focus on when preparing for the TOEIC. In each case, both English and other-majors noted how people who had studied abroad got ‘good listening scores’ (N1F1) and then could ‘concentrate on’ the reading section of the TOEIC (E1M3) or ‘count on’ the listening score to avoid studying further (N1F1). One English-major student expressed this as an advantage associated with many English-major students in particular:
Lots of students in English majors have been abroad. They usually don’t have trouble with the listening while most of the other majors have difficulties with it. That’s why they can’t listen. English majors have an advantage for the TOEIC test (E1F1).

As such, experience abroad may be a key influencing factor with regard to the different areas of language students focus on.

d) Locating patterns

One major strategy emerged with regard to how students prepared for TOEIC – locating patterns. Nine participants, across all groups, contributed fifteen comments linked to the strategy of locating ‘patterns’. Examples of the emic use of the term ‘patterns’ include: ‘There are patterns in the right answers for TOEIC’ (E1F2); ‘…there are patterns in the TOEIC so you can predict what TOEIC wants’ (E1M1); ‘When you see a pattern, you have to pick the right answer directly’ (N2F1). Patterns were associated with TOEIC RC & LC and in one case ‘patterns’ were also linked to the speaking test, ‘I heard there are also patterns so you can predict and practice speaking questions with efficient strategies’ (N2M2). As emerged in an earlier theme, patterns were also related to grammatical forms, i.e. ‘Questions about infinitives in the TOEIC are an easy part for you to get the right answer – there are patterns in TOEIC that always have strategies’ (E1M3); ‘If you know the patterns the TOEIC likes, you can figure out what form you need for certain questions easily and quickly’ (E1M1). In addition to grammatical forms, participants linked patterns to test design such as ‘…in the listening part, the word you listened to from the question is never the right answer’ (E1F2); ‘In part one, if you see a picture, you can know the answer that the TOEIC wants’ (N1M2). Interestingly, the ability to locate patterns was in three cases linked to studying the TOEIC over an extended period of time, e.g. ‘If you keep studying the TOEIC you can find out certain patterns’ (N2M2); ‘People who have studied for a long period of time tell me that there are patterns in TOEIC’ (E1M1).

Participants presented different reasons behind why locating patterns was an effective strategy. As represented above, and in the following quote by N2F1, locating patterns was associated with speed: ‘When you see a pattern, you have to pick the right answer directly. In that way, you can have time to solve all the questions’. For others, locating patterns was connected to gaining higher scores:

For people who get a perfect score, what we call the Gods of the TOEIC, it’s just like another math formula…you can find out certain patterns on TOEIC (N2M2); If you need to get your ideal score within five or six months, unless you study for two years…you need to be trained to choose the right answers. There are patterns in the
right answers (E1F2); Even people who get a perfect score 990 can’t talk in English. Those people focus on learning strategies and patterns only (E1M3).

With regard to how students learned patterns, one participant mentioned memorising different sections based on certain ‘patterns’ (N1M2); others credited language institutes (as described) and books or ‘other publications’ which ‘showed the patterns of the TOEIC’ (E2M1; E1M3). Participant M3, who had studied a number of TOEIC textbooks, credited patterns to raising his score by 200 points.

**CATEGORY FOUR: Relationship between TOEIC and English for Other Purposes**

Four (often contradictory) themes emerged with regard to the relationship between the TOEIC and English for purposes other than the TOEIC: (a) TOEIC is related to general English ability, (b) TOEIC scores are not an indication of general English ability, (c) preparing for the TOEIC helps general English ability, and (d) preparing for the TOEIC is not useful, practical and/or helpful.

**a) ‘Real’ English ability contributes to TOEIC scores**

Eight participants contributed to this theme, dominated by seven English-majors. For many of the participants having ‘good’ English was seen to contribute to ‘good’ TOEIC scores:

- If you want 800 or 900, real English ability is required (E1M3); If you study English hard, it will make you get a good score on TOEIC (E2F3); If you study English, it can help raise your TOEIC score (E1F1); and If you have good English, you will get a good TOEIC score (N1M2).

In the case of the last comment, the only other-major represented in this theme elaborated that the reason why people with ‘good’ English get ‘good’ TOEIC scores is because they ‘can get a good score on the listening section’. He additionally commented that if people with good English in general have difficulty with the TOEIC it is usually Part Five in the reading section. Although TOEIC Speaking was rarely mentioned, one English-major positively connected the TOEIC speaking test with general English ability:

- In the speaking test, you listen to questions and you need to answer them quickly. In my opinion, speaking is a good tool to tell you your English ability…people admit the speaking test score is your genuine ability’ (E1M1).

Overall, English-majors appeared to dominate the idea that English proficiency was reflected in TOEIC scores.
b) TOEIC scores - not a good indication of general English ability
Where the previous theme was supported by English-majors, other-majors dominated the idea that TOEIC scores are not an indication of general English ability. Eleven participants contributed to this theme (eight other-majors and three English-majors). General comments included:

I don’t think TOEIC scores are related to your real English ability’ (N1M2); a good score doesn’t guarantee good English (N1M1); I think scores are useless (E1F1); TOEIC is not a good evaluation tool for telling your genuine English ability (N2M1); I don’t think TOEIC can evaluate your genuine English ability (N2F1).

It is unclear from these comments, what areas of general English students were referring to; however, in many cases, participants specifically noted how TOEIC ‘ability’ in reading and listening was unrelated to speaking ability in particular. The following quotes represent this idea: ‘…some people who get a perfect score, 990, can’t talk English’ (E1M3); ‘A good score on TOEIC and speaking English fluently are really different’ (N1M2); ‘…job applicants with 900 are accepted but can’t say a word’ (N1M1); and ‘You can see students with high TOEIC scores who can’t speak in English’ (N2F1). Therefore, for other-majors in particular, participants questioned the degree by which Standard TOEIC scores were a true reflection of communicative ability.

c) Preparing for the TOEIC ‘helps’ general English ability
Five comments from five other-majors expressed how preparing for the TOEIC could help general English. Two comments related specifically to the listening section of the TOEIC where one student noted simply, ‘I think the listening section is helpful’ (N1F1) and another found that ‘if you study for the listening part, it will enhance your listening ability’ (N2F1). The same participant noted that TOEIC Reading helped reading, as did N2M1 who commented that the reading section ‘might be helpful for your reading ability’. One participant shared that although he found the TOEIC impractical, he believed that if people tried to use the TOEIC in their daily lives it would be helpful. N1M1, further found that although he had memorised English sentences associated with business, he could use the constructions to make daily expressions claiming that ‘it works’. As such, the TOEIC may be perceived as more useful where students use English outside of preparation for the TOEIC.

d) Preparing for/taking TOEIC is not useful, helpful and/or practical
Contrary to the theme above, nine participants (six other-majors & three English majors) commented that preparing for the TOEIC was not useful, helpful and/or practical. Three
participants noted that the TOEIC was not helpful for general English ability, i.e. ‘I don’t think studying for the TOEIC helps my English’ (E1F2); the TOEIC doesn’t help your English ability’ (E1M1). One of the two business majors who contributed to this theme, noted ‘…if you study the TOEIC only, it isn’t helpful for your English any more beyond certain points’ (N2M2). Five comments relate to the fact that TOEIC was not useful or practical due to the language content associated with the test. Without taking the speaking component, N1M1, noted, ‘it is totally useless’. E1M3 also commented that unless a vocabulary item appeared on the TOEIC test, it was ‘useless’ to learn it. Another participant noted that even though TOEIC conversations were based on daily life they were not easily applicable to real situations: ‘The TOEIC is not useful in real conversations such as when you meet foreigners, I think’ (E1F2). Further to this, E1F2 added that due to the many business letters in the TOEIC ‘if you don’t work for international trade companies, they are useless’. Overall, perceptions with regard to the application of the TOEIC (for purposes other than taking the TOEIC) appeared to vary considerably across the students independent of major.

**CATEGORY FIVE: Affective Outcomes**

One theme emerged under the final category - affective outcomes associated with preparing for and/or taking the TOEIC, as presented below.

**a) Negative emotions and associations**

Eight participants (six other-major students) contributed 12 comments on a range of negative emotions related to the TOEIC. Words that emerged with regard to participants’ feelings included; pressure (N2F1, E2F3, N1M2); despair (N2F2, N2M2); irritation (N1F1); worry (N2F1); nervousness (E2F3); failure (N2F1); dislike (N1M2) and feelings of being ‘upset’ (N1M1). One participant (N1M2) mentioned crying while studying for the TOEIC because she could not work out why her answers were wrong. Linked to the theme of securing a job, feelings of pressure and worry emerged, particularly as students drew closer to graduating: ‘I didn’t have pressure until last year. I felt the need to study the TOEIC when I was a junior’ (N2F2). Added to this, were feelings associated with a sense of futility for two participants. N1M1 noted that TOEIC made him ‘feel as if it’s all in vain’ due to the fact ‘TOEIC scores are only used for filtering job application forms’. Feelings of futility were also reflected in the following quote by N1M1:

Some students just focus on how to choose the right answer when they study TOEIC. They just study grammar. However, if you don’t speak English, it is totally useless. That makes me so upset. So why do we have to take the test?
N2M2 further shared that ‘even if (he) tried, (he) couldn’t do it’ and fell into ‘despair’. Interestingly, N2M2 noted that he did not lose confidence in English because of a positive previous experience at an English camp focusing on communication with native speakers. However, in the case of N1F3 the influence of EFL tests in general, appeared to have had a negative impact on her motivation toward learning English, causing her to feel irritation toward the TOEIC:

I have been studying English since I was in fourth grade in elementary school. At first I studied with great interest. Studying English was fun. However, I lost interest in English more and more since I needed to take English tests. Maybe that’s why I feel irritated by the TOEIC.

In the same interview, N1F1 commented on similar feelings noting that she too had liked English since middle school but did not think TOEIC was ‘good’. She similarly noted that every time she studied for the TOEIC it ‘really’ made her feel ‘irritated’.

While a majority of other-majors voiced negative associations with the TOEIC, it did not appear to be a theme shared by English majors in general. E2F2, for instance, noted feeling no anxiety over scores explaining that when she took the TOEIC she did it ‘comfortably’. Although describing feelings of nervousness, E2F3 also positively commented on her TOEIC experience noting that she took the TOEIC twice a semester and found that as her scores improved around 30 points each semester she was ‘happy’ and ‘inspired’ to study more. It is possible that other students had other positive affective experiences to share but remained quiet to avoid the appearance of bragging – a limitation of focus group methodology.

### 6.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter reported on the results of Phase One where a major aim was to present a thick description of the research context and direct data collection for Phase Two. Findings reveal that despite the fact that many participants questioned the validity of the Standard TOEIC as a measure of communicative competence, few could negate the importance of TOEIC scores, which emerged for some as a matter of ‘life and death’, ‘like war’ or ‘essential’. This perception appeared to be greatly motivated by job application processes attached to companies at large. Different applications and expectations of TOEIC scores within the government sector, university setting, and among peer groups, also appeared to contribute to the stakes of the TOEIC among students. The influence that these communities have on the
goals, motivation and actions of individuals during test preparation is of particular interest to the second phase of the research.

The results of Phase One also show that students may take a number of different approaches toward their test preparation. Language institutes (specialising in test preparation classes) featured as a dominant approach for other-major students in particular, and English-majors appeared to draw on their general English study to directly and indirectly support preparation for the TOEIC. Other forms of test preparation to emerge included study groups and TOEIC resources, such as TOEIC textbooks and practice tests. These results support the use of journal methodology as a way of establishing a clearer picture of the types of approaches different students take. The findings also support the use of journals and interviews as a way of exploring the conditions that are created by the different learning contexts, especially with regard to the type of content students focus on and strategies used. Findings from Phase One, for example, show that locating patterns or improving test-taking strategies featured as an important operation linked closely to institutes and TOEIC preparation materials.

The results of the focus groups also highlight a number of individual learner factors that may potentially mediate the actions and operations of students when engaging in test preparation. These factors include: a students’ major, year, English proficiency, previous experience with English and EFL tests, culture of learning, previous scores, finances, motivation, anxiety, and confidence etc. A clear example to emerge from the results is how students nearing graduation, or those with little experience with English, may be drawn to language institutes as a way of quickly raising scores. No doubt, any number of individual learner factors may work together to influence the decisions and contributions learners make when preparing for a high stakes test. Collectively, the results support a conceptualisation of washback as a dynamic system, i.e. one that is ‘produced by a set of components that interact in particular ways to produce some overall state or form at a particular point in time’ (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 26). The findings also support the use of SCT (in particular, Activity Theory) as a framework with which to investigate different sociocultural factors that may drive the individual motives, goals, actions, and operations of learners as they prepare for the TOEIC, as explored in Phase Two of the study.
Chapter Seven

PHASE TWO: CASE-STUDIES

Participants & Quantitative Results of Journals

7.0 Overview

This chapter begins with a restatement of the guiding research questions for Phase Two and introduces the participants involved. It then reports specifically on the quantitative results of the semi-structured journals providing a description of the data collected and an outline of the different types (and frequency) of tasks that students engaged in while preparing for the TOEIC. It also provides an overview of the type of content students focused on.

7.1 BACKGROUND

7.1.1 Guiding Questions

The guiding research questions during data collection for Phase Two of the study were:

1) What factors influence the motives and goals of English and other-major students to take and prepare for the TOEIC?

2) What actions do English and other-major students take toward their preparation toward TOEIC; and what may be key influencing factors behind this?

3) What operations do English and other-major students engage in when preparing for TOEIC; and what may be key influencing factors behind this?

4) What are the perceived outcomes of preparing for the TOEIC for English and other-major students?

The quantitative analysis of journals, presented in this chapter, provides evidence for the first parts of questions 2 and 3. Research Question Two, in particular, explores the approaches or types of actions that students took (for example, whether they attended preparation classes, studied independently through books, created a study group etc.). RQ3 addresses the different processes or (operations) carried out under the conditions that these actions created. Given the specific type of quantitative data collected from journals, this includes the types of language content that students focused on while preparing for the TOEIC. Chapters Eight and Nine report on the qualitative results of all questions (in relation to five case studies).
7.1.2 Participants

Although twenty participants were recruited for Phase Two (as established in the methodology), six participants withdrew from the project within the first month. Reasons for this included the decision (early on) to no longer take the TOEIC, a lack of interest in the project, or finding difficulty in fulfilling the requirements associated with participation. One participant, for example, neglected to complete consistent journal entries and contributed little to interviews. As shown in Table 7.1, thirteen participants remained in the study (seven English-majors & six other-majors). They represent a range of majors, year levels, language abilities and previous experience with the TOEIC. English-majors were recruited from classes within the English literature department (as outlined in Chapter Five), and other-majors came from departments specialising in police administration, engineering, psychology, business administration and advertising. Three other-majors were recruited from TOEIC classes (provided on campus), one participant was recruited from the International Lounge, and two students were recruited from classes related to their major.

Table 7.1
Participant Bio Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAJOR</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Site of Recruitment</th>
<th>Previous Experience with TOEIC</th>
<th>Previous TOEIC score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Mock</td>
<td>Standard Official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERENA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>English class</td>
<td>2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*TINA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>English class</td>
<td>3x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>English class</td>
<td>0x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILEY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>English class</td>
<td>9x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAX</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>English class</td>
<td>4x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*SUNNY</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>English class</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>English class</td>
<td>5x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIE</td>
<td>Police Admin</td>
<td>Soph</td>
<td>Police Admin class</td>
<td>2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*STEAVE</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Engineering class</td>
<td>3x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Soph</td>
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</tr>
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<td>JI YON</td>
<td>Business Admin</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>TOEIC class (on campus)</td>
<td>5x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*JESSICA</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>TOEIC class (on campus)</td>
<td>2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*SANTANA</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>International language centre</td>
<td>20x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Participants chosen as individual case studies presented in Chapters 8 & 9
Almost half of all participants were seniors in their final year of university. The remaining participants were juniors (third year students) and sophomores (second year students). All students had taken the ‘mock’ Standard TOEIC; however, three students (Tina, Steave and Jessica) had never taken the official Standard TOEIC. Only one student (Miley) had taken TOEIC Speaking and none of the participants had had experience taking TOEIC Writing. Previous scores on the Standard TOEIC ranged from 300 - 400 to 895. English majors averaged higher TOEIC scores than the other-majors. Previous TOEIC scores included in the table represent the participant’s most recent TOEIC score (mock or official).

7.2 RESULTS

7.2.1 Description of Journal Data

Participants submitted journals either electronically or as hard copies on a weekly basis. The majority did this consistently, some required occasional reminders. As mentioned, Steave, completed journals for only one month due to an injury. During that month, however, he was consistent in meeting his weekly deadlines. All participants, except for Jane and Sunny completed their journals in Korean using the Korean version of the template. Sunny completed half of her journals in English and half in Korean. Jane completed all of her journals in English. As noted in the methodology, the journals were translated by Sam and Ari (profiled in Chapter Five). The participants took the TOEIC at different times throughout the semester and, thus, maintained journals for varying lengths of time. Five participants took the TOEIC and completed data entries up to the end of June (Serena, Julie, Ji-Yon, Jessica and Santana). Five participants continued journal entries up to the end of July or August (Jane, Tina, Max, Brie and Sera), and one participant (Sunny) continued journals through to September. Appendix I provides an overview of data collected showing the dates that journal entries were completed, the dates participants were interviewed, and the months participants took the official TOEIC. June shows fewer journal entries in comparison to other months due to the final test period at the university.

Of note, English-majors Tina, Sunny and Jane took the Standard TOEIC more than once and Sunny and Santana were the only participants to take TOEIC Speaking (in addition to the Standard TOEIC). Neither of these participants had planned to take TOEIC Speaking at the beginning of research but made this decision towards the end of data collection. As noted, Steave discontinued journals from June to August due to an injury, but took the TOEIC in October and participated in all three interviews. Miley cancelled plans to take the official
TOEIC towards the end of data collection but took a simulated (mock) TOEIC test as a prerequisite for remaining at Kelly House (a dormitory system where students must use English at all times and take extra English classes).

Table 7.2 below provides a summary of the number of months that participants completed journal entries and the total number of journal entries. English-majors recorded a total of 183 entries across a total of 25 months (totalling 314 hours of test preparation). Other-majors recorded a total of 99 entries over 15 months (195 hours). Although participants were asked to complete a separate journal template each and every time they engaged in a form of task that they believed supported test preparation, Sunny, Max, Brie Sera and Jessica, at times, included more than one entry on one journal template (i.e. in cases where they participated in more than one task in a day). This is represented in the table as number of actions. An action represents one incident of test preparation over a continuous block of time. In cases where there are fewer actions than entries (Miley, Jane, Steave, Ji-Yon and Santana) participants recorded narrative but did not engage in any action related to test preparation. For example, one participant wrote about her feelings the day after taking the TOEIC, another explained why she had not spent time preparing for the TOEIC due to other commitments. These were not counted as actions toward test preparation.

Table 7.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Total Entries, Actions and Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(months)</td>
<td># entries # actions  time (hrs/mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>SERENA</td>
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<td>19 19 54.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7 7 6.45</td>
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<td>22 24 38.0</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>31 62 101.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>86 74 92.0</td>
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<td>183 198 314hrs</td>
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<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BRIE</td>
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<td>JI YON</td>
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</tr>
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<td>JESSICA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21 26 57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANTANA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18 17 33.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>99 113 195hrs 5m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.2.2 Results of Data Analysis

The quantitative results of journals are presented in two parts: (a) actions taken in preparation for the TOEIC (RQ2) - including direct and indirect actions (as explained below), and (b) language focus during direct preparation for the TOEIC (RQ3).

RQ2: Actions Taken in Preparation for the TOEIC

This section reports on (i) the number of direct and indirect actions taken by students during test preparation, and (ii) the types of direct and indirect actions that students engaged in.

(i) Direct and Indirect Actions toward the TOEIC

As indicated in the methodology, participants were asked to complete a journal template for every activity (action) that they felt contributed to their preparation for the TOEIC. This included actions directly focused on the TOEIC (coded as direct preparation) and those undertaken for purposes other than the TOEIC - but were also felt to contribute to TOEIC preparation (coded as indirect preparation). To differentiate this, students were asked to indicate the first aim of their action in their journals as either: prepare for the TOEIC, improve English in general, or other reasons (see Appendix B). The first indicator represents direct preparation for the TOEIC and the latter two form the category indirect preparation. Table 7.3 provides a summary of the number of journal entries relating to direct and indirect preparation for the TOEIC. It also shows the amount of time students devoted to the two different forms of preparation.
Table 7.3

Direct and Indirect Preparation for the TOEIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Direct TOEIC Prep</th>
<th>Indirect TOEIC Prep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># actions</td>
<td>Time (hrs/mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGLISH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERENA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TINA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILEY</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAX</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNNY</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>93.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEAVE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI YON</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESSICA</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANTANA</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>147.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. In the case of Max, Brie, Sera and Jessica, separate direct and indirect actions could be distinguished where more than one action was included in one journal entry. However, it was not clearly distinguishable in the case of Sunny who, as a result, was asked to differentiate each individual action in a follow up interview. She was unable, however to specify the exact duration of each activity.

Figures 7.1 and 7.2 below provide graphic representations of the amount of time students engaged in direct and indirect preparation. The first graphic shows that all English-majors included, to differing degrees, actions not directly related to the TOEIC as supporting test preparation. Jane and Miley recorded more cases of indirect preparation than direct. Over 90% of all actions that Jane engaged in were those that were not directly aimed at TOEIC. Jane explained that her first aim was to improve her general English, and noted that, although studying English in general ‘affected’ her TOEIC scores, studying the TOEIC did not help improve her general English ability as much. She also noted that although other methods such as attending TOEIC classes would perhaps raise her score to a greater extent, she preferred to focus on strengthening her overall English ability.

Five of the six other-major students, did not record any action other than directly preparing for the TOEIC. In other words, they did not participate in, or consider, any action not directly
related to the TOEIC as contributing to their overall test preparation. In the case of Brie, however, all actions were related to indirect preparation.

Similar to Jane, Brie mentioned that although she intended to take the TOEIC, her overall aim was to improve English in general. As a result, despite acknowledging that she would probably not take the TOEFL, Brie focused on TOEFL preparation materials and other general English texts:

![Figure 7.1](Direct and Indirect Preparation for the TOEIC - English Majors)

![Figure 7.2](Direct and Indirect Preparation for the TOEIC - Other Majors)
When I study for TOEFL, I become more critical when answering questions. I can talk to other students about the questions, so my reading and listening have improved. I think I can learn English more deeply with TOEFL than with the TOEIC (K-Int2)\(^8\).

\textit{ii) Types of Actions} \\
Results show that students engaged in twelve different types of actions as coded from sections in the journal template titled ‘activity’ and ‘details of activity’. Table 7.4 below provides a summary of the different types of actions taken by students as categorised according to direct and indirect preparation; and shared and independent study. \textit{Shared study} refers to study with others, and \textit{independent study} refers to ‘study independent of others’ (as indicated in the journal template). A brief description of each action follows. Table 7.5 on the following page provides an overview of the different types of actions that each participant engaged in.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Table 7.4} \\
\textit{Actions Taken in Direct and Indirect Preparation toward TOEIC}
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{AIM OF ACTION} & \textbf{CONTEXT} & \textbf{TYPE OF ACTION} \\
\hline
Direct preparation & Shared study & TOEIC classes \\
& & TOEIC study group \\
& & Simulated TOEIC test \\
& Independent study & TOEIC textbooks \\
& & TOEIC Internet lectures and sites \\
& & Other TOEIC preparation materials \\
& & Non TOEIC textbooks/Internet sites \\
Indirect preparation & Shared study & Major-related classes \\
& & Study groups \\
& Independent study & Preparation material for other tests \\
& & Watching TV and movies \\
& & Other English textbooks and materials \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

In cases of direct preparation, \textit{TOEIC classes} represent classes specifically focused on the TOEIC, either organised by the university or language institutes. \textit{Study groups} refer to small groups of students who met voluntarily to prepare for the TOEIC. \textit{Simulated TOEIC tests}, also termed as the \textit{Moee TOEIC} (모의토익), or mock tests, represent practice TOEIC tests taken under simulated test conditions (operated by the university or language schools). \textit{TOEIC textbooks} included: Hackers, Tomato, APEX, Zenith, The Summit, Economy RC1000 and other unnamed TOEIC preparation manuals. The types of TOEIC books mentioned included: listening, vocabulary, reading, speaking and sample tests. \textit{Other TOEIC preparation materials} refer to MP3 files, sample practice tests, vocabulary lists and personalised notes.

\(^8\) K-Int2 refers to a comment made in Korean (K) during the second interview (Int2) and translated.
Table 7.5
Types of Actions Taken by Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Total # of actions</th>
<th>Direct Preparation</th>
<th></th>
<th>Indirect Preparation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared Study</td>
<td>Independent Study</td>
<td>Shared Study</td>
<td>Independent Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOEIC classes</td>
<td>TOEIC study group</td>
<td>Simulated TOEIC tests</td>
<td>TOEIC textbooks</td>
<td>TOEIC Internet sites/Lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERENA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TINA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILEY</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAX</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNNY</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Majors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIE</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEAVE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI YON</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESSICA</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANTANA</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
made by students. Non-TOEIC texts included: Grammar in Use, Issues in the News and an unnamed grammar textbook; and TOEIC Internet lectures included Hackers and other unnamed sites.

In cases of indirect preparation, major-related classes refer to university classes related to the students’ majors; study groups represent small groups of students who met voluntarily to study English for purposes other than the TOEIC. Preparation for other tests includes TOEFL materials (Jane and Brie) and tests associated with major-related classes (Julie and Serena). Watching TV and movies included listening, watching and/or reading scripts associated with TV and movies. Finally, other general English material included: newspaper articles, novels, reading comprehension texts from the Internet, radio broadcasts, speeches, and textbooks (including Lee Sung Chul’s Super High Grammar and Reading for Results).
Figures 7.3 and 7.4 provide graphic representations of the different types of direct actions that English and other-majors engaged in. Of the 66 actions that English-majors indicated as direct preparation, TOEIC textbooks featured as the dominant action (70% of all direct actions). Other actions included simulated TOEIC tests (8%); TOEIC Internet sites/lectures (6%); and Non-TOEIC textbooks and Internet sites (15%). TOEIC classes and study groups did not feature in any of the activities. Of the 87 actions that other-majors indicated as direct preparation, TOEIC classes featured as the dominant action (48% of all direct actions). TOEIC textbooks followed closely at 29%, and other actions included: TOEIC Internet lectures/sites (10%), other TOEIC preparation materials (8%), and non-TOEIC texts/Internet sites (4%).

In summary of RQ2, findings show that students engaged in a variety of different tasks while preparing for the TOEIC - some of which were shared activities and others which were independent. TOEIC textbooks featured as a common method of preparation across both English and other-majors. However, findings also show differences between English and other-majors. TOEIC classes appeared to be a dominant method of study for other-majors (with all but one other-major engaging in this action). It is important to note, however, that three of the six participants were recruited from TOEIC classes. Nonetheless, two of the other-majors not recruited from TOEIC classes also participated in specialised TOEIC institutes. English-majors did not report any cases of attending institutes (with some further noting that they had never attended TOEIC classes). Moreover, results show that English-majors engaged in more activities based on non-TOEIC materials than the other-majors. They also participated in more independent methods of preparing for the TOEIC as opposed to teacher-led lessons.

RQ3: Focus of Language Content in Direct Preparation for the TOEIC

In addition to the type of actions students engaged in, journals also revealed different foci of language content. Although there was no specific prompt regarding content, students expressed the focus of their study under one or more of the following prompts: details of activity; how this activity contributed to preparation for the TOEIC test; and why you focused on this area. Students responded, identifying, at times, one language focus and at other times multiple language foci. Table 7.6 below provides an overview of the different language foci identified and the number of activities where the language focus was mentioned. Language foci were coded in cases where participants clearly described the language focus within the
activity. Content was not assumed based on the names of resources used. The number of activities where the language focus was unclear or unstated is also represented in the table.

Table 7.6
Focus of Language Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Actions in direct preparation</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Vocab</th>
<th>Simulated/Practice tests</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Focus unclear/unstated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English-Majors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERENA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TINA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILEY</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAX</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNNY</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Majors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEAVE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI YON</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESSICA</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANTANA</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six areas of content were identified. Listening was identified by the words ‘listening’ and ‘listening comprehension’. Reading was identified by the following key words: ‘reading’ and ‘reading comprehension’. Grammar was identified by the words ‘grammar’ or ‘sentence structure’. In some cases grammatical functions were described in detailed metalanguage:

Grammar in Use – Intermediate: Units 54, 55, 56. I studied about to + verb and verb + ing forms in addition to ‘prefer’ and ‘would rather’ (Sunny J7); In today’s class, we learned about participle construction types, noun modifying participles, participles that depict emotion, and how to construct participles (Steave, J4).

Vocabulary was identified by the key words ‘vocabulary’, ‘words’ and ‘phrases’. Practice and simulated tests was another coded category; however, there was no specific focus of language content, rather the focus was on the test itself. This included simulated tests, as referred to above, and practice tests which refer to previous TOEIC tests or practice tests taken from textbooks or from the Internet. With the exception of Sunny and Santana, who decided to prepare for TOEIC Speaking during data collection, results show that speaking and writing were areas that students did not focus on while preparing for the TOEIC. Santana
did not record any preparation associated with TOEIC Speaking but Sunny indicated her focus on TOEIC Speaking with the key words, ‘TOEIC Speaking’. Figures 7.5 and 7.6 below provide graphic representations of the types of language content English and other-majors focused on respectively.

Results show that English-majors focused on listening (21%), reading (22%), grammar (21%) and vocabulary (21%) in almost equal amounts. Simulated and practice tests accounted for 9% of the content mentioned. Figure 7.6 provides a slightly different picture with regard to the type of language content that other-majors focused on. Forty one percent of content foci mentioned was linked to grammar – proportionately almost twice that of English-majors. The number of times that listening was mentioned across activities, in the case of both English and other-majors, was proportionately similar (21% and 19 % respectively). In the case of vocabulary it was proportionately identical (21%). A key difference between the groups
however, was reading which was mentioned in 6% of cases where content was identified by other-majors. English majors on the other hand included reading as a focus of content in 22% of all cases where content was mentioned.

7.3 Chapter Summary
This chapter reported on the quantitative results of semi-structured journals. In answer to RQ2, results show that students engaged in a wide range of actions when preparing for the TOEIC including those that indirectly or directly focused on the TOEIC and were shared, or independent. Key differences among students emerged. All English-majors included (to some degree) actions not directly focused on the TOEIC, but were seen to indirectly strengthen test preparation. Only one other-major included actions where the TOEIC was not their main focus. Results also show that when directly focused on TOEIC preparation, English-majors engaged in more actions based on non-TOEIC materials than other-majors, and also participated in more independent methods of preparation. The dominant form of TOEIC preparation for other-majors was language institutes – an action not shared among the English-majors. In relation to RQ3, in cases of direct preparation for the TOEIC, English-majors reported a more balanced focus on language content. Other-majors often referred to discrete language rules and vocabulary items when preparing for TOEIC Reading, whereas English-majors more frequently referred to reading as a more holistic activity.

While differences between English and other-majors in this study are of interest, it is important to stress the danger of making generalisations based on a small number of participants: the results of one student may skew the results of the entire group. Even within the small population of this study, potential outliers emerged. Jane and Brie (one English and one other-major respectively), for example, relied almost entirely on indirect test preparation, both focusing to a great extent on TOEFL preparation as a way of indirectly strengthening TOEIC scores. Moreover, given that there was no clear indicator in the journals for students to describe the focus of their content, it was not always mentioned by the participants. Nonetheless, this chapter provides an indication of the types of actions that students may engage in – valuable information with regard to the actual practices of students over a longitudinal period of time. It also provides an indication of possible differences between English and other-major students – differences further explored through the qualitative analysis of both journals and interviews as presented in Chapters Eight and Nine.
Chapter Eight

RESULTS: INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

Other-Majors

8.0 Overview

This chapter presents the results of the journals and interviews with respect to other-major participants: Jessica, Santana and Steave. Each case study begins with a profile of the participant, the rationale behind their selection, and a description of the data. The results for each participant are presented in two parts: the quantitative results of journals (showing the different actions that the participant took), and the qualitative results of the major categories and themes that emerged from the analysis of journals and interviews. Each case study concludes with a visual data display of the participant’s overall test activity.

8.1 CASE STUDY ONE: JESSICA

8.1.1 Profile and Rationale

After completing her junior (third) year in advertising in 2008, Jessica decided to take a semester off to focus specifically on the TOEIC. She enrolled in TOEIC classes on campus and responded to an invitation to join the research in one of those classes. Jessica had taken two simulated Standard TOEIC tests before research began, but had never taken the official test. The rationale behind presenting Jessica as a case study includes her decision to delay graduation (specifically to focus on the TOEIC) and the collection of a rich source of data, despite the fact that she participated in the research for a shorter period of time in comparison with other participants. Jessica also shared many similarities with the other non-English-majors allowing for interesting comparisons. For example, Steave and Santanta also took TOEIC classes, and Steave also took the official TOEIC for the first time. Unlike Steave or Santana, however, Jessica had had little experience with English. As she explained, ‘I didn’t study English before, and I started studying for the TOEIC all of a sudden (Int1)...I don’t have any basic knowledge of English’ (J2). This difference between the other participants provided a further rationale for presenting Jessica’s story.
8.1.2 Description of Data and Data Collection

Interviews began in early April 2009, and ended with a second interview in July of 2009. Jessica maintained journal entries from mid-April to the end of May (when she took the official TOEIC test). A total of 21 journal entries (representing 57 hours) were collected across 42 days. Table 8.1 below indicates the number of actions recorded per month; the months where interviews were conducted; and the months where the official and simulated tests were taken (with corresponding scores). Although asked to complete one journal page for each action that Jessica felt contributed to preparation for TOEIC, she completed one journal page per day, where more than one action may have occurred. Accordingly, eight journal entries included more than one action resulting in a total of 26 separate actions across 21 days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of completed journal entries</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of actions</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulated test scores (ST)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>495</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official test scores (OF)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview dates</td>
<td>Int 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Int2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews were conducted with the interpreter (Joo), and transcribed and translated by Stanley (profiled in Chapter Five). Jessica spoke almost entirely in Korean, and journal entries were also written in Korean and translated into English by Sam (also profiled in Chapter Five).

8.1.3 Quantitative Data Analysis

Table 8.2 below provides a description of the different actions Jessica recorded while preparing for the TOEIC. All entries relate specifically to direct preparation for the TOEIC since Jessica did not include any cases of indirect preparation (see Chapter Seven). Each action was clearly labelled and described by the participant causing no difficulty with counting or categorising the different types of actions taken. However, given that the lengths of time for each action were combined as one total per journal page it was not possible to differentiate how much time was spent on each individual action. Frequency as opposed to length of time, therefore, is represented in the analysis of quantitative data.
Table 8.2
Actions Contributing to Preparation for TOEIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Campus TOEIC classes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC Internet lectures</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulated TOEIC test</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary and review notebooks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomato basic TOEIC listening book</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomato TOEIC vocabulary book</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC TEST problem set book</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8.1 below shows that of the actions that Jessica felt contributed to her preparation for TOEIC, over half were those led by instructors including on-campus classes (27%) and Internet lectures (27%), which Jessica noted using ‘together for maximum effect’ (J1). Textbooks (linked to independent, unaccompanied study) represented 31% of all actions and included the Tomato brand of TOEIC listening and vocabulary, and a TOEIC ‘test problem set book’. Vocabulary and review notebooks (linked to classes, lectures and the Tomato listening text) represented 11% of all activities, and an organised simulated TOEIC test, mentioned in one journal entry, completes the final 4% of all actions recorded.

It is important to note that despite her taking two-hour TOEIC classes every day, only seven entries across data collection included TOEIC classes, suggesting that it is possible that Jessica did not submit a journal entry for each and every action over the 42 day period of data collection. Therefore, data is representative of all actions as opposed to an exhaustive account of actions. Qualitative data analysis from journals and interviews provide further insight into
which actions Jessica focused on and reasons and influences behind the different actions she took.

8.1.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

This section begins with the results of peer (translation & coding) checks, follows with a description of the final categories and themes that emerged, and concludes with an overview of Jessica’s Test Activity.

8.1.4.1 Results of Peer and Member Checking

Following the protocol established in Chapter Five, four comments were raised in relation to issues of translation. This included three minor concerns regarding word choice and one concern where the meaning was felt to be quite different. Appendix J provides a description of each concern, and the amendments made as a result. Seventeen themes were coded under the categories of: reasons/goals driving TOEIC preparation; actions; operations; and outcomes of actions and operations. Appendix K provides a sample of the data display which was passed on to Grace (profiled in Chapter Five) for code checking. Peer checking resulted in 100% agreement on the coding of categories and themes. Unfortunately, despite many attempts at reconnecting with the participant after data collection, Jessica did not respond to contact. As a result, data for Case Study One was not member checked.

8.1.4.2 Final Categories and Themes

Table 8.3 presents the final categories and themes and indicates the number of comments coded from each data source. A detailed description of each category and theme follows.
Table 8.3

Categories and Themes - Jessica

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOALS/REASONS BEHIND TAKING TOEIC</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Journals</th>
<th>Int1</th>
<th>Int2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Securing a job</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Peers and parents influence decision toward TOEIC</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Standard TOEIC – not TOEIC Speaking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ACTIONS | | |
|--------|------|-----|-----|
| a) Suspending graduation | 6 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| b) Early preference towards directed teaching | 7 | 5 | 2 | 0 |
| c) Increased focus on independent study | 7 | 6 | 0 | 1 |

| OPERATIONS | | |
|-------------|------|-----|-----|
| a) TOEIC classes organised by level/content | 9 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| b) Focus on grammar in TOEIC class and online lectures | 16 | 14 | 1 | 1 |
| c) Vocabulary from a variety of sources | 13 | 9 | 0 | 4 |
| d) Repetition, review & memorisation | 28 | 18 | 4 | 6 |
| e) Investing time/effort & maintaining pace | 9 | 6 | 0 | 3 |
| f) Solving problems | 6 | 6 | 0 | 0 |

| OUTCOMES OF TEST ACTIVITY | | |
|---------------------------|------|-----|-----|
| a) Preparation toward TOEIC unsuccessful | 12 | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| b) Little application toward English for purposes other than TOEIC | 16 | 5 | 7 | 4 |
| c) Wasted time | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| d) Stress and pressure | 4 | 1 | 3 | 0 |

| Total Comments | 159 | 81 | 40 | 38 |

CATEGORY ONE: Goals/Reasons behind Test Preparation

Three major themes were coded with regard to major reasons behind why Jessica prepared for and took the Standard TOEIC. They include: (a) getting a job; (b) peer/parental pressure; and (c) preparing for the Standard TOEIC as opposed to TOEIC Speaking.

a) Getting a job

For Jessica, (evident in ten comments) attaining Standard TOEIC scores to secure employment was the key reason behind preparing for the TOEIC - especially in light of the current economy, as she explained, ‘…students try to get all the specs needed for employment today. The Korean economy isn’t good right now, so I feel I must not fall behind’ (Int1). Although Jessica had not yet identified her future career, she acknowledged the need to provide TOEIC scores as a ‘basic necessity’ (Int1) for employment:

Even if studying for the TOEIC isn’t exactly something in my interest, I have to do it by force…TOEIC is needed no matter what occupation I aim for. Anywhere and everywhere requires TOEIC these days. In recent times, almost all corporations look at TOEIC (Int1).

She further recognised scores of over 800 as necessary for employment opportunities but identified her target score as 700 due to feeling that she was not ‘that good at English’ (Int1).
With a score of over 700, Jessica believed that it would at least ‘make the basic level’ in terms of applying for internships and/or volunteer work (Int1) which were seen as important additions to a resume. As Jessica noted, ‘Even for volunteer work, for marathons for example, you need TOEIC to participate’ (Int1). Therefore, not only did Jessica feel the need for TOEIC scores in order to directly apply for jobs, she also believed in the importance of TOEIC scores as prerequisites to experiences that further strengthened her résumé at a time where job applicants did ‘whatever they [could] to get ahead of the game’ (Int2).

b) Peers and parents encourage preparation toward the TOEIC

Nine comments were coded in relation to the influence of peers and parents. As a senior, Jessica found that many peers had already secured TOEIC scores and were strengthening their resumes through other means. Accordingly, feelings of ‘falling behind’ (Int2) emerged, fostering a sense of ‘inferiority’ (Int1&2) and further creating pressure towards preparing for the TOEIC: ‘because everyone around already had a TOEIC score, I thought I should study’ (Int1): ‘This sense of inferiority will force me to do it’ (Int2). The following quote highlights the extent that Jessica felt she was falling behind in comparison with others:

The ones that are falling behind will be working on TOEIC studies, but the good ones would already have achieved their target scores and now are preparing for speaking - speaking for interviews in corporations because speaking skills are needed for employment in large corporations now like the news informed. TOEIC (RC&LC) is just a basic now (Int2).

Certainly, a strong source of motivation for Jessica was the fact that peers were already ‘participating in internships’ (Int1) and working on other qualifications while Jessica was preparing for the TOEIC for the first time. Peers in Jessica’s major, in particular, may have also heightened the importance of the TOEIC. For example, Jessica suggested that TOEIC scores were more ‘important’ to advertising students ‘than others’ (Int1). Peers in Jessica’s year may have been a further factor where she felt she would ‘look bad’ if she didn’t prepare for the TOEIC given her status as a senior university student (Int1). TOEIC scores also appeared to influence access to peer support, as Jessica explained: ‘The ones who get decent TOEIC scores make up a study group on their own to practice conversation with each other. Of course I am not included in that’ (Int2).

In addition to peers, Jessica’s parents further influenced goals towards taking and preparing for the TOEIC, as established in the following quote: ‘Their influence is large in the amount and effort that I place into studying. If it weren’t for my parents, I would not be studying for
the TOEIC” (Int1). From this comment, however, it is difficult to establish if Jessica’s parents had directly encouraged her to take the TOEIC or whether the comment simply refers to studying in general as a way to advance career options. The desire to please parents nonetheless, appeared to have been influential, as further discussed in later themes.

c) Focus on the Standard TOEIC – not TOEIC Speaking
Although Jessica noted that many corporations required English conversation skills (as well as the Standard TOEIC), she showed little interest in preparing for TOEIC Speaking. Reasons behind this (coded from three comments) include: the perceived difficulty of preparing for the Standard TOEIC and TOEIC Speaking at the same time (Int1); wanting to start with the ‘basics’ first and not being able to ‘take the challenge of speaking’ (Int1); and a lack of access to the resources she felt she needed to be able to prepare for it: ‘I need help from institutions or lessons like now – but for TOEIC Speaking I need to speak to foreigners or Korean teachers…that’s kind of burdensome (Int1).

CATEGORY TWO: Actions
Three themes emerged with regard to the actions Jessica took to prepare for the TOEIC. As described, ‘actions’ refer to the course taken by the participant to realise the goal of preparing for the TOEIC. They include: (a) suspending graduation; (b) early preference toward directed learning; and (c) increased focus on learner-directed study.

a) Delaying graduation
As noted, towards the end of 2008, Jessica decided to take a year off from her university studies in order to prepare for the TOEIC: ‘If the TOEIC was not so important, I don’t think I would have done it’ (Int1). Jessica identified her parents as a major influence behind this: ‘If it were not for my parents I would not be studying for the TOEIC and I would not have withdrawn from school’ (Int1). However, in what appears to be a contradiction, Jessica also mentioned that her parents did ‘not really know why’ she had taken a semester off and that she had had to convince them of her decision to do this: ‘They objected to it and I persuaded them that I was choosing a better alternative but they are still sceptical about it’ (Int1). It is perhaps likely that Jessica was strongly motivated by parental pressure to get a job soon after graduating and believed that taking a year off to focus on the TOEIC would best support this. As she explained, if she did not get a job quickly after graduating, ‘it would be even more difficult to get a job’ (Int1) later on. In other words, graduates who did not get jobs soon after graduation became less employable. Taking a year off to prepare for the TOEIC was,
therefore, a way of improving her chances of getting a job soon after graduation. It is interesting, however, that despite parental encouragement towards getting a job, Jessica chose to not tell her parents that she was focusing on the TOEIC.

b) Early preference toward instructor-directed learning

Results show that 10 of the 13 actions recorded in June were instructor-led (including TOEIC classes and on-line Internet lectures). Qualitative results further support the idea that Jessica had an early preference towards teacher-directed learning due to a number of influencing factors. One factor was that Jessica believed such contexts to be more efficient in terms of increased concentration and retention, and motivation: ‘When I study by myself I have the tendency to stray off and waste time, however, when watching the lecture, I tend to concentrate on what I hear and as a consequence, retain more material’ (J8)…”If I study individually, I forget (Int1)’…‘Learning words and idioms while watching the lecture is more efficient compared to when I do it by myself” (J4). Jessica also explained how the online lectures helped motivate her to learn more:

The online video lecture makes me want to study more. When I study by myself, studying for TOEIC is arduous and tedious and it makes me want to give up. But somehow, when I study with the video lecture, I start to pick up on things and it makes me want to learn more (J2)

A lack of experience/ability studying English through independent measures may have further influenced a preference toward teacher-led learning. For example, in Journal 9, Jessica described how she wished she had the ‘ability’ to study with an ‘independent will’ and later linked this to ‘being Korean’. As she explained, ‘If I study alone, I can’t study because it’s difficult being Korean and studying English alone with a book’ (Int1).

c) Increased focus on independent methods of study

Despite the reasons above behind Jessica’s preference for instructor-led lessons, results reveal increased focus on independent learner-directed study in the second month of her preparation, where almost 8 of the 13 actions recorded in May included actions such as studying from TOEIC textbooks and working with a review notebook. The most frequent activity recorded in May was independent study using a TOEIC Listening text. Journals 10 and 17 show that Jessica purchased TOEIC listening and vocabulary books for the first time and began ‘trying out’ (J16) problems and ‘going through’ listening tracks in the books – a key change from focusing mostly on teacher-led actions.
The desire to ‘rapidly’ increase (J11) TOEIC scores was a likely influence behind this: ‘I heard that the listening score was the easiest to increase so I bought a book to focus on listening comprehension’ (J10). Starting at a ‘basic’ level was a key reason behind buying the ‘Tomato’ series of TOEIC books in particular: ‘Since I don’t have the basic skills necessary, I’m going to focus on the Tomato book first, and then move on to the Hacker’s TOEIC book’ (J10). Moreover, with regard to vocabulary, Jessica further mentioned hearing that ‘the vocabulary in the test had become harder’ (Int2) which was perhaps a further influence behind purchasing a TOEIC vocabulary book. Certainly, based on the desire to raise scores quickly, concern over more difficult vocabulary, and the fact that listening and vocabulary were not a major focus of either the Internet or class lectures (as described in later themes), Jessica turned to actions outside of the teacher-directed methods of study she had initially focused on. This theme also highlights the powerful influence of information and advice from the wider community.

**CATEGORY THREE: Operations**

Six themes fall under the category of operations, that is: behaviours used to accomplish the goal under the ‘conditions in which the activity unfolds’ (Lantolf, 2001, p. 145). They include: (a) the operationalisation of the TOEIC classes; (b) focus on grammar; (c) focus on vocabulary from different sources; (d) repetition, review and memorisation; (e) maintaining effort and pace; and (f) solving problems.

**a) TOEIC classes operate according to level and content**

At the time of data collection, Jessica was enrolled in a TOEIC 550 class and had previously participated in the TOEIC ‘basics’ class. An important theme to emerge with regard to TOEIC classes was how they operated at levels focused on target scores and how these levels also influenced the type of content that Jessica focused on. The following quote shows how the different levels of the classes corresponded to target scores on the TOEIC, but did not necessarily relate to the level of the student:

> Not all students in the 550 class have a score around 550. It’s not like students in the basic classes are really low in score and the ones in 550 are 550. The instructor said that students in the 700 and 750 classes are around 600 and the ones in the 550 class are around 400 or even less (Int2)

Of particular note, students were free to choose classes at their own discretion: ‘I was in the basics class, and I moved up because I wanted to’ (Int2). As a consequence, students could take higher level courses despite lower TOEIC scores. One reason behind doing this, as
Jessica suggested, was the hope of getting a higher score: ‘It’s just because students want to aim for a higher score. Even my friend who has a TOEIC score of 500 takes a 750 class’ (Int2).

Results also show how different levels of classes focused on different content. For example, moving from the basics class (which focused equally on TOEIC Listening and Reading) to the 550 class, Jessica found that the focus changed to Reading: ‘When I moved up to a class aiming for a 550 score, the class was focused on reading...The instructor told us at the beginning of class that we would focus on reading...leaving listening to study on my own’ (Int2). Not surprisingly, TOEIC Reading was the dominant focus of content in the first month of data collection.

b) Focus on grammar in TOEIC classes and Internet lectures
Sixteen comments in both interviews and journals support the idea that grammar featured as a key focus in TOEIC classes and Internet lectures. Jessica explained the general operation of the TOEIC 550 classes in the following way: ‘The instructor teaches grammar in class and at the end we solve questions’ (Int2). This theme is also supported by the fact that out of seven journal entries related to TOEIC classes, five included grammar under the journal prompt: ‘How I feel this activity contributed to preparation for the TOEIC’. One comment in particular, specifically linked grammar to reading comprehension: ‘I’m currently focusing on reading comprehension so it helps me with the grammar study’ (J1). In reading, as she further explains, ‘I need to know all the context and grammar to understand what is written’ (Int1).
Results also show a strong focus on grammar in Internet classes: ‘After I’ve watched about three video lectures (modifier and verb parts), I watch it again…the vocabulary section suffers a bit but I still watch the video lectures to build a solid base of grammar’ (J2). Grammar was mentioned as an area of focus in all seven journal entries linked to Internet classes.

c) Vocabulary content across a variety of sources
Ten comments across journals and interviews show how vocabulary, gathered from a variety of sources, was a particular focus of study. Some vocabulary came as a result of TOEIC classes, where ‘they teach some vocabulary’ (Int2), and to a lesser degree, TOEIC online lectures where in one journal Jessica described learning words and idioms while watching the lecture (J4). These are two of only a few comments connecting vocabulary to cases of direct teaching. More frequently, Jessica mentioned independently reviewing her vocabulary
notebook which contained unfamiliar words that she had come across in TOEIC classes, and in her Tomato basic TOEIC listening and vocabulary textbooks purchased toward the end of data collection.

d) Repeating, reviewing, and memorising material

Twenty-eight comments emerged in relation to repetition, review and memorisation as key strategies employed during test preparation. Twenty one comments related specifically to repetition and/or review. With regard to repetition, repeating online lectures, in particular, featured in a number of entries: ‘I will watch the entire Hacker’s video lecture once and watch it again’ (J4); ‘It’s a video lecture. It has the advantage of being able to rewind it’ (J12). Repeating MP3 files ‘on a loop’ when using the Tomato TOEIC listening texts also emerged as a recurring strategy. With regard to reviewing material, three comments in particular were linked to TOEIC classes where Jessica noted often reviewing material from the course book and her notebook (J18). At one time she also took a review class which involved a ‘clear review of the materials that [she] might have missed during the actual class period’ (J19). Jessica also reviewed the Hacker’s video lectures as a way of consolidating grammar: ‘If I watch the Hacker’s online lecture and review the material, grammar seems to settle’ (J6). She also ‘constantly’ (J2) reviewed the vocabulary in her personal notebook.

A key motivation behind the above strategies may lie in the following comment where Jessica notes, ‘it does take more time, but that is how I study – understanding fully before I move on to the next subject’ (Int1). The phrase ‘to understand fully’ is also used in the following journal entry: ‘Whenever I encounter material I don’t understand or have missed out on while listening to class lectures, I try to understand it fully by using the book’ (J9). The need or desire to ‘fully understand’ language material suggests that Jessica may have had a low tolerance for ambiguity, as she explained:

Others might not study like me. I think I’m doing it wrong but I think I should know what I have studied before I move on or I won’t understand the next thing either…I feel more comfortable doing this’ (Int1)...During the evening, I take a class, but once I miss out on one thing, then as a consequence I can’t seem to catch up (J15).

Certainly, the desire to completely or ‘fully’ understand something before moving on to something new appears to underlie the emphasis on repetition and review.

Eight comments were also coded in relation to memorisation as a recurring strategy. Memorisation was mentioned as a general strategy overall: ‘I tried to memorise everything’
(Int2), and was also connected to listening (Int2, J11), vocabulary (J2, J18) and grammar (Int2). In particular, Jessica mentioned a variety of different methods in which she memorised material. One way was by listening: ‘Just memorising by listening was good for me’ (Int2)…‘I tried to listen to lessons and just memorise them’ (Int2). Although finding it ‘tedious and annoying’ (J11), memorisation through dictation was a further strategy Jessica used, and working with a friend ‘matching’ words, was a strategy employed to make memorisation easier for her.

Of particular note, Jessica used the words ‘memorise’ and ‘review’ together, creating confusion over how, or if, she differentiated them. The following comment, for instance, may be an example of the words being used interchangeably, or may refer to different strategies:

If I memorise vocabulary with the help of a vocabulary book, I have a tendency to forget them, so I take care of such a problem by constantly writing out vocabulary from my vocabulary notebook and reviewing them in my spare time (J2).

It is possible that Jessica may have seen reviewing as a strategy or a step towards memorisation: ‘It seems easier to memorise words by reviewing them and organising the words as I solve problems’ (J18).

e) Investing time/effort and maintaining a constant/fast pace

Nine comments were coded in relation to this theme. Not surprisingly, in order to achieve goals associated with the TOEIC, Jessica recognised the need to invest a great deal of time and effort. With regard to learning vocabulary in particular, she explained, ‘It seems difficult to improve…It seems good results only come through investing much effort and time’ (J17). Similarly, although noting that it was ‘rather quite boring’, Jessica believed if she ‘constantly and diligently’ worked with her listening text book her ‘skills might improve’ (J20). More than this, however, Jessica also recognised the need to maintain a constant pace: ‘My peers say that if you lose pace, it doesn’t work. That’s why I keep on studying’ (Int2). This became evident where, after receiving lower than expected scores, she ‘stopped studying for a month’, which in turn made it ‘difficult’ for her ‘to start again’ (Int2). Losing momentum in this way was a key reason why, in her words, she failed to advance to the ‘next level’ (Int2).

f) Solving problems

A further strategy which Jessica felt was ‘very effective’ (J7) with regard to preparation for TOEIC was solving problems: ‘If I solve a lot of problems then it will be very effective’ (J7). ‘Solving problems’, as explained by Brain the translator-checker, is a direct translation
meaning choosing or selecting the correct answer. This strategy, coded from six comments, was linked to many of the aforementioned actions. For example, Jessica noted solving problems as a result of listening to online lectures (J6), using the Tomato TOEIC listening text book (J16), participating in TOEIC classes (J18), and directly solving problems from the ‘TOEIC test problem set book’ (J7). A key advantage of solving problems for Jessica was that it increased test familiarity. In one entry she explained how she had solved TOEIC problems after her ‘feel for the test’ had ‘deteriorated’ (J7). This was also the case with regard to solving problems in the simulated TOEIC tests: ‘Taking the TOEIC like this on a regular basis will help me get a feel for what TOEIC is’ (J14). Jessica’s limited experience with the TOEIC is likely to have been a key influencing factor behind this.

**CATEGORY FOUR: Outcomes of Actions and Operations**

Four themes emerged with regard to the outcomes of Jessica’s Test Activity: (a) preparation for TOEIC mostly unsuccessful, (b) limited application of learning in relation to English for purposes other than TOEIC, (c) wasted time, and (d) stress and pressure.

a) **Limited success preparing for the TOEIC**

Evidence (represented in 8 comments) shows that Jessica viewed her overall preparation for TOEIC as unsuccessful A major factor contributing to this perception was Jessica’s overall method of study: ‘I think my method was wrong’ (Int2); ‘I think my score didn’t increase because…my method of study wasn’t right for me’ (Int2); ‘Even after I did all that [study], I thought it’s not working….this is difficult’ (Int2). In the case of TOEIC Reading, Jessica explained that she was ‘not able to apply’ what she had learned for lack of ‘all the basics’ (Int2). She felt that a lack of vocabulary, in particular, restricted her ability to solve problems: ‘The class teaches things in grammatical context but when students try to revise the problems and try to solve them again, their lack of vocabulary holds them back’ (Int2)...’; ‘I tried to listen to lessons and memorise them but because my vocabulary was insufficient it just didn’t work’ (Int2). A further reason why Jessica perceived her method as unsuccessful was her ‘tendency to rely too much on TOEIC classes and on video lectures’ (J7) as opposed to independent study:

I think the time spent working independently was insufficient. I should have solved more questions, memorised more words but the amount of study overall was too much and I experienced a lack of time to revise everything I studied because the classes were on a daily basis (Int2).
Due to a perceived lack of success and failing to achieve her goal of 700 points, Jessica applied to a student exchange program and explained that if she were not successful, she would continue preparing for the TOEIC in Seoul for another three months. In other words, Jessica revised her initial goals as a consequence of feeling that her test preparation had been unsuccessful.

At the same time, Jessica did recognise (in five comments) improvement in some areas of TOEIC content: ‘Ever since studying for TOEIC my reading comprehension level seems to have increased a bit’ (J2); ‘After learning a bit of grammar, I think that I’m starting to pick up and actually understand things (J1). She also recognised how watching Internet lectures helped her ‘pick up on things’ and motivated her to ‘learn more’ about TOEIC (J2), and how her vocabulary skills developed as a result of solving problems (J7) and from listening comprehension (J16).

b) Limited application toward English for purposes other than TOEIC
Ten comments show how, in Jessica’s opinion, learning in preparation for the TOEIC could be applied to areas of English outside of the TOEIC; and seven comments relate to ways in which Jessica felt preparation for the TOEIC did not. In the former case, Jessica noted that overall, 20 – 30% of what she had studied was ‘maybe…useful to general English’ (Int2). In particular, she found that preparing for the TOEIC had helped her ‘understand more grammar and context in English’ (Int1). Here, the word context likely refers to the idea of gist: ‘[It] gave me a chance to understand the context of English…I know what point it’s trying to make’ (Int2). Jessica also mentioned how her vocabulary skills had increased and that this was ‘a bit helpful for learning English’, where ‘once in a while’ she recognised words from her vocabulary list at the movies. As a result, she perceived ‘improving vocabulary skills [as] a great help to learning English’ (J1). Jessica also felt that vocabulary supported the possibility of being able to converse with a ‘foreigner’: ‘It seems like practising constantly will make it possible for someone to converse with a foreigner (J11). Finally, evidence shows that preparation for the TOEIC further encouraged Jessica to learn more about the types of language learning that suited her: ‘I realised that although I do concentrate on what I hear, if I write down notes on what I hear, I see and recall a lot more words as well’ (J15).

Six comments, on the other hand, reveal how Jessica felt preparing for TOEIC had little application toward English for purposes other than TOEIC, as coded from interviews: ‘I don’t really think TOEIC increases English skills that much’ (Int1): ‘I wasn’t studying English, I
was studying TOEIC (Int2); ‘…there’s no student who is good at English just because they studied TOEIC. There’s know-how to the TOEIC’ (Int1). From this perspective, Jessica felt that ‘general English’ was ‘an area to study all by itself’ (Int1). In particular, she felt that preparing for the TOEIC had failed to enhance productive skills: ‘I was just memorising grammar and things, and I wasn’t able to study communication’ (Int2); ‘I don’t think it helps much in terms of English conversation (Int1). On a final note, Jessica explained, ‘Contrary to what I expected, I thought my English skills would get better as I studied for the TOEIC, but they did not’ (Int2).

c) Wasted time

Although Jessica had little previous experience with English, she recognised that studying English was important in ‘recent global times’ and something ‘quite connected’ to her future career: ‘With marketing there are some things that need to be written in English and I think communication skills are needed’ (Int1). In the case of the TOEIC, however, she explained that it seemed like ‘a waste of time’ (J1) and ‘not needed much in most offices except for interviews or on résumés’ (Int1). From this perspective, a common theme to emerge was how TOEIC took time away from other, perhaps more worthwhile, studies. As Jessica noted, ‘If [students] could study something they were interested in, in the time they spent on the TOEIC, they could use their knowledge for their majors more efficiently’ (Int2). The ‘reality’ of the TOEIC, as Jessica explained, is that people ‘agonise…trying to figure it out, as opposed to fulfilling their own needs and interests…[It] seems very sad to me’ (J21). ‘Why do I have to do this’ she asked ‘when I don’t even have enough time for my other studies’ (Int2).

d) Stress and pressure

Evidence shows, in five comments, that preparing for the TOEIC caused Jessica a great deal of stress and pressure: ‘These pressures are quite severe and a large cause of stress…I have much stress’ (Int1). Not surprisingly, given previous themes, a key influence behind the pressure and stress was perhaps validating her decision to take a year off from her studies to focus on the TOEIC: ‘All the results that I get in the time I’m away from school is all up to me. That gives me a lot of stress and emotional ups and downs’ (Int1). Feelings of starting TOEIC preparation later than peers was perhaps a further source of stress and pressure where in order to ‘keep up’ she needed to make up for lost time – ‘I started this whole ordeal much later compared to everybody else. I desperately feel the need to work that much harder to keep up (J15)…I am at a severe lack of time’ (J21). With the added pressure of keeping up
with peers in order to get a job and discovering the growing importance of TOEIC Speaking
Jessica explained, ‘It aches me to see other fellow students go through this TOEIC
ordeal…and the fact that the TOEIC also incorporates a speaking test eats my heart out’ (J21).
In this context her enjoyment and sense of agency in studying English was potentially
threatened as implied in the final comment: ‘I think I should enjoy studying English. I don’t
want to study English because I have to’ (Int2).

8.1.5 Overview of Test Activity: Jessica
Based on the above results, Figure 8.2, on the following page, provides a summary of what
Jessica perceived to be the positive and negative outcomes of her Test Activity in relation to
her motives and goals, actions and operations directed by a range of influencing factors. A
summary of Jessica’s Test Activity in comparison with the other non-English-major students
follows at the end of this chapter.
Standard TOEIC score of 700+
To gain access to internship programs
To secure employment

Influencing factors
- Competitive economy
- Competition amongst peers in the field of advertising
- Parental pressure
- Feelings of inferiority, pressure in senior year
- Fear of falling behind others

Suspending graduation
Influencing factors
- Parental pressure
- Previous Mock TOEIC scores

Level 550 TOEIC classes &
Internet lectures
Influencing factors
- University organisation of classes
- Limited experience (TOEIC & English)
- Preference toward instructor-led content & familiar culture of learning
- Previous TOEIC scores

Change to more independent methods of study: Textbooks and review notebook
Influencing factors
- Focus in institute on RC leads to independent study of listening in textbooks
- Desire to increase scores quickly by strengthening listening score

Focus on grammar & vocabulary
Influencing factors
- Content, organisation and instruction in TOEIC class ad online lectures
- TOEIC books
- TOEIC RC

Focus on Listening
Influencing factors
- TOEIC Listening books
- Belief that TOEIC scores will increase quickly by strengthening listening

Repetition & Review &
Memorisation
Influencing factors
- Review classes at institute
- Low tolerance for ambiguity
- Learning strategies used outside of class

Solving Test Problems
Influencing factors
- Content in TOEIC classes, online lectures, textbooks
- Little previous experience with the TOEIC

Positive Outcomes
- Improvement in TOEIC: RC, listening, & motivation toward the TOEIC.
- Improvement in general English: grammar, vocabulary and gist.
- Discovery of new strategies for independent language learning discovered.

Negative Outcomes
- Scores lower than expected due to: loss of momentum, lack of vocabulary & time to review because of demands from TOEIC classes.
- Belief TOEIC has little application toward English for purposes other than TOEIC and future career.
- ‘Wasted time’ - time spent on TOEIC reduced time available to study for major.
- Stress and pressure due to desire to validate suspension of graduation

Figure 8.2: Overview of Test Activity - Jessica
8.2 CASE STUDY TWO: SANTANA

8.2.1 Profile and Rationale

Santana joined the research as a senior with one semester remaining before graduation. He was recruited from the international lounge – a cafe-style setting for students to socialise and study in a language other than their first. Similar to Jessica, Santana also took a year off in 2008 in order to focus on English. As he explained, due to the fact that he had just focused on math and science as an engineering student, he felt the need to concentrate on English as a means of preparing for employment (Int2). In an early interview, Santana noted that English was a subject that he had ‘hated’ (Int1) in middle school and high school and had specifically avoided it when choosing his major. He also described his English as ‘terrible’ (Int1), despite conducting much of the interviews in English. Unlike Jessica and Steave (another engineering student), Santana was quite experienced with the TOEIC. Before participating in the research he had taken the official TOEIC 10 times and the simulated TOEIC over 20 times.

Santana became an interesting case to study in that before his third interview he successfully secured employment (despite having one semester left to complete before graduation). As a result, Santana was able to provide further insight into motivation toward TOEIC within the workplace. Further rationale behind including Santana was the fact that he was only one of two participants to take TOEIC Speaking; had extensive experience with the TOEIC (in comparison with the other non-English-majors), and also had many similarities with Jessica and Steave with which to compare and contrast results.

8.2.2 Description of Data and Data Collection

The first interview began in mid April 2009 and a second and final interview followed in June and August respectively. During this time, Santana maintained journal entries from mid-April to the end of May and took the official Standard TOEIC test in April and June; and TOEIC Speaking in June; after which he applied for a job and was successful. A total of 18 journal entries, capturing 33 hours and 50 minutes, was collected across 28 days. Each journal entry described a single action that Santana felt contributed to preparation for the TOEIC, with the exception of one journal entry (where Santana recorded his response to taking the TOEIC). Table 8.4 below provides a summary of the number of journals and actions recorded for each month; the months where interviews were conducted; and the months where the official and simulated tests were taken (with corresponding scores).
Table 8.4
*Overview of Data Collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of completed journal entries</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of actions</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of hours</td>
<td>20.30m</td>
<td>13.20m</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Standard TOEIC scores</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>710</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC Speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>unstated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Int1</td>
<td>Int2</td>
<td>Int3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All interviews were conducted with the interpreter (Joo), but Santana mostly used English. Interviews were transcribed and translated (where necessary) by Stanley (profiled in Chapter Five). Throughout results, comments made in English by the participant are presented with (E-) and have not been changed from the participant’s original words. For example, E-Int2 refers to a quote coded from the second interview spoken in English. Comments translated from Korean to English are coded with (T-).

8.2.3 *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Table 8.5 and Figure 8.3 below provide a picture of the different actions Santana recorded across 17 journal entries with regard to preparing for the TOEIC. Each action was clearly labelled and described by the participant causing no discrepancy with regard to counting or categorising the different types of actions taken.

Table 8.5
*Actions Contributing to Preparation for the TOEIC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC class</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent/unaccompanied (TOEIC books)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC focus with peer study group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All actions recorded in journals focused directly on the TOEIC, and of these actions, 13 out of 17 (28.5 hours) linked to TOEIC classes; 3 out of 17 actions (7 hours, 20 minutes) linked to independent, unaccompanied study involving TOEIC textbooks; and 1 action (2 hours), included independent study with a peer. TOEIC textbooks used during instances of independent study were the same as those used in TOEIC classes.
8.2.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

As with Jessica, the qualitative results are presented below beginning with the results of peer and member checking; and a description of the final categories and themes that emerged. It concludes with an overview of Santana’s Test Activity.

8.2.4.1 Results of Peer and Member Checks

Table 8.6 below provides an overview of the results of translation and code-checking. One minor issue (at the word level) was raised in relation to the translations. A data display of four categories, twelve themes and 136 related comments was presented to Grace for code-checking. Overall, Grace highlighted six concerns. This included five cases where she felt the quote did not match the theme (three of which belonged to the same theme), and one case where she felt the language of the participant was not clear enough to support the theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues of translation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote does not support theme</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response not clear enough to support theme</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, translation and code checking resulted in the removal of one quote that did not adequately match the theme, minor changes to the wording of one theme, and the extension of another theme. In the one case where Grace felt the response of the participant was not
clear enough to support the theme, the quote remained since the researcher felt that with more contextual background (not included in the data display) the participant had been clear. In the one case where the translation of the Korean was queried, the problematic word, which did not affect the overall meaning, was removed from the quote. A detailed description of each quote that came into question and the rationale behind the amendments made is provided in Appendix J. Unfortunately, the participant was unavailable for member checking.

8.2.4.2 Final Categories and Themes
Table 8.7 provides an overview of the final categories and themes that emerged from data analysis, as described in detail below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.7</th>
<th>Categories and Themes - Santana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GOALS/REASONS BEHIND TOEIC PREPARATION</strong></td>
<td>Number of Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Standard TOEIC and TOEIC Speaking to secure a job</td>
<td>Total: 12, Jnl: 1, Int 1: 3, Int 2: 2, Int 3: 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Promotions and scholarships</td>
<td>Total: 4, Jnl: 0, Int 1: 2, Int 2: 0, Int 3: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACTIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Focus on English conversation</td>
<td>Total: 14, Jnl: 0, Int 1: 7, Int 2: 6, Int 3: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) TOEIC classes</td>
<td>Total: 7, Jnl: 2, Int 1: 2, Int 2: 3, Int 3: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) TOEIC books</td>
<td>Total: 22, Jnl: 17, Int 1: 2, Int 2: 3, Int 3: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPERATIONS/CONDITIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Focus on TOEIC RC due to strength in TOEIC LC</td>
<td>Total: 5, Jnl: 0, Int 1: 3, Int 2: 1, Int 3: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Focus on grammar and vocabulary</td>
<td>Total: 17, Jnl: 1, Int 1: 0, Int 2: 0, Int 3: 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Solving problems &amp; practice tests</td>
<td>Total: 10, Jnl: 10, Int 1: 0, Int 2: 0, Int 3: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Taking notes, making tables and reviewing</td>
<td>Total: 5, Jnl: 4, Int 1: 0, Int 2: 0, Int 3: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) TOEIC teacher influences strategies</td>
<td>Total: 12, Jnl: 0, Int 1: 0, Int 2: 12, Int 3: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OUTCOMES OF ACTIONS AND OPERATIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Preparation for TOEIC strengthens understanding/makes learning English easier</td>
<td>Total: 15, Jnl: 11, Int 1: 2, Int 2: 2, Int 3: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) TOEIC useful for business/future career and everyday English</td>
<td>Total: 13, Jnl: 6, Int 1: 6, Int 2: 1, Int 3: 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CATEGORY ONE: Reasons/ Goals attached to TOEIC Preparation

Two themes emerged with regard to reasons and goals behind preparing for and taking the TOEIC (Standard & Speaking): (a) securing a job, and (b) promotions and scholarships.

a) **Standard TOEIC and TOEIC Speaking to secure a job**

Thirteen comments emerged in relation to the motive of preparing for the TOEIC in order to secure a job. Santana recognised that ‘many companies want a good score’ (E-Int2) and being a senior appeared to intensify his motivation toward test preparation: ‘When I was a sophomore and junior, I didn’t have burden in my mind, but these days I have many times...
burden (E-Int1). With one semester remaining before graduation, Santana began applying for jobs early and noted feeling that his ‘ability’ for one job in particular was ‘not enough’ due to the fact that (among other reasons) his TOEIC scores were ‘low’ (E-Int2).

Securing a job was a key motivation with regard to taking TOEIC Speaking where Santana described growing interest and requests for English speaking skills from larger companies:

These days many company want to TOEIC Speaking test so in Korea’s big company, for example just Samsung and LG they have to….they want to good TOEIC Speaking grade. So, when I was looking for a job, I looked advertisement in Hwansung, Daegu. The company [was advertising] just internship but the qualified is TOEIC speaking grade….I remember it was 6 or 7 so I take a TOEIC speaking test (E-Int3)

In addition to the influence of job advertisements, peers also appeared to motivate Santana’s desire to take TOEIC Speaking: ‘My friend went to Germany. He said he took TOEIC Speaking test and he recommended me – ‘You have to do speaking test, maybe you are good grade’ (E-Int3). Santana also viewed TOEIC Speaking scores as contributing a unique and competitive element to job applications: ‘In order to get a job, something unique like TOEIC speaking, which is unique in one perspective, may be in need. That’s why I took the exam this time…it will be a unique characteristic for me – something different, an edge’ (E-Int3).

Perhaps indirectly related to the goal of taking the TOEIC for purposes of employment, it is important to point out that Santana also recognised the growing importance of English ‘as a world-wide’ citizen, and the ‘need to learn English’ (E-Int1) and other languages, especially in relation to the type of career he was interested in. As he explained, ‘Japan has high quality machine design or maker materials so I want to study English or Japanese’ (E-Int3). Santana, therefore, appeared to display strong motivation toward providing TOEIC scores and at the same time recognised the authentic need for English in his future career.

b) Scholarships and promotions

Four comments reveal how TOEIC scores may prove influential in securing scholarships and promotions within the university setting and work place. In the university context, Santana explained: ‘...the university gives scholarship to students so university want TOEIC scores’ (E-Int1). He also explained that it was very important, from the perspective of the university, that students ‘experience’ TOEIC. At his new company, Santana also found that TOEIC scores between 700 and 800 worked towards bonus points that in turn contributed to promotions. Therefore, although securing a job was an initial motivation for preparing for
TOEIC, Santana found that even after achieving this goal, TOEIC remained important within the work setting where his motivation to take the test continued.

**CATEGORY TWO: Actions**

Four themes emerged with regard to the type of actions Santana took during test preparation, and the major influences behind these actions. They include: (a) focusing on English conversation, (b) TOEIC classes, (c) TOEIC books, and (d) focusing on TOEIC Reading.

**a) Focus on English conversation before and during test preparation**

Eleven comments were coded in relation to focusing on English conversation before and during TOEIC preparation. Results show that Santana began preparation for the TOEIC in his junior and senior years but had focused on English conversation in his sophomore year, taking conversation classes, and later participating in conversation study groups with peers from those classes. A number of influencing factors appeared to drive this approach toward language learning. Belief in how best to learn English was one such factor: ‘If you want a good TOEIC score, you spend only 6 months or one year, but English conversation is very difficult so you have to spend more time (T-Int2). Advice from seniors emerged as a further influence: ‘A senior said to start English conversation because English conversation is very difficult and needs a long time, so when I was a sophomore I started English conversation’ (T-Int1). Santana also believed that conversation skills were more ‘useful’ in terms of the growing need for English as a global language (especially in the automotive industry). As he noted, ‘I don’t think TOEIC is really useful but I do think English speaking skills are the most important when it comes to English (T-Int1).

In addition to focusing on conversation before preparing for the TOEIC, Santana also recognised the importance of focusing on conversation in tandem with test preparation – an approach he felt was unique among other students: ‘there is no one who studies both at once like me’ (T-Int1). While focusing on the TOEIC, he continued with his conversation study group twice weekly, ‘These days I study TOEIC and English’ (E-Int2). During the conversation study groups, which met two times a week, the members took turns discussing a different topic. Interestingly, conversation study group sessions were not mentioned in journal entries. When asked why this was the case, Santana explained, that the study groups were ‘only something like meeting people after the weekends and asking, ‘What have you been up to’, there wasn’t much to write about in journals’ (T-Int3). It is unclear if this suggests that Santana perceived little connection between the speaking group and preparation.
for TOEIC or not. Results do show, however, that focusing on conversation was part of Santana’s overall approach to increasing his global English skills and connected with his approach to preparing for the TOEIC - ideas developed in later themes.

b) TOEIC classes
Quantitative results show that 13 out of 17 journal entries included TOEIC classes at a language institute (outside of the university). Due to ‘homework and projects’ related to his major Santana noted being unable to continue classes the first time he had enrolled at a language institute. However, after taking a leave of absence before graduation, he found that he had more time to focus on the TOEIC and English, and was able to attend two-hour classes every day without ever being absent (Int2). It is unclear if Santana returned to the same language institute or whether he chose a different one. The main focus of the classes, however, included ‘part 5 and 7’ of TOEIC Reading. Santanta did not describe why he chose to attend an institute; however, he did describe in detail the influence that his TOEIC teacher had had on his learning, as discussed in a later theme, which may have contributed to reasons behind why he maintained classes at that institute.

c) TOEIC preparation books
All seventeen journal entries included TOEIC books under the prompt, ‘Details of the activity’. In other words, TOEIC textbooks featured as a core part of the curriculum in the TOEIC classes (J1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18) and were also used as the focus of independent, unaccompanied study (J13, 14, 17), and study with a peer (J2). In fourteen cases, ‘Hacker’s TOEIC’ and ‘Tomato TOEIC’ texts were used in tandem. Although preparation textbooks (in conjunction with handouts) formed a large part of the curriculum at the language institute, Santana also recognised advice from peers as a key influence behind using TOEIC textbooks: ‘My friend said you have to solve many book’ (E-Int1); ‘Last year people recommended to me, if you want good TOEIC score you have to solve many many books’ (E-Int2).

CATEGORY THREE: Operations
Four themes emerged with regard to operations associated with the course of action Santana took in preparation for the TOEIC. These include: (a) focus on TOEIC Reading, (b) focus on grammar and vocabulary during TOEIC classes, (c) taking notes, making tables and/or solving problems, and (d) the influence of the TOEIC teacher on strategies.
a) Focus on TOEIC Reading
Throughout journals only one action was linked to TOEIC Listening. As mentioned, TOEIC Reading (in particular Parts 5 and 7) dominated course content in TOEIC classes. TOEIC classes alone, however, may not completely explain why Santana focused on Reading as opposed to Listening. For example, he also focused on TOEIC Reading during cases of independent study (both unaccompanied and with a peer). The fact that Santana had scored higher points in TOEIC Listening in previous tests may have been an influencing factor: ‘My listening score[s] are always high’ (E-Int1) ‘I think listening skill more than upgraded, but reading is just steady’ (E-Int1). Santana linked higher scores in listening to his many years of conversation practice: ‘I [went] to English conversation institute continuously so my listening score is steady, but my reading score is low’ (E-Int1); ‘Listening comprehension is English conversation skill’ (E-Int1). As a result, due to his previous language learning experience he may have felt that he did not need to focus on TOEIC Listening to the same extent as TOEIC Reading.

b) Focus on grammar in TOEIC classes
All entries that related to TOEIC classes included a reference to grammar in the journal prompt: ‘How I feel this activity contributed to preparation for the TOEIC test’. Interestingly, Santana described the focus of each class in detail, often using specific metalanguage, for example, ‘I studied relative clauses and compared the differences between relative, interrogative and complex relative clauses’ (J18). The type of grammar he focused on included: gerunds (J1, J3, J6); clauses (J1, J18); sentence structure (J1, J8); tenses (J5, J6); infinitives (J4); passive voice (J6, J16); prepositions (J7, J9); conjunctions (J9, J15, J16); and qualifiers (J12). No other focus was mentioned in relation to TOEIC classes other than vocabulary (as found in two journal entries). This included ‘idiomatic phrases and test related vocabulary’ (J7); and ‘vocabulary in relation to prepositions’ (J15).

c) Solving problems/analysing question types and/or practice tests
Solving problems, analysing TOEIC question types and practice tests featured as a key strategy toward preparing for the TOEIC as presented in ten journal entries. Santana specifically related this to TOEIC classes in eight journal entries. In six entries he described solving problems based on discrete grammatical points in TOEIC textbooks, as shown in the following comments: ‘I solved problems on the gerunds part and reviewed them’ (J1); ‘I learned about the to + verb type sentences… and solved several sample questions’ (J4). In
four entries he described analysing question types or becoming familiar with problem types: ‘I was able to get used to the preposition problem examples’ (J9); ‘I was able to find out what the actual test questions look like’ (J8). For Santana, ‘getting used to’ (J2), or familiar (J13) with the TOEIC ‘testing style’ was a key advantage. Focusing on solving problems was also mentioned as a strategy taken outside of TOEIC classes (J2, 13 & 17). In addition to discrete problem samples, Santana also took practice tests in TOEIC textbooks where he found he was able to ‘check on [his] weaknesses’ (J13 & 17).

d) Taking notes, making tables and reviewing as key strategies
Santana described taking notes and making tables in five comments. In three journal entries related to independent, unaccompanied study, Santana mentioned the use of ‘reminder’ or ‘error’ notes (J13 & 17), and a notebook he created to review mistakes he had made ‘in order to not repeat’ them (J14). In addition to taking and reviewing notes, Santana also mentioned ‘making tables’ as a further strategy. In two entries related to TOEIC classes (J15 & 18), Santana made tables to ‘show vocabulary in relation to prepositions (J15); and to ‘understand a bit more about relative clauses’ (J18). It is unclear if making tables was a strategy encouraged by his teacher or if he constructed them on his own initiative.

e) TOEIC teachers influences strategies
Santana made eleven comments across interviews about TOEIC teachers. In particular he compared his current TOEIC teacher with a previous teacher and described the influence the new teacher had on his test preparation - especially with regard to focusing on structure and grammar; and using context. For example, where the ‘style’ of Santana’s first teacher was to ‘just memorise’ (E-Int2), his current teacher focused on structure and grammar:

Other teacher usually said remember and memorise and vocabulary. But my TOEIC teacher was different…that teacher said to me, first language structure and grammar…that style is I want style (E-Int2)

Where memorisation features as a recurring theme in the case of Jessica, ‘memorise’ or ‘memorisation’ was found in only one journal entry belonging to Santana. Before attending classes with his current TOEIC teacher, Santana mentioned that he too used to memorise but that his ‘style’ changed because of his new teacher (E-Int2).

In addition to less focus on memorisation and more focus on structure and grammar, Santana noted how his new teacher encouraged him to use context as shown in the following exchange:
R: How did your teacher’s style influence you?
S: [My] style has changed. Now I look at not only one, but I try to look at the whole thing. When I look at…for example a blank, I used to look at the blank and the words only and solve the problem, but now I look at the reading material, the blank, the context, then solve the problem (T-Int2)

This influence also extended to writing where Santana noted that ‘after meeting this teacher’ he saw ‘some of the context’ which made ‘writing sentences easier’ (T-Int2).

Although vocabulary was mentioned in only four journal entries, Santana’s teacher further appeared to influence his approach to new words. Where he previously learned one word and one meaning at a time, his new teacher’s ‘style’ was to present vocabulary used in a variety of contexts, presenting collocations associated with the word: ‘The TOEIC teacher explained the vocabulary. The teacher wrote economical + merchandise or car, but economy + crisis or situation. I think that style is very impressive to me’ (T-Int2). ‘Before I met that teacher’, Santana explained, ‘I only studied one word and one meaning’ (T-Int2). Santana also noted how he preferred the way the teacher explained if sentences were correct or not – something he felt other teacher ‘didn’t explain’ (E-Int2). Under the tutelage of his new teacher, Santana further expressed how he began to ‘have interest….enjoyment’ (E-Int2).

**CATEGORY FOUR: Outcomes of Actions and Operations**

Two major themes emerged under the category of outcomes of actions and operations. These include: (a) preparation for the TOEIC strengthens understanding and or makes learning English easier, and (b) preparing for the TOEIC is useful for business/future career and links to English for purposes other than TOEIC.

**a) TOEIC strengthens understanding/ makes learning English easier**

Fifteen comments link to the idea that preparing for the TOEIC strengthened understanding and made learning English easier for Santana. Eleven comments related to the influence that focusing on grammar had on positive outcomes. In the journal prompt, ‘Area of general English I feel this activity focused on improving (if any)’, Santana expressed how he came to get ‘a better grasp’ on different areas of grammar: ‘Prepositions are similar to conjunctions in that they are made up of similar words and their classification is similar…I was able to easily understand it after that’ (J9); ‘I was very confused with the tenses and the grammatical voices but through this process I was able to get a better grasp’ (J6); ‘Gerunds are quite confusing, but it has helped me to understand them’ (J3). Santana further noted how he was able to
differentiate grammatical functions due to preparing for the TOEIC in the following comments: ‘In the demonstrative pronouns part, I was able to easily understand the complex part and how it differentiates from ordinary pronouns’ (J11); ‘I was able to see similarities and differences between past and present tense and +ing forms’ (J5). He also explained how he was beginning to understand more about the structure of English:

As I study the TOEIC I begin to recognise basic vocabulary and grammar, so the sentences I used to stare at without a clue now appear separated. I’m seeing the structure of English little by little…I’m beginning to recognise parts of the structure of English sentences (T-Int 1)

Increased awareness regarding the structure of English further helped Santana understand text faster: ‘…as I began to notice how adverbs in between the words frame the sentence, it seemed to help me understand the general meaning faster (T-Int2).

Also linked to increased understanding, Santana discussed how test preparation in general made learning and using English easier: ‘…through learning the TOEIC I think I’m able to understand sentences and have an easier time learning English’ (J1). As mentioned, influenced by his TOEIC teacher, Santana also described how ‘seeing the context’ made writing sentences easier (E-Int2). Further to this, Santana found that by focusing on commonly used prepositions he was able to get used to an ‘easier’ usage of English (J7); and finally, due to understanding word structure and remembering words, Santana also explained how it had become easier to speak in English: ‘...because I study TOEIC, I [see] the word sentence structure, so I think more easy to speak English’ (E-Int1).

b) TOEIC useful for business/ future career and everyday English

Despite an earlier comment where Santana noted that the TOEIC was ‘not really useful’ thirteen comments across interviews and journals suggest that Santana did in fact view preparation for the TOEIC, as somewhat useful for business, his future career and everyday English. On three occasions, Santana noted how TOEIC content was necessary (E-Int1); helpful (J1) and important (E-Int2) with regard to practical application in the work force. The following comments express this view: ‘As you know that if I enter the company, I usually use business English. I think that many people [say] TOEIC is not important but I think that TOEIC is a little important (E-Int2); ‘Since TOEIC is based on business English, I think it is necessary in preparation for my career in a company. I guess it helps in that way’ (E-Int1).
Santana also connected the TOEIC to not only making learning English easier (as in the theme before) but also improving his everyday English and conversation skills. Six comments were coded in relation to this idea. Four comments, in particular, link to grammar, for example, ‘I learned that in between nouns there are several forms...that can change structurally depending on various cases. I learned that these sentences can be used in ordinary life’ (J8); ‘Qualifiers, being the basics of a conversation, helps with communication by simplifying complex sentences’ (J11). He further noted how studying TOEIC (focusing on nouns and adverbs) made it more ‘comfortable for English conversation’ (E-Int1). In addition to the influence of grammar, Santana found that while focusing on vocabulary he could ‘decrease [his] level of mistakes in everyday communication’ (J13). Of interest, where a number of negative comments emerged from the Test Activities of the other non-English-major case studies, overall, Santana presented a positive experience of test preparation where no negative outcomes emerged from his journals or interviews.

8.2.5 Overview of Test Activity: Santana

As with Case Study One (Jessica), Figure 8.4 provides a summary of what Santana perceived to be the positive outcomes of his Test Activity in relation to his goals, actions and operations influenced by a range of factors. A summary of Santana’s Test Activity in comparison with the other non-English-major students follows at the end of this chapter.
GOAL: Std TOEIC score of 700 – 800 + TOEIC Speaking to secure employment.

Influencing factors
- Job advertisements by big companies
- University requirements
- Globalisation
- Competition amongst engineers
- Recommendations by peers
- Belief in the need for English in future career

Focus on English conversation before and during preparation for TOEIC

Influencing factors
- Advice from seniors
- Belief – English language skill requires time.
- Belief – conversation skills are important and help prep for TOEIC

TOEIC Classes
No initial influencing factors mentioned; however, classes may have been maintained due to preference to learning strategies used in the class.

TOEIC Books
Influencing factors
- Content from TOEIC classes
- Limited time to attend TOEIC classes due to demands from major
- Advice from peers

Focus on TOEIC RC

Influencing factors
- Content in TOEIC classes and books
- Language ability - LC
- Improvement in Listening scores

Focus on Grammar & Vocabulary

Influencing factors
- Content in TOEIC class & TOEIC books
- TOEIC teacher
- TOEIC RC Part 5
- Results from simulated test

Taking notes, making tables, reviewing and/or solving problems

Influencing factors
- Content from TOEIC book and TOEIC classes

Using and understanding context & less focus on memorisation

Influencing factors
- Teaching style of TOEIC teacher

Perceptions of Positive Outcomes
- Focusing on grammar improves understanding/makes learning English easier
- TOEIC is useful for business/future career and everyday English
- Improvement in general speaking ability as noticed in conversation study groups

Perceptions of Negative Outcomes
None mentioned

Figure 8.4: Overview of Test Activity - Santana
8.3 CASE STUDY THREE: STEAVE

8.3.1 Profile and Rationale

Steave, a junior in the engineering department, was recruited from a major-related class and began participation in mid-April 2009. Steave presented himself as a keen learner of languages who did not begin studying English until high school (i.e. to prepare for the university entrance exam). After high school, Steave took conversation classes for one year to focus on learning English for his own interest:

Personally, I like to learn languages. I didn’t study English until I was in high school because it was difficult. Since getting older I have felt it necessary, so I took a conversation course for a year. Back then, my goal was just having some foreign friends and watching movies without subtitles (T-Int1).

Steave’s previous experience with the TOEIC was limited to participation in three simulated (or ‘mock’) TOEIC tests organised by the university, and his highest score was around 500. In one case, he had taken a simulated test to apply for a ‘Buddy Program’, where Korean students provide support to international students at the university.

Due to injury and hospital visits, Steave completed only one month of journals, and delayed taking the TOEIC until September 2009. His journal entries were somewhat sparse due to the injury, and perhaps, a self-acknowledged ‘weakness at expressing things in writing’ (Int3). Yet given that his interviews were particularly candid offering a rich source of data, his case was chosen for qualitative analysis. Steave was also chosen for purposes of comparison with the other participants since he also had limited experience with the TOEIC (as with Jessica) and was an engineering student (similar to Santana). A further factor behind including Steave was wishing to avoid the over representation of ‘diligent’ or ‘keen’ participants.

8.3.2 Description of Data and Data Collection

During six months of data collection (April – Sept 2009), Steave completed 13 journal entries and participated in three interviews. He attended a language institute for two months (April & May) but due to the injury mentioned above, and the vacation period (where he returned to his hometown) Steave discontinued TOEIC classes to focus on his health. Weeks before taking the official Standard TOEIC in September, he resumed an individual study program. He did not maintain journals over this period but discussed his approach to preparing for the test in the final interview. Table 8.8 below provides an overview of the data collection period and the number of entries and actions recorded.
Throughout interviews, Steave spoke mostly in Korean with an interpreter. The recordings were transcribed/translated by Stanley, and data was analysed for common themes following the framework of data analysis discussed in Chapter Five.

**8.3.3 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Of the thirteen journal entries, ten represented two-hour TOEIC classes which Steave took from May 6 to May 22. The remaining three journal entries explain why he was unable to attend the institute that day. Therefore, 100% of all recorded actions were related to TOEIC preparation classes. While the period in which Steave maintained journals was short, it is likely that most cases of attendance at the language institute during that time were logged. Qualitative results from interviews and journals help create a more comprehensive picture of Steave’s test activity as presented below.

**8.3.4 Qualitative Data Analysis**

The qualitative results are presented below beginning with peer and member checking. This is followed by a description of the final categories and themes that emerged.

**8.3.4.1 Results of Peer and Member Checks**

Table 8.10 provides an overview of the results of translation and code checking. The results of translation checks included one minor change at the word level, and one change at the sentence level. Thirteen themes were coded under the categories of: reasons for taking the TOEIC, actions, operations, and outcomes of actions and operations. Of the 96 comments recorded in the data display, Grace queried two comments.
Of particular note, the peer checker pointed out that although one theme referred directly to TOEIC Speaking, it was unclear whether the participant was referring specifically to TOEIC Speaking or EFL Speaking tests in general. She also felt that Steave’s changing views with regard to the TOEIC were not clearly represented. Consequently, peer checking resulted in the merging of two themes into one. This theme was titled: Steave’s changing perspectives toward the Standard TOEIC and to EFL Speaking tests in general. Appendix J provides a detailed description of concerns raised and actions taken. In the case of member checking, in the original transcription (before themes were coded), Steave isolated two comments that he felt had been transcribed or translated incorrectly. As requested by the participant, these were removed. The participant also looked at the categories and themes in a follow up interview with the researcher (and interpreter) and expressed no disagreement.

### 8.3.4.2 Categories and Themes

Table 8.11 below presents the final four categories, thirteen themes and 96 comments related to Steave’s Test Activity. A detailed description of each theme follows.

#### Table 8.10

**Categories and Themes - Steave**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES/REASONS FOR TAKING THE TOEIC</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Jns</th>
<th>Int1</th>
<th>Int2</th>
<th>Int3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Securing a job</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Changing perspectives regarding the importance of TOEIC RC&amp;LC and English speaking tests</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTIONS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) TOEIC classes at a language institute</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Independent preparation outside language institute</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPERATIONS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Key focus of study: Grammar and/or vocabulary</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Simulated/practice tests</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Memorisation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Preparation counter to preferred learning styles, beliefs about learning, and/or previous learning experiences</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTCOMES OF TEST ACTIVITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Little application towards English for purposes other than the TOEIC</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Exhaustion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Decreased TOEIC test anxiety</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Increased hesitancy and focus on accuracy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Decreased enjoyment, enthusiasm and/or interest</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Comments</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CATEGORY ONE: Goals/Reasons Behind TOEIC Preparation

Two major themes were coded with regard to goals and reasons for taking the TOEIC. They include: (a) securing a job, and (b) changing perspectives with regard to the importance of the Standard TOEIC and EFL speaking proficiency tests.

a) Securing a job

As with Jessica and Santana, ten comments across all interviews support the idea that attaining a score to get a job featured as a key motivation behind preparing for the Standard TOEIC. As Steave explained: ‘I started TOEIC because I needed a score’ (Int1). He further described his change of focus from studying English for ‘genuine’ purposes (i.e. taking conversation classes after finishing high school) to studying TOEIC in order to secure a job: ‘I started to study with a genuine reason but it ended up with getting a job or promotion. That’s the recent trend, although I don’t like it’ (Int1). While preparing for the test, Steave singled out securing a job as his only motivation behind taking the TOEIC: ‘...there’s no other motivation. There’s only the one goal’ (Int1).

Pressure from companies appeared to be a major influence behind the perceived need for TOEIC scores. Steave described TOEIC scores as a prerequisite in the application process: ‘The two basic things companies ask for are transcripts and TOEIC scores. Even though I’m better at other things, I can’t pass the first round without a good TOEIC score, even if I had other abilities to do the job’ (Int1). He also discussed cases where irrespective of the need for English in a particular job, English test scores were still required:

One of my friends had to take an English test for the job even though the job didn’t need English at all. In that case, it’s a waste of time and energy. Only a few specific departments in a job need overseas business trips. If you think of the whole company, not many people need to use English (Int 1).

His specific goal was to reach a score of 800 and as Steave explained in an earlier interview, he would continue preparing for the TOEIC until he attained it. A key influence behind this number appeared to be his particular field of study: ‘Even in the study of humanities they want a high score. Engineers are busy trying to gain a high score. The requirements used to be about 600, but now it’s more like 700 or 800’ (Int2). Steave’s aspiration to work for a foreign company (Int1) may have also influenced the desire for this particular score, though he did not specifically relate this.
b) Changing perspectives

Although attaining TOEIC scores to get a job was a key theme in early interviews, results show (as coded from 8 comments) that Steave’s perceptions regarding the importance of the Standard TOEIC and English speaking tests changed. For example, during the final interview, Steave discussed the diminishing popularity of the Standard TOEIC, mentioning how ‘major enterprises’ such as Samsung and Daewoo had ‘changed their minds’ and were not asking for the Standard TOEIC (Int3). Instead, he found that they were interested in other EFL tests such as TOEFL and TEPS (Int3). As a result, he suggested ‘it’s follow the leader from there onwards’ as ‘all other companies will follow’ (Int3). As a direct consequence, Steave expressed feelings of uncertainty about future test goals: ‘For now I’m thinking whether I should totally change the target language or try different kinds of tests like TEPS or TOEFL in addition to TOEIC’ (Int3).

Steave also showed changing perspectives with regard to the importance of English speaking tests. In the second interview, when asked why he was not taking TOEIC Speaking, he explained that he did not ‘place much importance in speaking tests because only a few places look[ed] at them’ (T-Int2). However, in the final interview, he noted ‘lately, when you hand in your resume, they say they take a look at speaking’ (T-Int3). Speaking in this case did not refer specifically to the TOEIC, but could have included an EFL speaking test. Steave also discussed a case where a senior he knew had studied hard to get a score of 900 on the Standard TOEIC only to discover that the company was more interested in a speaking score (T-Int3). Despite this changing perspective, however, Steave made no plans to take TOEIC Speaking or any other English speaking proficiency test. His belief that grammar should be prioritised over speaking and a lack of confidence in knowing how to study for TOEIC Speaking may have facilitated this, as shown in the following comments: ‘I think grammar and things like that are first in priority, and speaking can be left out for later’ (Int3); ‘It’s not that I don’t have any intention of doing [TOEIC speaking]. I just have no idea how I should study for it’ (Int2).

As evident through comments above which include the stories of others, a key source of information regarding changing demands from companies came from peers and seniors. When asked how he found out about changes in the demand for the TOEIC, Steave replied:

I found out through conversations with friends, seniors and professors…just naturally considering my age and grade, most of what we talk about is about employment,
English test scores, GPA’s and so on. So naturally, a flow of information comes in from this process (Int3).

Accordingly, influenced by information passed on by others, Steave perceived an increasing demand for English speaking tests and a diminishing demand for the Standard TOEIC most likely related to increasing competition with other English proficiency tests. This, as a result, caused uncertainty over how best to represent English proficiency to companies, and future plans of action.

**CATEGORY TWO: Actions**

Two major themes emerged with regard to the actions Steave took preparing for the TOEIC. These include: (a) attending TOEIC classes at a language institute; and (b) preparation outside TOEIC classes.

**a) TOEIC classes**

Steave’s main course of action was attending TOEIC preparation classes at a language institute. All journal entries relate to this context. Five comments from interviews and journals suggest three key reasons behind why Steave took this form of action. The first influence appeared to be the desire to quickly raise scores: ‘The reason why I’m taking TOEIC classes is to receive a high score on it’ (J1-10)…The institute teaches you formulas to raise your score’ (T-Int1). A second reason behind attending TOEIC classes included Steave’s inexperience with the TOEIC where he noted that instead of formulating his own study plans and strategies, he could ‘just take [his] teacher’s advice’ (J1-10). Finally, a key reason behind choosing the specific language institute that he did was that Steave was familiar with the teacher who had taught him in a previous (non-TOEIC) class.

**b) Preparation outside the language institute**

Although Steave logged no preparation outside the language institute in journals, he did mention doing homework in preparation for the classes such as ‘memorising readings’ (Int2), and work suggested by the teacher. In such cases Steave noted utilising the class book the teacher had made - a collation of material from well known TOEIC textbooks. He also mentioned preparing for the TOEIC at home two weeks before taking the test where he ‘went through basic grammar’ (Int3). Due to the lack of consistency with regard to the upkeep of journal entries it is unclear how much time Steave spent preparing for the TOEIC outside the institute and what this consisted of. This data comes from interviews alone. In saying this,
Steave was asked a number of times during interviews about this and revealed very little emphasis on preparation for the TOEIC outside the classroom other than that linked to TOEIC classes.

**CATEGORY THREE: Operations**

Four major themes emerged in relation to operations: (a) focus on grammar and vocabulary, (b) practice tests, (c) memorisation, and (d) preparation counter to preferred learning styles, beliefs and prior language learning experiences.

**a) Focus on grammar and/or vocabulary as a key focus of study**

Fourteen comments across journals and interviews emerged under the theme of grammar and vocabulary as a key focus of study. When Steave was asked during the second interview about his main focus of study he replied ‘grammar and vocabulary’ (T-Int2). Seven comments specifically relate to TOEIC classes. Examples of quotes linked to grammar include: ‘We solve grammatical problems’ (Int2); ‘Along with the lecture on grammar, I solve and examine problems that might come up on the TOEIC’ (J1). When asked to describe a typical class, Steave replied, ‘I study words every day, and if I studied grammar, nouns or grammar lessons, next I solve questions in relation to what I learned’ (Int2). Similar to Santana, in a number of cases, Steave specifically identified the grammatical features of the class in detailed meta-language: ‘We learned about tenses and agreements…’ (J1); ‘We learned about participle construction types and noun modifying participles that depict emotion and how to construct participles (J5). Three comments relating specifically to vocabulary in the TOEIC classroom included writing down commonly used words and expressions (J2); solving and memorising vocabulary (J5); and quizzes of common expressions (J4).

It is important to note that TOEIC classes did not appear to be the only influence behind Steave’s focus on grammar. When asked why grammar was a key focus to his overall preparation and if anyone had influenced this, Steave replied that he ‘realised himself’ that he had ‘needed to study more grammar and vocabulary’ (Int1). In addition, as introduced in a previous theme, it is possible that Steave prioritised grammar over other areas of English: ‘I think grammar and things like that are first in priority and speaking can be left out for later’ (Int3). In other words, although the institute appeared to lead the content of Steave’s learning, Steave’s underlying belief in the need to prioritise grammar may have influenced the action of taking TOEIC classes. Results from simulated tests may have also influenced Steave’s
desire to focus on grammar. For example, when asked in the first interview what he might do after receiving scores on his next simulated test, Steave answered: ‘If I get a bad score, I will go back to the beginning and study grammar again. If I get a good score, I will study less grammar and practice tests (Int1)’. Previous simulated TOEIC test scores, therefore, may have also influenced his focus on grammar and vocabulary.

b) Practice tests
Nine comments were coded in reference to practice tests as a focus of content. Practice tests refer to previous copies of the TOEIC or practice tests from preparation materials. In Steave’s case they were mentioned in reference to TOEIC classes: ‘we took a practice listening comprehension test’, and specific resources such as ‘the Mojilge TOEIC test book’ (as indicated in journals J9, 10 & 11). A major benefit of taking practice tests, from Steave’s point of view, was becoming ‘accustomed to the question types’ (J1-J10), whereby reducing feelings of anxiety as presented in a later theme.

c) Memorisation
Eleven comments emerged with regard to memorisation as a major strategy. Seven quotes specifically related to TOEIC classes. As Steave noted, ‘At the institution, I just memorised. Memorised as much as I could’ (Int3)...Memorise this word because it’s on the TOEIC. You don’t need to memorise this because it isn’t on the TOEIC - That’s how they teach. Like a math formula’ (Int1). Across five quotes, memorisation was closely linked to vocabulary including, ‘writing down often used words and expressions and memorising them’ (J2), and to taking a ‘memorisation quiz’ of expressions that ‘came up in the test’ (J4). Grammar and reading were also linked to memorisation: ‘It was difficult to understand the words and grammar that I memorised’ (Int2). When asked about how he studied for TOEIC Reading in general he answered, ‘I memorise part four, one reading at a time. I memorise a few readings before the lesson, and the lecturer lectures on that (Int2).

Steave also used memorisation strategies in preparation for the listening section. Influence behind this appeared to stem from information gathered from peers, as opposed to TOEIC classes: ‘In the listening parts three and four, students tend to memorise the whole question. They say that news and speeches that appear a lot on the TOEIC do help…so I thought, I needed to memorise a lot of the listening section and prepare a lot’ (Int3). Advice from peers with regard to memorisation strategies was also linked to TOEIC Speaking and grammar, ‘People who have done the speaking test say that they just memorise part four (Int2); ‘Even
people around me say that…they tell me to think of things simply; try to memorise grammar and things like that while studying for the TOEIC (Int2).

d) Methods/strategies counter to preferred learning styles, beliefs and experiences

Eleven comments emerged with regard to how methods and strategies ran counter to Steave’s preferred learning styles, beliefs about learning and/or previous language learning experience. With regard to preferred methods of studying, Steave explained how his preference for learning English was to focus on more communication: ‘The study method I originally wanted to use was a communicative method with some conversation’ (Int2)…‘I would choose communication and basic grammar rather than TOEIC classes’ (Int3). Related to this, Steave spoke about how his experience at the institute did not ‘work’ for him: ‘That’s how they teach. Like a math formula…It suits some students to raise scores but it doesn’t work for me. I feel bad. I’m doing it because other people are doing it’ (Int1).

In two cases Steave spoke of ‘better ways’ of learning that appeared to run counter to his experience of preparing for the TOEIC. One example of this is where Steave questioned the explicit teaching of grammar since he felt it was something that could be learnt ‘naturally’: ‘We don’t really need grammar in our daily lives in Korean. I think English is the same…You learn some basic grammar and you learn the rest of it naturally in your daily life. I think that’s a better way (Int1). Therefore, although Steave recognised the need to focus on grammar with regard to the TOEIC, he also appeared to question this with regard to learning English in general - as summed up in the following quote: ‘The way I study for the TOEIC is not exactly the way I want to study English (Int1).

A key influence behind these beliefs appeared to be his previous language learning experience, which he described as a ‘fun’ experience where he had ‘just enjoyed learning English’ (Int3). As he further explained: ‘I took a conversation class and enjoyed it. It took a while but after one year I could tell I had improved. Most of all, I enjoyed it’ (Int2). The following quote emphasises that a key reason behind this positive experience was a stronger focus on communication than on grammar:

I attended a conversation class for a year. I didn’t learn much about grammatical things. I was able to think up simple grammar, grammar that changes as I communicate with my teachers and learn from them about what is a better way of saying something. Although not much in relation to grammar was learned, and even though my communication wasn’t smooth, my communication levels were okay and most of all…learning English through communication was fun and comfortable (Int2).
Steave’s desire to focus on communication as opposed to grammar is further evident in the following quote where he compares TOEIC classes and conversation classes with regard to preferred methods of teacher feedback.

The difference is this - when I make a wrong English sentence, the TOEIC teacher tells me ‘You are wrong because of this, this reason’. But in conversation class, when I say something wrong, the teacher says the correct sentence back to me and I repeat it. I think that’s a better way to learn (Int1).

As such, results show that for Steave, preparing for the TOEIC appeared to strongly conflict with preferred learning styles and beliefs about language learning – factors closely related to previous communicative language learning experiences.

CATEGORY FOUR: Outcomes of Actions and Operations

Five themes emerged with regard to the outcomes of Steave’s Test Activity: (a) little application of the TOEIC for purposes other than the TOEIC, (b) exhaustion, (c) test anxiety, (d) increased hesitancy, and (e) reduced enjoyment/interest/enthusiasm.

a) Some/little application of TOEIC preparation towards general English

Three comments emerged from journals and interviews with regard to the perceived relationship between TOEIC and English for purposes other than the TOEIC. In journals Steave acknowledged little overlap. For example, in the section of the journal that asked the participant to comment on the area(s) of general English they felt their action had focused on improving, Steave presented only one response across eight journal entries: ‘I think this activity is limited to only improving my TOEIC test score results, and not on improving my English in general’. Other journal entries for this field were left blank.

During interviews, however, Steave recognised that he could not say that TOEIC and general English use were ‘totally separated’ and that ‘although they have different aims and need different study methods they are related somehow’ (Int1). More specifically, he identified vocabulary and grammar learned from TOEIC classes as being ‘useful’ for studying English in general. The extent to which this was the case was unclear from interviews. Of interest, however, was one comment where Steave felt that if his TOEIC scores improved, it would be ‘more helpful’ for his general English (J1). Although he did not elaborate, it might suggest the belief that studying for the TOEIC at higher levels may be perceived as having a greater positive impact on learning English for purposes other than TOEIC.
b) Exhaustion
In two interviews, Steave mentioned how preparing for the TOEIC had ‘exhausted’ him. One reason for this appeared to be a ‘one-sided’ focus on grammar instruction: ‘...all those formulas make me feel exhausted’. A further factor was pressure from taking TOEIC classes alongside other ‘school tasks’ where it had become ‘more than [he] could bear’ (Int3). Interestingly, despite exhaustion and the strain of preparing for the TOEIC alongside other subjects, Steave noted that he did not ‘hate English in itself’ (Int1).

c) Decreased TOEIC test-taking anxiety
Seven comments emerged with regard to anxiety over taking the TOEIC. These feelings appeared to change throughout interviews. In the first interview, Steave noted that he felt nervous about taking the test and related this to the fact that he ‘was not very good at English’ and had not ‘studied very much’ (Int1). During the third interview, however, he noted that, although he felt more nervous taking the ‘real’ test as opposed to taking simulated tests, ‘it wasn’t significant’ (Int3). Steave also described how his feelings of anxiety appeared to differ from the experiences of peers. He described how friends had told him that they had felt greater levels of anxiety when they had taken the real TOEIC for the first time. When asked to explain this, he accredited his lack of anxiety to taking simulated and ‘preparation exams’, and other EFL tests which had been ‘more nerve-wracking’ (Int3). A further reason, however, may have included Steave’s changing attitudes towards the importance of the test as outlined in the category of goals and motivation.

d) Increased hesitation and a focus on accuracy
The above theme emerged from the final interview (represented by two extended comments, and one related comment). While preparing for the TOEIC, Steave noticed that his focus on accuracy had changed and he had begun to feel more hesitation with regard to speaking in English. Prior to preparing for the TOEIC, he explained:

I used to just speak out anything that came across my mind. I just tried to match the pieces of the words that I knew…Like they say - a lack of thought is equivalent to bravery. I just said anything that came to mind (Int3).

After preparing for the TOEIC Steave found that he hesitated more before speaking: ‘I hesitate a little because I know a little’. This was closely linked to a focus on grammar: ‘Now that I know some grammar, I think before I speak and say to myself - Is this right grammatically?: Am I saying things correctly?’ (Int3). Interestingly, Steave noted that this outcome was neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’, but rather had made him ‘personally concerned’ that
the people he spoke to would prefer him to speak ‘naturally and freely’ as opposed to worrying about grammar.

e) Negative outcomes on enjoyment/interest/enthusiasm in English

‘Having fun’ emerged as an important factor for Steave with regard to learning. Adjectives such as fun, enjoyment, enthusiasm were mentioned at least thirteen times throughout interviews. An example of the importance of interest and fun includes Steave noting how he chose his TOEIC classes due to the teacher being ‘interesting’. He also used having ‘fun’ as a strategy to learning new words and solving problems: ‘I try to have fun in knowing one more word and solving one more question’ (Int2). What is more, Steave mentioned taking conversation classes (prior to the research) ‘for fun’ (Int3). While preparing for the TOEIC, however, evidence from six comments (particularly in comparison with previous learning experiences) suggests that Steave experienced decreased interest, enjoyment and enthusiasm studying English. These comments appear to contradict a previous comment where he said that he did not get ‘uninterested in English because of TOEIC’ (Int1). The following comment exemplifies this well, ‘When I started studying for the TOEIC, unlike before, it started to feel like studying - not for fun’ (Int3). Steave further expressed the fact that although he felt the institute was responsible for increasing his score, it had failed to interest him and as a result his ‘enthusiasm about English fell’ (Int3). In the third interview, Steave also twice mentioned how his enthusiasm and interest had fallen, noting that his aim was to ‘get over the TOEIC as quickly as possible’, in order to ‘pay attention to regaining interest’ in English (Int3).

8.3.5 Overview of Test Activity: Steave

Figure 8.5 on the following page, provides an overview of Steave’s Test Activity including what he perceived to be positive, negative and neutral outcomes in relation to the goals, actions, operations and influencing factors that defined his Test Activity. A summary of Steave’s Test Activity in comparison with the other non-English-major students follows at the end of this chapter.
RC/LC TOEIC score of 800+
To secure employment

Influencing factors
- Company requirements
- Expectations associated with major
- Belief that grammar and RC/LC should come before Speaking

TOEIC Class

Influencing factors
- Teaching of formulas to raise score
- Desire to reach high score quickly
- Previous inexperience with TOEIC
- Familiarity with teacher

Independent study at home with TOEIC class materials

Influencing factors
- Directed by TOEIC teacher and content in TOEIC classes

Focus on grammar & vocabulary

Influencing factors
- TOEIC class
- Belief in the importance/need of grammar
- Previous TOEIC scores

Focus on practice tests

Influencing factors
- TOEIC class

Memorisation

Influencing factors
- TOEIC classes
- Advice from peers
- TOEIC RC Part Four

Positive Outcomes
- Some grammar and vocabulary useful for everyday English
- Reduced TOEIC test anxiety

Neutral Outcomes
- Greater focus on accuracy over fluency due to focus on grammar

Negative Outcomes
- Overall, little application towards English for purposes other than TOEIC
- Exhaustion
- Decreased enjoyment in English due to comparisons with previous language learning experience & instruction counter to preferred learning style

Figure 8.5: Overview of Test Activity - Steave
Chapter Summary

Chapter Eight reported on the test activity of three other-major participants (Jessica, Santana and Steave) in their junior and senior years at university. These case studies provide a varied picture of TOEIC preparation, motivated by a range of factors.

Motivated Test Goals

At the centre of each student’s test activity was the goal of taking and preparing for the Standard TOEIC, motivated to a large extent by the perceived need to gain TOEIC scores for employment. Competition within the job market and advice from peers and parents appeared to strongly influence this perception. The participants created target scores ranging from 700 – 800+, motivated by perceptions of language ability, competition within different fields of study, and previous test scores and experience with the TOEIC. Unlike other non-English-major participants, Santana also included preparing for TOEIC Speaking as part of his test goals. Factors influencing the decision to engage or not engage in TOEIC Speaking among participants included: perceived importance placed on the test by companies, strength of qualifications, future career, perceived ability, confidence in speaking, experience preparing for speaking tests, belief in the sequence of learning, and advice from peers.

Learner Action

In response to the above motives and goals, the participants engaged in various actions, drawing upon specific learning communities in support of test preparation. All three students took part in instructor-led preparation courses, online, at a language institute and/or on campus. Key factors influencing this action included limited experience with the TOEIC and/or English (Steave & Jessica), uncertainty over how to study English independently (Jessica), and the belief that TOEIC classes would support the rapid increase of scores (Steave). The type of teacher also appeared to influence the choice of preparation classes (Santana & Steave). Other actions linked to student test activity included independent study through TOEIC textbooks, and materials provided by preparation classes. A key difference between Santana and the other two case-studies was that Santana, keen to use English in his future career, focused on conversation skills in tandem with preparing for the TOEIC.

Operations

Influenced by a range of factors, including the conditions created by different learning communities, students operationalised their learning in various ways. Instructor-led
preparation courses appeared to influence a focus on TOEIC Reading and in particular, grammar and vocabulary. Other factors, however, also appeared to influence the type of content students centred on, including: belief in the importance of grammar (Steave), perceived language ability (Santana), and the results of previous test scores (Steave & Santana). Findings also show that Jessica focused on the listening section to a greater extent than Steave and Santana, motivated in part by the belief that focusing on listening would bolster scores to a greater extent. With regard to strategy use, preparation classes and materials (used in class or independently) appeared to draw students toward solving practice items (Jessica, Santana & Steave) and memorisation (Jessica & Steave). However, as shown in the case of Santana, the types of operations students engage in may be greatly mediated by different teaching methodology. Other strategies mentioned included: repetition, note-taking and making tables. Jessica also engaged in independent language learning strategies for the first time as a result of preparing for TOEIC Listening.

**Outcomes**

Despite the fact that Steave and Jessica found some TOEIC content, such as grammar and vocabulary, useful for everyday English, overall they felt that their test preparation had little application towards English for purposes other than the TOEIC. Moreover, although Jessica believed that her TOEIC Listening and independent study skills had improved somewhat, overall she believed her method of study to be unsuccessful. A lack of foundational knowledge, where the level of the content exceeded her language ability, appeared to be a key influencing factor behind this. Other negative outcomes to emerge from Steave and Jessica’s test activity included: feelings of resentment over ‘wasted time’ (Jessica), anxiety, despair and exhaustion (Steave & Jessica), and in the case of Steave, decreased enjoyment in English, as influenced by preferred learning styles and previous language learning experiences. Steave also recognised greater attention on accuracy over fluency due to focusing on grammar. However, as he noted, this was neither a positive or negative outcome. Although Santana also participated in TOEIC classes and used TOEIC books, data analysis revealed only positive outcomes related to his test activity. Focusing on grammar (in TOEIC classes) appeared to improve his understanding of English in general and made learning English easier. Santana also believed that preparing for the TOEIC was useful for business and everyday English. Chapter Ten discusses some of the reasons behind why students, including the English-majors presented in the next chapter, may experience different outcomes as a result of preparing for the same test within similar contexts.
Chapter Nine

RESULTS: INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

English-Majors

9.0 Overview

Chapter Nine presents the results of two English-major case studies: Sunny and Tina. As with the previous chapter, each case study begins with a profile of the participant and the rationale behind their selection. It follows with a description of the data and the results of data analysis in two parts. The first part includes the quantitative results of journals showing the different actions that the participant took, and the second part presents the qualitative results including the major categories and themes that emerged from the in-depth analysis of journals and interviews. Each case study concludes with a visual data display of the participants overall Test Activity, and the chapter ends with a summary of both cases.

9.1 CASE STUDY FOUR: SUNNY

9.1.1 Profile and Rationale

Sunny, a senior in her final year, joined the research project in response to an invitation presented in a class related to her double major (education and English literature). Her overall goal was to become an English teacher, but she was also open to other career options. After returning from a year in Canada, Sunny took the TOEIC for the first time in December 2008 scoring 715. She explained how she had not prepared for the test due to believing that her time in Canada had strengthened her English enough to score well. However, due to lower than expected scores, Sunny decided to put more focus on directly preparing for the TOEIC. The rationale for presenting Sunny’s story includes her decision to take TOEIC Speaking where few participants had, interest in the influence of her experience overseas, the fact that she took the TOEIC a number of times throughout data collection, and the rich source of data gathered from journals which she maintained over a long period of time (relative to other participants).

9.1.2 Description of Data

Interviews began in early April 2009, and ended in early November 2009. During this time, Sunny maintained journal entries from April to September and took part in four interviews.

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9 The year after data collection, Sunny secured a temporary English teaching position at a local high school.
Due to a teaching practicum (connected with her major) she did not prepare for the TOEIC or complete journal entries throughout most of May and part of June. She took a simulated Standard TOEIC test in August and the official Standard TOEIC test in August and September. Towards the end of data collection she also decided to focus on TOEIC Speaking which she took in September. A total of 34 journal entries were collected. Table 9.1 below provides a summary of data collection including scores gained from both simulated and official TOEIC tests. The table shows a difference of 115 points between the simulated test and the official test in August, and an increase in 85 points between official tests taken in August and September.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of journal entries</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simulated TOEIC score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>850</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official TOEIC RC&amp;LC scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>735</td>
<td>820</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official TOEIC Speaking score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>160</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of interview</td>
<td>Int 1</td>
<td>Int 2</td>
<td>Int 3</td>
<td>Int 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews 1 & 2 were conducted with the interpreter (Joo) who was seldom called upon for interpretation. Accordingly, interviews 3 & 4 were conducted in English without the interpreter present. Journal entries, however, were mostly written in Korean and translated into English by Stanley (profiled in Chapter Five). To differentiate quotes spoken in English and those translated from spoken or written Korean, E and T are used respectively. For example, E-Int2 refers to a quote coded from the second interview spoken in English. Quotes in English are presented verbatim and non-target like use has not been changed.

9.1.3 Quantitative Data Analysis

Sunny completed journals on 34 days and participated in 62 separate actions, (i.e. at times she participated in more than one activity on one day). In a follow up interview, Sunny was asked to clarify how each action related to the specific indicators on the journal template so that the researcher could clearly isolate the aim of each action, the type of action, and the corresponding comments. In cases where two different TOEIC books were used on the same journal page these were counted as two separate actions since Sunny differentiated these as separate actions completed at different times.
As Figure 9.1 below shows, of the 62 actions recorded in journals, 69% were actions that Sunny felt supported preparation for the TOEIC but were first aimed at improving English for other purposes (i.e. indirect contribution to TOEIC). Close to one third of all activities were those directly centred on the TOEIC. Twenty three percent of all actions were focused on the Standard TOEIC and 8% of all actions were directed at TOEIC Speaking.

![Figure 9.1](actions.png)

Table 9.2 below presents the specific types of actions undertaken by the participant. Actions indirectly contributing to the TOEIC included: watching TV/movies (42%); conversation study groups (19%); tasks and/or texts related to major (5%) and other (3%).

| Table 9.2 Actions Contributing to Preparation for the TOEIC: Sunny |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                     | April | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Total | %         |
| Indirect Actions    |       |     |      |      |     |      |       |           |
| Watching TV/movies  | 3     | 0   | 7    | 10   | 6   | 0    | 26    | 42%       |
| Study group         | 1     | 0   | 1    | 6    | 4   | 0    | 12    | 19%       |
| Actions related to major | 2   | 0   | 1    | 0    | 0   | 0    | 3     | 5%        |
| Other               | 0     | 0   | 1    | 0    | 0   | 1    | 2     | 3%        |
| Direct Actions      |       |     |      |      |     |      |       |           |
| RC & Vocab books    | 0     | 0   | 0    | 3    | 8   | 0    | 11    | 18%       |
| TOEIC Speaking books | 0   | 0   | 0    | 0    | 0   | 5    | 5     | 8%        |
| Non-TOEIC books     | 0     | 0   | 3    | 0    | 0   | 0    | 3     | 5%        |
| TOTAL                | 5     | 1   | 13   | 19   | 18  | 6    | 62    | 100       |

TV/movies included a range of different popular American drama series and movies accessed from the Internet, and the conversation group consisted of 5 – 6 members who met weekly
for 1.5 – 2 hours. Sunny described the study group as follows: ‘usually we have one topic and we discuss about that topic. We have one co-ordinator (each week). The co-ordinator asks questions and we answer’ (E-Int3). Content associated with study groups included short articles or texts focusing on a range of topics such as: hobbies (J1), military service (J12), human interest stories from around the world (J16, J19) and politics (J21). Actions related to the category of her major included preparation for a test in a content based education class taught in English (J2), and study connected to a required course book - ‘Grammar in Use’ (J3&J4). The category of ‘other’ included reading a book out loud (J10), and attending a function with international students (J29).

With regard to actions focused directly on the TOEIC, textbooks were used in every case – TOEIC preparation textbooks accounted for 88% of all activities focused directly on the TOEIC, and non-TOEIC texts accounted for 12%. Results also show that of the 19 activities connected to TOEIC textbooks, Hackers Reading was used in 8 cases, Hackers Vocabulary in three cases, and Hackers Speaking in five cases.

In summary, results show that of all actions perceived as contributing to preparation for TOEIC, over two thirds were those whose primary purpose was to improve English for purposes other than the TOEIC. Watching TV/movies was a dominant action, representing over 40% of all actions. Under one third of all activities were those directly focused on the TOEIC, where test preparation books and other textbooks featured as the only course of action presented in journals. Despite taking classes in English, only a small number were specified as contributing test preparation for the TOEIC.

9.1.4 Qualitative Data Analysis
This section presents the qualitative results of journals and interviews. It begins with the results of peer and member checking and follows with a description of the final categories and themes that emerged. It concludes with an overview of Sunny’s Test Activity.

9.1.4.1 Results of Translation, Peer and Member Checking
The results of translation checks included two changes at the word level, and three changes at the sentence level where meaning had been affected. Nineteen themes were coded under the categories of: (a) goals/reasons behind preparing for the TOEIC: (b) actions, (c) operations, and (c) outcomes of TOEIC Test Activity. Appendix L provides a sample of the data display. Of the 151 comments included in the data display, peer checking resulted in two queries.
questioning if the participant’s words had been clear enough to support the themes. Details of translation and coding concerns and actions taken in response are outlined in Appendix J. With regard to member checking, the participant was given a copy of the translated versions of the journal entries and a copy of the final themes and categories. No major discrepancies were noted.

9.1.4.2 Final Categories and Themes

Table 9.3 presents an overview of the final categories and themes, and the representative number of comments from each data source. A detailed description of each theme follows.

Table 9.3
Categories and Themes - Sunny

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and Themes</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) GOALS AND INFLUENCING FACTORS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Attaining a score and/or getting a job</td>
<td>14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Peer and parental pressure associated with TOEIC</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Changing motivation toward taking TOEIC Speaking.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) TOEIC in preference to and in competition with other tests</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) ACTIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Indirect contribution to the TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Study for major</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Watching movies/TV</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Weekly conversation group</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Direct Focus on the TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) TOEIC and non-TOEIC books</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Study group</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) OPERATIONS (content/strategies/rate and sequence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Indirect contribution to the TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Focus on speaking, reading, and vocabulary in conversation study groups</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Repetition &amp; memorisation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Subtitles</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Direct Focus on the TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Focus on grammar to support TOEIC Reading</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Some memorisation of vocabulary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Producing language under time pressure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) OUTCOMES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Direct preparation for the TOEIC supports general English</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) TOEIC text books restrict access to variety</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Test scores influence confidence, motivation and focus of future TOEIC study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Increased motivation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of comments</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* total includes one quote from email correspondence
CATEGORY ONE: Goals/Reasons Behind Taking the TOEIC

Four major themes emerged with regard to the reasons behind taking and preparing for the TOEIC: (a) securing a job, (b) peer and parental pressure, (c) increased motivation to take TOEIC Speaking, and (d) TOEIC in preference to and in competition with other tests.

a) Securing a job

As with the other-majors presented in the previous chapter, for Sunny (represented across fourteen comments) achieving TOEIC scores in order to get a job featured as the main goal behind preparing for the TOEIC: ‘We need a score…The main goal is to get a job’ (E-Int1). The fact that she was a senior in her final semester appeared to create an added sense of urgency. The following quote explains how pressure to take the TOEIC increased throughout her years at university:

> When I was sophomore, I didn't think about TOEIC because it wasn't that important and nobody talked about this. We just focused on our own subjects which were related with our major. However, when I was junior and senior, TOEIC was getting important. Everyone who wanted to get a job needed TOEIC score, so lots of students stayed at the library and studied TOEIC (E-Email)

As an indication of the importance of test scores, Sunny explained that she would take the Standard TOEIC every month until she reached a score of around 900 or 850. Netizens\(^\text{10}\) appeared to be a key influence behind gaining this specific score (and a score of 7 on TOEIC Speaking) where she read on-line that people ‘should get a TOEIC score over 900 and then a speaking around 6 or 7’ (E-Int3). Certainly, when Sunny got level 7 on TOEIC Speaking she noted she would not take the TOEIC Speaking test again but would rather try a different EFL speaking test\(^\text{11}\). Results also show that public opinion, with regard to the expectations of particular companies, appeared to prioritise the Standard TOEIC over TOEIC Speaking which led Sunny to feel that companies ‘care[d] about’ reading and listening scores more (E-Int3). As a result, Sunny aimed to continue taking the Standard TOEIC until she reached her target score.

b) Peer and parental pressure

Further influences behind preparing for the TOEIC included friends, peers and parents, as coded from nine comments. When asked who influenced her most to study the TOEIC, Sunny explained how friends with higher scores were a strong motivation: ‘Lots of friend got

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\(^{10}\) The term netizen refers to a combination of the English words Internet and citizen.

\(^{11}\) However, a further influencing factor may have included uncertainty, as voiced by the participant, as to whether she was able to achieve level 8 and the potential waste of money.
good score - Over 900. So, yes it pushes me like - You should study TOEIC. Your friend got a good score. You also get a good score too’ (E-Int1). She particularly noted ‘envying’ one friend who had also been to Canada for a year and had scored over 900. Having lived in Canada for one year and scoring 715 on the TOEIC, appeared to cause feelings of insecurity: ‘Usually they [peers] think, oh you were in Canada, so maybe you are great English, so you will get high, high TOEIC score or something…Too much, too much, too much’ (E-Int2). For this reason, Sunny explained that she avoided telling people her score. Education majors, however, did not appear to be as influential as other majors:

My major is education so they [peers in Education] don’t really interested about TOEIC. They don’t take TOEIC because they have another test. They don’t need this one if they don’t wanna get a job with a company, they wanna go (teach at) school’ (E-Int3).

Sunny, therefore, may have had different goals to other education majors. Having a double major in English literature may have been an influence behind this as peers in English literature were perhaps more likely to talk about EFL test scores.

In addition to peers, parents also influenced Sunny in ‘pushing’ her to gain higher scores: ‘My parents push me (E-Int3)...My father said ‘So you have a high score? So I say not yet. He say ok, do your best’ (E-Int4). Avoiding the disappointment of her parents appeared to be an important concern. For example, when she achieved lower points on the official TOEIC in September compared to the simulated TOEIC (taken a month earlier) she explained that she wouldn’t tell her parents for fear she would ‘disappoint’ them (E-Int3).

c) Changing motivation toward taking TOEIC Speaking

Related closely to themes above, is the theme: changing motivation toward taking TOEIC Speaking, which emerged towards the end of data collection (in Interview Three). Six comments relate to this theme. Before the third interview, Sunny had mentioned not wanting to take the test because she was ‘not really that interested’ (E-Int3) and thought that it was ‘a little bit expensive’. She had also felt that because the test was ‘new’ and that ‘a lot of people’ did not know about the test, it was ‘not really important’ (E-Int3). These feelings changed, however, in response to growing advice from the Internet community (as shown above) and from peers who encouraged her to take TOEIC Speaking. Sunny also felt that TOEIC Speaking scores would strengthen her résumé:

I suddenly felt like I should write something down in the resume. Lots of people say to me, why don’t you take TOEIC Speaking tests? So that’s why I suddenly decided
that I should take TOEIC speaking test…a lot of company are about TOEIC speaking test score, so I felt it was really important’ (E-Int3).

As a result of these influences, Sunny took the Speaking test in September.

d) TOEIC in preference to and in competition with other tests
A further influence behind preparing for the TOEIC was the perception that it was easier than other tests and encouraged a greater chance of success. For example, although Sunny noted that the OPIC was ‘better’ in that it could ‘show your English ability well’ (E-Int4), she chose to take the Standard TOEIC noting that, in addition to demand from companies, it was ‘a little bit easy one’ (E-Int4). Moreover, although she was scheduled to take the high school English ‘teacher’s test’ she decided instead to prioritise the TOEIC. When asked if the TOEIC was more important to her than the teacher’s test she replied, ‘Yes, because that test [the teacher’s test] is really hard to pass – in this year I think it is almost impossible’ (E-Int2). Sunny also commented on the fact that she found the TOEIC more interesting than the teacher’s test: ‘When I study TOEIC kind of interesting like because I like English and then kind of grammar too but education a lot of theories….not as interesting’ (E-Int4). In addition to having interest in the TOEIC, and weighing up chances of success it is possible that Sunny perceived the TOEIC as offering greater support towards getting a job – ‘I wanna be a teacher but that’s a little hard. I wanna get a job…maybe in education…anyway we need English’ (E-Int4).

CATEGORY TWO: Actions
Results from journal entries reveal that Sunny engaged in actions that (i) indirectly contributed to the TOEIC and actions that were (ii) directly focused on the TOEIC (as outlined in Chapter Seven). Both types of actions played an important role in Sunny’s overall preparation as described below.

i) Indirect Contribution to the TOEIC
Three major actions were coded as indirectly relating to the TOEIC: (a) watching movies/television, (b) weekly study groups, and (c) major-related study.

a) Watching movies/television
As noted in quantitative results, watching movies and television accounted for 42% of all activities which Sunny felt contributed to her preparation of the TOEIC. As Sunny explained,
‘[it’s] not really for TOEIC but it’s going to be helpful for TOEIC’ (E-Int2). Twenty three comments across journals and interviews relate to this theme.

A key reason behind using movies and television to study English was the desire to ‘maintain’ her listening skills: ‘Watching movies is one of the methods I use in order to maintain my listening skills’ (T-J1); ‘By listening to daily expressions (through movies) all the time, I think I can maintain a certain level of listening skills at all times’ (T-J5). This action likely stemmed from her desire to maintain the listening skills she had acquired in Canada:

The reason why I turn on a movie every morning is to get myself (my ear) familiarised with English. Compared to the time I was in Canada, I am exposed to much less English in my daily life, so I’ll just have to make do with the morning movies (T-J13).

Exposure to interesting and motivating content was a further influence behind using movies and television to support her English (evident in eight comments). Words such as: entertaining (J6), fun (J18), enjoyable (J15), motivation (J6), interesting (J5), and exciting (J7) describe this action. As Sunny explained, ‘It feels great knowing that I’m studying and enjoying at the same time’ (T-J15).

When asked how this action supported her TOEIC preparation, Sunny connected it to TOEIC Listening: ‘…it must help me with listening comprehension’ (T-J1); ‘…it might make the listening comprehension problems easier for me to solve’ (T-J13); ‘…this could really be helpful for the TOEIC listening comprehension section’ (T-J9). In particular, she revealed how consistent exposure to ‘natural’ English and/or different accents supported preparation for the TOEIC: ‘I watch the Simpsons to expose me to natural English’ (J13); ‘Through movies I’m able to naturally get used to native speaker dialects or accents or pronunciation’ (T-J1); ‘There are several characters in the drama who use different dialects such as American, British and even an Arab accent’ (T-J5). Sunny also believed that listening to movies and television had contributed to a high score in listening with regard to previously taking the TOEIC

Since none of the actions taken to directly prepare for the TOEIC included TOEIC Listening, it is possible that watching TV/movies supported her test preparation more than she perhaps realised. However, other reasons for not directly preparing for TOEIC Listening may have included the fact that she had greater confidence in her listening ability in comparison with reading: ‘I think my listening is ok but reading part, pretty terrible’ (E-Int1), or that she found
the idea of studying from books unappealing: ‘To be honest, going all the way purchasing TOEIC related listening comprehension books and studying them would be tedious for me’ (T-J1).

Of note, due to the fact that Sunny decided to take TOEIC Speaking towards the end of data collection, no connection was made in journals between watching TV/movies and TOEIC Speaking. However, when asked if she thought this action had in fact helped her preparation for TOEIC Speaking she replied, ‘Listening and speaking? Yes it goes together…cause every day, I listened to the movie or music or drama…I sometimes lipped to them…not out loud…but like murmur. I think that helped a lot’ (E-Int3). It is possible that this action, therefore, also supported her preparation for TOEIC Speaking.

b) Weekly conversation study groups
As shown in quantitative data, weekly study groups accounted for 19% of all activities. Thirteen comments across journals and interviews also relate to this action. Similar to the action of TV/movies, a major aim behind attending study groups was to maintain exposure to English:

Since returning from Canada, I use Korean all the time while I’m in school and the time spent using English is truly lacking so I’ve decided to join a study group in order to at least use English for a few hours….it gives me a chance to speak and hear English (T-J1).

Although maintaining a certain level of general speaking ability, in particular, was the main influence behind attending the study group (Int-2, J1 & J13), Sunny also connected the study groups as contributing to TOEIC Reading (J1, 13, 14, & 16). This was most likely due to the fact that the study group read an article every week: ‘...we read an article every Monday…this must truly be helpful with TOEIC reading’ (T-J1). Looking up unfamiliar words was also linked to ‘help[ing] with TOEIC reading comprehension’ (T-J14). Again, due to the fact that Sunny decided to take TOEIC Speaking towards the end of data collection, she made little mention of how her conversation study group may have contributed to preparation toward TOEIC Speaking. It is possible, however, that attending the conversation group had provided her with confidence to take TOEIC Speaking.

c) Few classes related to major support preparation for the TOEIC
Quantitative data shows that only three journal entries, or 5% of all actions, were linked to classes within Sunny’s major. This included two cases of using the text ‘Grammar in Use’ in
class (J3; J4); and preparing for a test in a content-based class taught by a native speaker (J2) where she notes, ‘without actually using a TOEIC book and/or studying for listening or reading exclusively, classes such as this one must help me with TOEIC’ (T-J2). Sunny referred to these activities as strengthening TOEIC Reading, grammar and vocabulary in particular (Int2; J2, J3); however, she also highlighted that ‘if you look at it a bit differently, you could use it for writing, listening and speaking as well’ (T-J3). As opposed to separating general English from preparation for the TOEIC, this comment and the following one reveal how Sunny appeared to take a holistic view of language learning: ‘Studying for my major – English is not different from studying TOEIC. They are helpful to each other’ (Int2). It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that only a relatively small number of entries linked content in English classes to preparation for the TOEIC. Although Sunny took one major-related class taught in English, only one journal entry (describing preparation for a quiz) connected this class to supporting preparation for the TOEIC: ‘I had to completely memorise four pages of handouts that the professor had given us. Through this activity I was able to learn a lot of new vocabulary’ (T-J2). It is interesting, that the only time this class was mentioned was in the case of memorising vocabulary in preparation for another test.

ii) Direct Focus on the TOEIC

Two major actions were coded in relation to direct focus on the TOEIC: (a) textbooks; and (b) vocabulary study group, as described below.

a) TOEIC and non-TOEIC textbooks

Using textbooks was the only action mentioned in journals related to directly preparing for the TOEIC. Twenty-six percent of all actions involved the use of TOEIC textbooks (Hackers TOEIC Reading, Vocabulary and Speaking). Sunny also used one non-TOEIC text in three actions. Seventeen comments across journals and interviews relate to this theme.

The results show that using TOEIC textbooks was a new action for Sunny: ‘Before, I didn’t buy the book so I didn’t have any tips for taking the TOEIC’ (E-Int3); ‘I purchased TOEIC vocabulary book for the first time’ (T-J16). Feeling confident about English after returning from Canada was perhaps one reason why Sunny had not previously used any TOEIC preparation materials. A further influence may relate to the following comment: ‘I don’t like study using the book. It’s pretty bored’ (E-Int3). A key change in motivation behind using TOEIC texts, however, was to quickly raise scores: ‘...the only reason why I’m using this book is to simply increase my TOEIC score quickly’ (T-J17); ‘...this activity will help me
raise my score in a short period of time’ (T-J18). In particular, Sunny believed that the TOEIC texts would help increase familiarity with patterns and typical problem types (J26), and frequently used vocabulary items (J20). As it was the first time for Sunny to take TOEIC Speaking, familiarity with the overall test format and design was a key reason behind using a TOEIC Speaking text: ‘[I] want to figure out what kind of questions there are and how to solve them (T-J26). Sunny also used one non-TOEIC book to help prepare for TOEIC, i.e. Grammar in Use (Intermediate). A key motivation behind this was to help her prepare for TOEIC Reading, particularly with regard to part 5 (J4). Sunny first used this book in one of her university classes (J3) and later found it useful for the TOEIC (J20 & 24). In other words, she was able to utilise resources from her major to support TOEIC preparation.

b) Vocabulary study group
Towards the end of data collection, Sunny mentioned a new action that she had begun in mid-September – a vocabulary study group. Due to journal entries finishing at this time, there were no entries; however, Sunny described her vocabulary group as five members who used a variety of vocabulary books covering 120 words at each meeting and taking small ‘tests’ (E-Int3). It is unclear how often they met or how long the group continued. What is interesting, however, is that despite forming groups to study English in response to classes associated with her major, Sunny had noted in an earlier interview that she preferred not to work with others with regard to the TOEIC. As she explained:

Because this kind of study [TOEIC] I need to focus on by myself. If I’d study with other people, I think not really good. Just speaking practice is good with other people. But reading part…I need to pay attention, like not with other people…other people make me don’t focus on reading (E-Int2).

Therefore, by starting a TOEIC study group, she appeared to introduce a new action counter to initial beliefs. A key influence behind this included the desire to improve low scores on TOEIC Reading, and she found working with others ‘fun’ where books were ‘boring’. She also appeared to welcome accountability and peer support that kept her on target: ‘I should remember a lot of vocabulary so I can’t do it alone, cause nobody check so I need somebody who can study with me…If I do it alone maybe I get lazy’ (Int3).

CATEGORY THREE: Operations
The category of operations (including the focus of content and strategies) is divided into two parts: (i) operations that indirectly contributed to the TOEIC, and (ii) operations in direct preparation for the TOEIC.
i) Indirect Contribution to the TOEIC

Three operations were coded with regard to actions taken to improve English in general but also indirectly contributed to the TOEIC: (a) focus on speaking, reading and vocabulary linked to study groups, (b) repetition and memorisation, and (c) using subtitles.

a) Focus on speaking, reading, and vocabulary in conversation study groups

Sunny mentioned different areas of language foci in journals. As noted, maintaining speaking skills was a key influence behind participating in study groups where members debated and discussed a wide range of topics (J1; J11; J12). Reading comprehension was also a key focus where the co-ordinator of the group would bring a text related to a topic of interest to read and discuss (J1). Another area of language mentioned was vocabulary where, in one case, Sunny ‘learned some new expressions and did a vocabulary test for an hour and a half’ (T-J19). Although grammar was not a direct focus, Sunny also described how the conversation study groups indirectly led her to focus on her weaknesses in grammar: ‘I realise my weak areas of my English during the study group. When I speak in English, I often make mistakes such as using the wrong tense or dropping prepositions’ (J19).

b) Repetition and Memorisation

Across six comments Sunny described how repetition featured as a key strategy, particularly in the case of watching movies and television: ‘I have repeatedly watched the movie so many times’ (T-J9); ‘I’ve seen this movie four to five times already (T-J1). Influences behind this strategy include the desire to increase listening comprehension (J1, J9, J10, J13) and for ‘picking up new expressions’ (J13). Repetition was also mentioned with regard to one study group activity where, through repetition and using context, she noted being able to ‘find the meaning’ (J13). Memorisation was also mentioned as a strategy in two journals, including in preparation for a test associated with her major where she ‘had to completely memorise pages of handouts’ (T-J2); and in preparation for her role as the co-ordinator of the study group for the week where she memorised ‘all the difficult vocabulary’ (J13).

c) Subtitles

The use of, or avoidance of, subtitles featured as a recurring strategy to improve listening (coded from ten comments). It was also linked to previous success with the TOEIC: ‘I tend to watch movies without subtitles and it seemed to help me with preparation for listening comprehension in the last TOEIC (J1). Even when subtitles were present she noted ‘trying her best’ (J3) not to look at them, instead relying on the context (J7) to comprehend meaning.
However, in cases where comprehension was completely lost she noted using subtitles (J3, J5) or in some cases she would alternate the use of subtitles where it was ‘possible for [her] to pick up more expressions (J10).

ii) Direct Preparation for the TOEIC

Four operations were coded in relation to actions Sunny took in direct preparation for the TOEIC. They include: (a) focus on grammar, (b) memorisation, (c) producing language under time pressure, and (d) familiarisation with test format, patterns and problem types.

a) Focus on grammar to support TOEIC Reading

Of the eleven journal entries related to TOEIC Reading textbooks, nine (or 82%) focused specifically on grammar – particularly with respect to part 5 of TOEIC Reading. The following comments in journals highlight this: ‘I studied Hackers TOEIC Reading focusing on grammar’ (T-J18); ‘I studied the Hackers TOEIC focusing on grammar (J25); ‘Hackers TOEIC Chapter 1 – Subject verb’ (J17). Although Sunny mentioned having difficulty with other areas of TOEIC Reading, grammar appeared to be a priority especially given the limited time she felt she had: ‘I have problems with parts other than part 5 of the Hackers TOEIC book, but I don’t think I have the time to look through all of it before the test’ (J24).

b) Some memorisation of vocabulary

In addition to memorising as a strategy associated with English for purposes other than TOEIC, Sunny also mentioned memorising as an operation in direct preparation for the TOEIC (found in three comments in two journal entries). In each case, memorisation was linked to vocabulary and to TOEIC Reading: ‘I memorised some TOEIC vocabulary…words related to the subject of the economy. This might help me on the TOEIC reading comprehension’ (J16). Sunny also mentioned memorising lists of words as a strategy for improving her score over a short period of time. Later, in journals, however, she expressed uncertainty over memorising lists of words:

I bought a word book that has frequently asked words in the TOEIC test. Now I am wondering if it will help much. I thought I needed it to improve my score in a short period of time. Instead when I find a new word in a sentence, I guess the meaning of the word and look it up in the dictionary. Then I memorise the words with the sentence. I think it works for me than just memorising lists of words (J20).

There was no further mention of memorising lists after this journal entry. Moreover, in comparison with Jessica and Steave, memorisation did not feature as a major strategy.
c) Producing language under time pressure

Due to the decision to take TOEIC Speaking towards the end of data collection, very few comments were made with regard to strategies and specific content associated with preparing for the test. However, one focus of preparation mentioned in journals was producing language under time pressure, particularly with regard to parts 3, 4 & 5 of the test as found in two comments. In particular, using Hackers TOEIC Speaking, Sunny practiced strategies for finding solutions in ‘a short period of time’ (J27 & 28).

CATEGORY FOUR: Outcomes

Four themes emerged under the category of outcomes: (a) direct preparation for TOEIC strengthens general English ability, (b) TOEIC Speaking textbooks restrict access to variety, (c) test results influence confidence, motivation and focus of future study, and (d) preparing for the TOEIC increases motivation to study English and achieve other goals.

a) Preparation for the TOEIC strengthens English for other purposes

Ten comments show how direct preparation for the TOEIC (through textbooks) strengthened English for purposes other than the TOEIC. Although Sunny noted that the ‘only reason’ for using TOEIC textbooks was to raise her score, she also recognised how this action ‘could improve [her] general English skills’ (T-J17). For example, she explained how studying for the TOEIC helped identify her overall weakness in grammar: ‘Before starting to study I thought maybe I know a little about grammar but it was not true. I was really bad, not good, not good at grammar and reading’ (E-Int3). She also found that the grammar that she studied was particularly useful for reading. When asked, ‘Do you think your general English ability is improving because of studying for TOEIC’ she replied, ‘[If] I understand grammar, it’s good…in many ways like, this rule is pretty hard but if I know grammar, like easier to read…a little bit (E-Int3). She further noted how ‘Words, vocabulary and grammar’ together led to ‘better understanding’ (E-Int4). Of interest, this realisation emerged in response to a class associated with her major:

S: When I read the article or book, I can find some words that I remember from yesterday.
R: From TOEIC study?
S: Yes, it’s pretty good.
R: When does it happen?
S: In English class – reading in detail.

In addition to TOEIC textbooks, Sunny applied an expression from ‘Grammar in Use’ (a text linked to preparation for TOEIC) in a conversation study group session:
I used an expression I had learned from the book ‘Grammar in Use’ in conversation study group today. I had to think about it for a bit in my head before actually saying it but I think with repetitive usage it’ll come out automatically (T-J17).

In other words, due to preparing for the TOEIC, Sunny continued studying from a book associated with one of her major classes which she then found had practical application toward English for purposes other than the TOEIC.

b) TOEIC Speaking textbooks restrict access to variety

Although results show that Sunny found the TOEIC Speaking text useful in terms of becoming familiar with the overall format of the text and questions, she also noted, in two journal entries, how she felt restricted by the target sentences: ‘This book covers restricted areas of learning by focusing on certain types of sentences/questions/patterns (T-J28)...I realised that it is dangerous to depend on the book too much even though the book helps me. It seems like the book prevents me from using various expressions (T-J30).

c) Test results influence confidence, motivation and strategies

Five comments show how test results from the official and simulated TOEIC appeared to influence Sunny’s confidence and motivation, and strategies for future study. With regard to confidence, Sunny explained how after receiving a much lower score on the Standard TOEIC than expected (after returning from Canada) she began to feel uncertain about her English:

> Before taking TOEIC test I was a little bit confident to speak or [if] someone ask[ed], how do I say or some questions or something, I was like Ok, I’m gonna do that or something. But after taking TOEIC test…Uh…I’m not sure about my answer or something (E-Int1).

Conversely, in cases where Sunny felt she did well on the TOEIC she noted feeling a ‘can do’ attitude with ‘expectation and encouragement’ (E-Int3), which, in turn, led to increased motivation to study more. After informing her parents of the score she received from TOEIC Speaking (Grade 7) Sunny noted feeling ‘proud’ and ‘happy’, determined to ‘study more’ (E-Int3). Similarly, after receiving encouraging scores from the early simulated Standard TOEIC test, she mentioned thinking, ‘Wow, if I study a lot maybe I will get high score soon’ (E-Int3). In reality, however, although she studied more for a few days, she found she became ‘lazy’ as time ‘went by’ (E-Int3). It is possible that high scores from the simulated TOEIC test had also discouraged motivation to study: ‘It made me expect like I would get a high score in this test...A lot of people said [the simulated test] was more difficult than the real TOEIC. I didn’t study a lot. I expected a lot but real TOEIC was pretty hard’ (E-Int3).
The results of test scores also influenced future learning actions and operations. For example, as noted, because of lower than expected scores in TOEIC Reading, Sunny decided to join a vocabulary study group (E-Int3); and in response to scores in reading being lower than listening, she focused more on reading in direct preparation for the TOEIC. Interestingly, when asked if the breakdown of skills provided on the official score certificate (see Appendix M) influenced her in any way she answered ‘no’. The results show that although Sunny scored highest in vocabulary and grammar in tests taken in August and September, she continued to focus on vocabulary and grammar and noted that vocabulary in particular should be a focus of attention in the future. Results from Reading and Listening scores as a whole, therefore, appeared to influence broad learning actions and operations such as focusing on either reading or listening.

**d) Increased motivation towards studying English and other goals**

Four comments show how preparing for the TOEIC provided Sunny with positive goals and motivation to study English. For example:

> I have a goal so I should learn about something of English, so that is good…if I have a goal to have something, I can do it’ (E-Int3); ‘It was good time for keeping me [at] the desk. If I don’t have a goal like this, I [wouldn’t] have high score. I wouldn’t study this much on my English’ (E-Int3).

In particular, she noted she would not have learned so much vocabulary without the influence of the TOEIC (E-Int3). The TOEIC appeared to not only influence the amount of time she spent studying English but also encouraged a wider range of actions and operations that she might not have participated in if she had not prepared for the TOEIC: ‘If I didn’t have a goal, I keep watching movie or something’ (E-Int3). Sunny also noted how preparing for the TOEIC helped her to ‘have goals for achieving other things’ (E-Int3), i.e. ‘things’ other than English. However, it is not clear what goals she was referring to.

**9.1.5 Overview of Test Activity: Sunny**

Figure 9.2 provides a summary of Sunny’s Test Activity including positive/neutral and negative outcomes in relation to goals, actions and operations directed by different influencing factors. A summary of Sunny’s test activity follows at the end of this chapter.
Standard TOEIC score 850 - 900
TOEIC Speaking 7
To secure employment

Influencing factors
- Advice from Internet community
- Public opinion supports prioritisation of Std TOEIC
- Peer and parental pressure
- Experience abroad leads to desire for higher scores
- Belief: higher chance of success with TOEIC than teacher’s test

Figure 9.2: Overview of Test Activity - Sunny

INDIRECT Contribution to TOEIC
- TV/Movies & Weekly conversation study group
  Influences: desire to reduce rate of language attrition
- Some classes related to major

DIRECT Focus on TOEIC
- New Action: Hackers TOEIC Textbooks
  Influences: lack of experience with TOEIC; desire to quickly raise scores, and increase test familiarity with TOEIC Speaking.
- Non-TOEIC Textbook
  Influences: concern over Part 5 of the Std TOEIC; familiarity with book used in English class.
- Change from independent study to shared vocabulary study group
  Influences: finding textbooks boring; lack of success with textbooks; need for accountability, preferred language learning style.

INDIRECT Contribution to TOEIC
- Focus on listening, reading, vocabulary, speaking
  Influences: Conversation study group
- Repetition and memorisation
  Influences: TV/movies, study group and test associated with major.
- Using/avoiding subtitles

DIRECT Focus on TOEIC
- Focus on TOEIC Reading and grammar
  Influences: lower scores in TOEIC Reading than TOEIC
  Listening TOEIC Reading Textbook; Part 5 of Std TOEIC test
- Some memorisation of vocabulary
  Influences: TOEIC vocabulary textbook; study group
- Producing language under time pressure
  Influences: TOEIC Speaking test; TOEIC Speaking textbook

Positive/Neutral Outcomes
- Watching TV/movies improves TOEIC Listening and increases familiarity with accents on the TOEIC
- Conversation study group strengthens TOEIC Reading
- Focusing on grammar and vocabulary in TOEIC and non-TOEIC textbooks strengthens English for purposes other than TOEIC
- Increased confidence and motivation in English due to increase in scores
- TOEIC pushes motivation to study grammar and vocabulary – areas she may have avoided otherwise

Negative Outcomes
- TOEIC Speaking texts restrict access to a variety of expressions due to formulaic structures
- Decrease in confidence in English due to lower than expected TOEIC scores.
- Decreased motivation to study TOEIC due to higher scores
9.2 CASE STUDY FIVE: TINA

9.2.1 Profile and Rationale

Tina, a junior majoring in English literature, joined the research project in response to an invitation presented in one of her classes. She had had no previous experience taking the official Standard TOEIC but had taken three simulated tests. She too had spent time abroad in 2007 to focus on English, including eight months in Canada and three months in the Philippines. Reasons behind selecting Tina as a case study include the fact that journals and interviews resulted in extensive and candid data, and while she shared many similarities with Sunny (such as experience overseas and the desire to be an English teacher), she took a somewhat different approach to preparation toward the TOEIC, whereby making interesting comparisons between the participants.

9.2.2 Description of Data

Interviews began in early April 2009, and ended in August 2009. During that time, Tina completed nineteen journals entries representing 54 hours of study time and took part in three interviews. She did not prepare for the TOEIC in June due to concentrating on final tests associated with her major. Tina took simulated Standard TOEIC tests in April and July, and the official TOEIC test in August. Table 9.4 below provides a summary of data collection including: the number of days and hours of completed journals, dates and scores gained from both simulated and official TOEIC tests, and the months where interviews were conducted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number journal entries</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of actions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of hours</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulated test (ST)</td>
<td>unstated</td>
<td>850</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official test (OT)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>835</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEWS</td>
<td>Int1</td>
<td>Int2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Int3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All interviews were conducted with the interpreter where Tina spoke mostly in Korean. The recordings were transcribed and translated by Stanley. Journal entries were also written in Korean and translated and coded according to procedures outlined in the methodology. Tina decided early on that she would not take TOEIC Speaking or Writing and made few comments relating to either strand.
9.2.3 Quantitative Data Analysis

Tina completed one journal entry for each action she felt contributed to her preparation for the TOEIC. This included 19 separate entries linked to 19 actions. As Figure 9.3 below shows, 21% of all actions (or 4 entries) were focused on improving English for purposes other than the TOEIC (indirect contribution to the TOEIC). One entry included watching TV/movies, another entry included a conversation study group, and two entries included English classes and related homework.

![Figure 9.3: Actions in Preparation for TOEIC](image)

Table 9.5
Actions contributing to preparation for the TOEIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Contribution to the TOEIC</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV/movies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation Study group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English classes and related h/w</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Focus on the TOEIC</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC Books</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulated TOEIC tests</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet news</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventy-nine percent of all actions were those undertaken to specifically prepare for the TOEIC. Of these actions, 63% (or 12 entries) related to TOEIC textbooks, 11% (2 entries) related to simulated TOEIC tests, and 5% (1 entry) included the Internet as an action toward directly preparing for the TOEIC. Table 9.5 above provides a detailed overview of the types
of actions that Tina participated in each month. Qualitative data analysis below provides a more descriptive and detailed picture of the actions Tina took and key influences behind them.

9.2.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

This section presents the results of translation, peer and member checking, and follows with a description of the final categories and themes that emerged. It concludes with an overview of Tina’s test activity. A summary of Tina’s test activity is provided at the end of the chapter.

9.2.4.1 Results of Peer, Member and Translation Checks

The results of translation checks included two minor changes at the sentence level. Qualitative analysis revealed seventeen themes and of the 169 comments included in the data display, peer checking resulted in two concerns. Specifically, Grace queried whether there was enough information in one quote to support the theme; and she queried a subheading used within a theme. Details of each concern and actions taken are outlined in Appendix J. The participant was also sent a copy of the final themes but did not reply to follow up emails.

9.2.4.2 Final Categories and Themes

Table 9.6 presents an overview of the final categories and themes corresponding to Tina’s Test Activity, and the representative number of comments from each data source. A detailed description of each theme follows.

CATEGORY ONE: Goals/Reasons behind Taking the TOEIC

Two major themes emerged with regard to goals and reasons behind preparing for the TOEIC. These include: (a) getting a job, and (b) support and/or pressure on campus.

a) Getting a job

The central goal to Tina’s Test Activity was acquiring a TOEIC score of 800 – 850 in order to be better placed for employment opportunities. Similar to Sunny, who also wanted to become an English teacher, Tina found requirements for teacher certification ‘far too difficult’ (Int1) and considered the TOEIC something she could use to ‘apply to anywhere’ (Int1). Although admitting little knowledge about applying for a job, Tina linked high TOEIC scores with increased opportunity: ‘If you have a higher score, you get to apply for more jobs’ (Int2). In addition to the TOEIC, however, Tina also recognised the need for other qualifications in order to apply for a wider range of jobs. She believed that high TOEIC scores coupled with other ‘licences’, or certifications, increased employment opportunities.
Table 9.6  
Categories and Themes - Tina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and Themes</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) GOALS/REASONS BEHIND TAKING TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Attaining a score and/or getting a job</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Support and pressure on campus</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) ACTIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Actions focused on indirect contribution to TOEIC preparation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Classes associated with major support TOEIC</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Study group and television</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Actions focused on direct preparation for TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Hackers TOEIC books</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) TOEIC Internet community</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Simulated TOEIC test &amp; practice tests</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) OPERATIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct focus on the TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Major and vacation period influences time spent on actions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Content associated with TOEIC books</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Following scheduling as proposed by TOEIC books</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Memorisation, review &amp; repetition</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Test-taking strategies linked to Internet sites</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Solving problems</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) OUTCOMES OF ACTIONS AND OPERATIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) TOEIC strengthens general English</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Influence of simulated and practice tests</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Anxiety and worry</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Growing perception of importance of the TOEIC and English</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Guilt, regret and/or resentment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of comments</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Friends who had graduated appeared to be a key influence behind taking the TOEIC in order to secure a job. Since Tina had taken time off in Canada, she found that a number of friends had ‘already’ found employment. ‘That kind of thing’, she added, ‘leads me to say, I should study…they had a reasonable score to get a job’ (Int2). When asked if many of her friends in her junior year took the TOEIC she noted, ‘not as many as one might think’ (Int3). She noted finding it difficult to convince other juniors to take the TOEIC test with her. She did find, however, that ‘quite a lot of seniors took the TOEIC’ (Int3). Therefore, peers who had graduated, or peers nearing graduation appeared to have more influence than peers in her year.

b) Support and/or pressure on campus

Three comments suggest that Tina felt both support and pressure from different groups within the university context. Because she was an English literature major, Tina noted that she was supported by the university ‘from time to time to take the TOEIC’ (Int3). This included subsidies for simulated TOEIC tests provided by the university. No other specific type of
support from the university was mentioned. Tina also described ‘pressure’ to study the TOEIC from within the campus due to the expectations of other students – particularly other-majors:

People think that all English majors are good at English, so my non-English-major friends say, ‘You must have a good score right?’ Whenever, I hear this question, I feel more pressure to study TOEIC hard (Int2)

Although only one comment was coded in relation to this particular pressure, it links to similar comments made by Sunny and others from focus group participants.

CATEGOR Y TWO: Actions

Quantitative results from journal entries reveal that Tina participated in actions that (i) indirectly supported TOEIC preparation, and (ii) directly related to TOEIC. Themes relating to these subcategories are presented below.

i) Indirect focus on TOEIC

Two themes were coded with regard to actions that indirectly supported preparation for the TOEIC: (a) university classes associated with major, and (b) study groups and television.

a) Classes associated with major contribute to the TOEIC

Fourteen comments emerged linking classes associated with Tina’s major with overall preparation for the TOEIC. Interestingly, in the first interview, Tina expressed that her major (English literature) did not support preparation for the TOEIC to any great extent: ‘The TOEIC and my major, in my opinion, are two separate things. My major is more focused on literature, like reading comprehension and the like; but the TOEIC is really practically based, so I don’t think it helps that much’ (Int1). During the second interview, and as a result of keeping journals, Tina appeared to feel quite differently:

Writing the journals made me think about what helps me, which I don’t usually think about. It was more than I thought. When I did the first interview, I thought my major was not helping me at all. However, as I am thinking more about it, I have realised that it is more helpful than I thought (Int2).

In particular, Tina found her ‘Issues in the news’ class to be most relevant to the TOEIC, as she notes, the ‘current event problems [were] just like in the TOEIC test and the level of difficulty [was] similar’ (J5). Tina also felt that, as a result of English literature classes, her reading speed with regard to understanding the structure of sentences had increased and was therefore helpful for finding ‘grammatically awkward phrases in part 5 of the TOEIC (J2)’, and for helping TOEIC Reading in general. Overall, Tina explained how she felt that 50% of
her classes potentially supported preparation for the TOEIC. It is unclear, however, why this was not represented in journals. Perhaps, as she suggested above, participation in the research raised this awareness.

Of interest, in the third interview, when asked how she felt her major may have supported preparation for the TOEIC, Tina replied:

In my case, I don’t think my study methods for the TOEIC and methods for other subjects are related or connected. For the TOEIC, I followed the methods others said were good and effective’ (Int3).

Overall, however, when asked if she thought she had any advantage as an English-major she replied, ‘Probably. I am exposed to English more, so it’s hard to forget something that you see every day’ (Int2).

b) Study groups and television
Eight comments in journals and interviews show how Tina perceived actions such as study groups and watching television as indirectly supporting preparation for the TOEIC. Although these actions represent only two of the nineteen journal entries (10% of all actions), comments show how Tina linked these actions to the TOEIC. Since the study group consisted of similar content i.e. current events, Tina found it helped her ‘get used to’ TOEIC Reading (J3). During the study group, five or six members gathered to read a newspaper article, discussed the article and tested each other with words they did not know (J3). Working as part of a study group was something Tina liked to do to keep herself ‘studying regularly’ (Int2); however, due to a busy schedule and disappointment with the other group members using too much Korean, she stopped attending the study group. Tina also connected watching television to preparation for the TOEIC. In one journal entry (J6) she linked television dramas to Part Three of TOEIC Listening, i.e. where ‘two people are having a conversation’ (J6). She also found it more ‘efficient and interesting’ to listen to TV dramas as opposed to using textbooks.

ii) Actions in Direct Preparation for the TOEIC
Three themes were coded with regard to actions taken in direct preparation for the TOEIC: (a) Hackers TOEIC books, (b) TOEIC Internet community, and (c) simulated and practice tests.

a) Hackers TOEIC books
Quantitative results show that most actions in direct preparation for the TOEIC were linked to TOEIC books including Hackers Listening and Reading texts. Results from interviews also
support TOEIC books as a dominant action, ‘I studied mostly using Hackers TOEIC book’ (T-Int3). Before taking the official TOEIC, Tina noted completing both books from beginning to end, but felt she had spent more time on the TOEIC Reading book since it ‘had more to study’ (Int2). Recommendations from on-line communities featured as a key influence behind using Hackers TOEIC books where she noted that ‘everyone says it’s a good book’ (Int2). The fact that Tina was a first-time test-taker also links to this action:

T: When I was beginning TOEIC studies, I really didn’t have any experience so I just started with the one people recommended to me. Since it was my first time, I thought I should start with something not so difficult. Something widely used.

R: Who recommended it to you?

T: The Internet. I don’t know the people but they are people who have studied the TOEIC more than I have…The first thing that came to me was to try to find an answer through the Internet. It could be because of my personality. I use the Naver portal site and the Internet cafes or other cafes because they have an abundant amount of information (Int3)

Overall, Tina found the books expensive (especially in the case of the listening text which had additional MP3 files), but she also felt that she was ‘getting her money’s worth’ (J8). She also found them well organised and believed that with constant focus ‘an improvement of over 100 points seem[ed] plausible’ (J8). Moreover, in two comments Tina noted that the material was easy because ‘the basics were explained thoroughly’ (J12) and in one case, she thought she had ‘almost enjoyed’ it (J10).

b) TOEIC Internet community

In addition to advice on TOEIC textbooks, Tina used the Internet community for other advice. Six comments, in addition to those mentioned above, relate to the TOEIC Internet community as an action towards preparing for the TOEIC. A key advantage, for Tina was that she could locate other test-takers who had ‘high TOEIC scores’ so that she could ‘follow their methods’ (Int3), especially after feeling disappointed with early efforts preparing for the TOEIC:

At first, I just thought my English skills were bad. Then I thought, “How do other people take this test?” I just wondered how other people received high TOEIC scores. That’s why I started looking it up’ (Int3).

Tina was first introduced to the Internet community through a friend and through her own Internet surfing. When asked how she could ‘trust’ the information on the sites, she replied ‘Of course, if someone uploads something and says it’s a bit of advice, I think that maybe the person is good at TOEIC’ (Int3). With regard to the perceived success of this action, Tina
found that before using advice from the Internet, she ‘was really unable to solve much of the TOEIC exam’ but the ‘advice [from Internet communities] helped save a lot of time and shortened the time needed to finish the test’ (T-Int3).

c) Simulated and practice tests
Tina took the simulated TOEIC test twice during data collection (which accounted for 11% of all actions). In both cases, the test, which Tina described as the ‘most popular mock TOEIC tests taken by the students’, was offered by the university career support team (J1). Tina further explained that the conditions for the test were ‘exactly the same as the real TOEIC’ (J1). The main reason for taking simulated tests was to improve scores by strengthening test familiarity or - ‘keeping that feeling for TOEIC’ and to check ‘current progress’ (J1). Tina also took a complete practice test at the back of one of her TOEIC books the day before the official test and expressed in the final interview that she would focus more on practice tests the next time she prepared for the TOEIC.

CATEGORY THREE: Operations
Since Tina mentioned very little regarding how she operationalised actions that indirectly supported preparation for the TOEIC, the following themes, relate specifically to direct preparation for the TOEIC. They include: (a) focus on TOEIC during the vacation period, (b) focus on grammar and vocabulary, (c) following schedules, (d) review, repetition and memorisation, (e) test-taking strategies associated with Internet sites, (f) solving problems, and (g) the influence of peers and seniors.

a) Focus on TOEIC during the vacation period
As quantitative results show, twice as many hours were spent on preparation for the TOEIC in July and August (vacation period) as opposed to semester time (April, May, June). Thirteen comments relate to this theme. NotSurprisingly, university work and assessments associated with Tina’s major featured as a key factor influencing this action: ‘Because of my school studies, I only study for my major. It means that I don’t have much time to study TOEIC, so I am planning to study it in the vacation’ (Int1). The desire to not ‘sacrifice’ free time during school semester time also featured as a further reason behind why Tina focused more on the TOEIC during the vacation period: ‘I hate to study like when I was in the third grade of high school. I don’t want to sacrifice my free time so sometimes I think, “Why do I have to do this?” - or “Maybe I’ll just study in the holidays”’ (Int2).
Despite breaks in preparing for the TOEIC due to school commitments, Tina, as with Jessica, noted how it was important to maintain a constant flow: ‘TOEIC is a type of study that should be a constant thing, but I have been putting it aside for reasons such as tests etc, so my overall flow of study has been interrupted’ (J4). As a result, Tina returned back to the beginning of the book during vacation period noting, ‘I have started to study using Hackers TOEIC reading from Day 1 [of the schedule] since I have been studying on and off for a while’ (J12).

b) Focus on grammar and vocabulary in TOEIC textbooks

Key areas of content mentioned in association with TOEIC textbooks included grammar and vocabulary (particularly in the TOEIC Reading book). Thirteen comments across journals and interviews relate to grammar and vocabulary as a key focus of content. With regard to grammar, Tina described the TOEIC Reading textbook as containing 50% grammar instruction and 50% problems solving, as she noted: ‘[it] just explains grammar and gives questions on that specific grammar point to solve’ (Int3). Only one comment included mention of grammar as a focus from the listening text. For the most part, unlike Santana, Tina mentioned grammar in general terms: ‘I particularly focused on grammar and vocabulary’. However, in two entries (J11, J18) she more specifically mentioned using the text to isolate causative verbs (J11), and grammatical exceptions (something she felt she had a ‘weakness’ in). She also described how the structure of the book presented similar grammatical together which led her to question the effectiveness of her study method, believing that it was better to have mixed grammar questions where the answers were not as predictable.

In the Hackers TOEIC book, the content is organised like this, for example, in the RC part 1, the concept is nouns, so they give all these explanations on nouns and then questions related to it. In this case, since all the questions given in this particular section are related to nouns, it is less time consuming because that’s the only focus. But when you’re solving mixed grammar questions, you are not given what the question is focused on…In terms of effectiveness, I really thought I should solve more mixed questions and that the Hacker’s TOEIC book wasn’t doing me much good (Int3)

Overall, however, Tina felt that grammar and vocabulary would ‘be of great help on Part 5 and 6 of the TOEIC’. Vocabulary, in isolation, featured as an area of study in four journal entries, where Tina found there were ‘so many words’ that needed to be studied while using the books (J16). She also made use of the vocabulary list at the end of the TOEIC Reading book. Little mention was made of content other than grammar and vocabulary; however, Tina
did mention (with regard to the listening textbook) that she was exposed to different accents, which ‘surprised’ her considering she was ‘used to the American accents’ (J11).

c) Following schedule provided by books
Six comments show how Tina followed the study schedule recommended in the Hacker’s TOEIC textbook (a strategy not mentioned by any other participant). Evidence of this was found in the following journal entry: ‘I studied each part of the TOEIC according to the schedule as set by the Hacker’s TOEIC book (J16); ‘Overall, I hastened through parts 5 and 6. The ordeal took less time than the set time limit’ (J16). The last comment suggests that Tina may have also been following time frames set by the schedule. The following comment, describes in more detail, how the schedules operated:

There are two different schedules - schedule A and B. Schedule A goes by the order of the content of the book. You do part 1 ad 2 and 3 and so on. Schedule B goes by subjects. You study this part of the book to master part 3 of the listening section today (Int2)

Although it is unclear which schedule Tina followed, she worked through one of the above schedules the month before taking the TOEIC which featured as a key strategy toward preparing for the test. The following comment suggests a key influencing factor behind using this schedule was the fact that she had no other plan, most likely due to inexperience with the test: ‘I studied with no plan before, but I bought the Hackers book. It has a one month schedule to finish the book, so I will follow the schedule and finish it in a month’ (Int2).

d) Memorisation, repetition and review
Memorisation, repetition, and creating a review notebook featured as further strategies Tina used when preparing for the TOEIC. Thirteen comments (twelve from journals and one from interviews) were coded under this theme. Eight comments included the words ‘memorise’ or ‘memorising’ and in most cases they were linked to ‘vocabulary’, ‘words’, or ‘expressions’ and to the TOEIC Hackers reading textbook. One comment was connected to the TOEIC Listening text. Of interest, memorisation was not only used in connection with the TOEIC. As with Sunny, evidence shows that Tina also memorised vocabulary and other items with regard to preparing for two tests related to her major. Moreover, when explaining her strategy of memorisation, Tina linked it to a familiar culture of learning: ‘It’s not too different from learning vocabulary in Korean - as in the typical Korean style of vocabulary memorisation’ (J2). In order to ‘make it easier’ to memorise words, Tina created a vocabulary review notebook, ‘I have just organised a last minute review book, not only because I don’t have
much time but also because it seemed that it would be easier to memorise’ (J18). A further comment shows that the review note book was also used as a place to record ‘incorrect answers’ or items that she was unsure of (J18).

In addition to memorisation and reviewing, Tina also mentioned using repetition as shown in four comments across three journals - particularly linked with TOEIC listening. She noted listening to sections ‘on a continuous loop’ (J10); repeating questions organised by pattern types; repeating listening sections that had different accents which she felt seemed ‘like good training’ (J11); repeating phrases out loud at the same speed as the sample text and mimicking the same accent (J11); and recording listening questions from the test on her MP3 player. By listening repeatedly, Tina also felt that it helped ‘with everyday English’ (J7) as explored further in later themes.

e) Test-taking strategies linked to Internet sites

Five comments emerged with regard to the type of strategies Tina discovered and/or employed as a result of using Internet sites linked to the TOEIC. After finding it difficult to complete a simulated TOEIC test within the time frame, Tina researched ways to improve time management and began incorporating them into her TOEIC preparation:

After I looked at the information (on Internet sites) and heard things from people, I applied it to my studies in the holidays – things like keeping a time frame, paying attention to the question in the audio of part two of the listening section later in the test, and advice on what to read first. It saved me a lot of time. Before this I was unable to solve much of the TOEIC exam, but the advice helped me save a lot of time and shortened the time needed for me to finish the test (Int3)

Tina also began using a stop watch when solving problems based on advice found in the TOEIC Internet community.

Further to this, Tina discovered ‘tricks’ she could use in each section of the test to help raise scores. For example, one ‘trick’ involved observing what tense was represented in a picture to help solve the question, and in the case of grammar and vocabulary questions, Tina learned to differentiate between questions that could be solved by reading the multiple choice items first and questions which required a more detailed scan of the text: ‘When you have vocabulary to choose from, you should read the text, and when you are just given multiple choice questions asking for the correct verb form, you don’t need to’ (Int3). In the case of TOEIC Listening, Tina further described how in Parts 3 and 4, the advice was to read the questions given first and that if she was unable to read it before the audio began, she should
just guess and go on to the next question ‘since it is not wise to risk the next question as well’ (Int3). She also found advice on how to approach questions which identified vocabulary with similar pronunciation, particularly in response to Part 1 of TOEIC Listening.

f) Practice questions

Eleven comments (from four journal entries and Interview Two) show how practice questions featured as a further strategy toward preparing for the TOEIC - predominantly linked to the TOEIC Hackers books. Not surprisingly, a key reason behind using this strategy was for Tina to get ‘an overall sense of the test’ where she found that by becoming familiar with the problem types she could ‘train to understand the passage quickly’ (J17). Overall, Tina appeared to find solving practice questions a helpful strategy, and in the final interview, as noted above, wondered if she should have focused more on solving questions as opposed to focusing on grammar: ‘I should focus more on solving many questions rather than this’ (Int3). Setting time limits when solving problems, was also mentioned in four comments.

g) Seniors influence actions and operations

Six comments from Interview Three reveal how senior peers influenced different actions and operations. Methods used by her seniors included solving problems, using the Hackers website, and using textbooks. Evidence suggests that Tina may have changed her method or approach to preparing for the TOEIC because of this influence. In one case, for example, she described how she had lost an MP3 file from one of the Hacker’s books and looked to seniors to borrow a copy. What she found was that the seniors were ‘just solving questions rather than listening to an audio file’ (Int3). Certainly, only one journal entry linked to MP3 files; yet solving problems became a common theme throughout journals and interviews. In the final interview, Tina also discussed how she contemplated using lectures and attending institutes as a result of the advice and experiences of seniors:

I kept trying to study independently, but others such as my seniors use video lectures. They watch videos and some participate in institutes as well…as I keep hearing that TOEIC scores improve significantly by watching lectures and attending institutes. I think that is the way to approach the TOEIC (Int3)

In this way, seniors played an important role in not only the actions and operations that Tina participated in during data collection, but also with regard to future approaches.
CATEGORY FOUR: Outcomes

Five themes emerged with regard to the outcomes of Tina’s Test Activity: (a) TOEIC preparation encourages application toward English for purposes other than TOEIC, (b) the influence of simulated/practice tests, (c) anxiety, worry and nervousness, (d) growing recognition of the importance of the TOEIC/English, and (e) guilt and resentment.

a) Application of the TOEIC

Eighteen comments provide evidence that, for Tina, preparing for the TOEIC supported English for purposes other than the TOEIC. When asked overall if she felt that her preparation for the TOEIC had helped improve her general English skills or had supported her major, Tina noted, ‘Yes, from time to time’. Specifically, linked to TOEIC Listening, Tina found that ‘listening repeatedly’ supported ‘everyday English’ and to a further degree ‘help[ed] with conversation as well’ (J7). She also found that she had difficulty with accents in a way that she had not realised which helped her to ‘acknowledge things [she] did not know’ (Int3):

One thing that comes to me every time I work on the listening comprehension part is that I tend to miss the questions that are in British or Australian accents. These are the accents I am not used to, so as I try to put together bits of information to find out the words that are being said, I miss the dialogue as a whole. I think I might need more exposure to British and Australian accents (J13).

Tina also found that preparing for the listening section ‘trained [her] to read passages quickly’ and to listen in a way where she had to quickly understand ‘what [was] being said’ (J17). She also noticed ‘many expressions which could be used in daily life’ acknowledging this as ‘the reason why [she] started memorising them’ (J13). ‘All I have to do now’ she explained, ‘is use them in daily life’ (J13).

Linked to TOEIC Reading, Tina again mentioned learning words that she felt she could ‘use in ordinary conversation’ (J12), and found that she recognised vocabulary she had previously encountered while preparing for the TOEIC, when studying English for other purposes. Moreover, she also tried a different approach to vocabulary to what she had previously used: ‘It occurred to me that instead of thinking about the nuances of each word while taking the test, it might be better to think about what other words are most often used alongside it’ (J16). Grammatical structures also featured as an area Tina felt she could transfer to areas of English for purposes other than TOEIC. She found that due to ‘repetitively looking at sentences’ the TOEIC had helped with sentence structuring where she felt she could
‘remember a few things’ and use them (Int3). She also found that she had more confidence reading longer texts as a result of preparing for TOEIC (Int3; J16). Finally, linked to simulated and practice TOEIC tests, Tina discovered that she was encouraged to ‘understand English in a short period of time’ (J14) and that practice tests not only supported listening comprehension in general, but also vocabulary and grammar ‘as a bonus’ (J19).

b) Simulated/practice tests influence Test Activity
Fourteen comments across all interviews and in four journal entries describe different ways in which simulated and practice tests influenced Tina’s Test Activity. Most comments in this theme correspond to becoming familiar with the TOEIC and the influence of simulated and practice tests in diagnosing potential weaknesses. The following comments depict this well, ‘I was able to know what it feels like in the actual test and analyse the areas I lack (J14)…’ I would say that I realised my weak points’ (Int2). Specific areas which Tina described as ‘weak points’ included: having to re-read material which wasted time (J15), difficulties in section 3 and 4 of TOEIC Listening (Int2), time management (J1), failing to read questions in advance (Int2), and maintaining concentration throughout the test (J14). As a result of simulated and practice tests Tina also mentioned how she would focus on specific strategies such as the need to ‘memorise more vocabulary’ (Int2), solving problems within a set time limit (J15), and spending more time practicing specific sections of the test (Int2). As a way of strengthening motivation and confidence, Tina further described the simulated TOEIC test as an ‘incentive’ or ‘stimulus’ (J14), and due to the practice test being easier than she had anticipated she found that she was ‘more confident’ (J19).

c) Anxiety, worry and/or nervousness
Feelings of anxiety, worry and nervousness towards preparing for and taking the TOEIC test emerged from six comments across two interviews and one journal entry. Taking the TOEIC for the first time was one influence behind this: ‘I was worried and nervous since it would be the first time taking the official TOEIC test’ (J19). Tina further noted experiencing nervousness due to ‘hastily’ preparing for the TOEIC and needing more time (Int3). Concern over spending ‘a lot of money’ (Int1) and ‘time and effort’ (Int1) further increased feelings of anxiety. For example, when asked if she felt any anxiety over taking the test she replied, ‘Of course, since I have paid a lot of money and all…The test is what matters and leaves you something of value after taking it’ (Int1). The length of the test and time pressure further added to feelings of nervousness. While taking the official TOEIC, managing time became a
source of anxiety where Tina found herself losing time over more difficult questions and as a result she lost focus towards the end of the test: ‘Near the end, I started justifying myself with the fact that this was my first TOEIC examination and….I sort of gave up’ (Int3).

Of interest, in comparison with achievement tests, Tina mentioned having more anxiety with the TOEIC due to the unpredictability of the content. Achievement tests, as she explained, contained content learnt over a set time period where she was able to ‘anticipate the type of questions that come up’ (Int1).

d) Growing understanding: Job market and the importance of English/TOEIC

As a result of preparing for and taking the TOEIC, Tina reflected upon the importance of the TOEIC and English, as found in four comments. After researching different Internet sites, Tina acknowledged surprise at the numbers of people preparing for the TOEIC: ‘I realised how many people were actually taking the TOEIC in Korea’…I didn’t know that all these people would see the TOEIC as being so important’ (Int3). As a result, Tina became aware of how competitive the test had become; how competitive the job market was and how she ‘really [felt] the need to prepare’ (Int3). She further noted how this new ‘mindset’ encouraged her to ‘talk more seriously about issues’ (Int3) related to applying for jobs. As with Jessica, discovering the amount of people that were taking the TOEIC (and also the ages with which many started preparing for the test) further shaped feelings of ‘falling behind’ where Tina felt she had ‘started too late’ (Int3). This was particularly the case where she read about middle school students taking the TOEIC.

As a result, Tina reflected upon the growing importance of English as something people ‘must do’ as part of a growing ‘English frenzy’ - something she drew motivation from when preparing for the TOEIC and studying English (Int3). Certainly, when Tina was asked how she felt the TOEIC had influenced her life she noted that she felt the need to study English more (Int3). Moreover, as a result of realising the importance and competitiveness of the TOEIC, Tina also felt that she should try for other ‘licences’, or certifications, in order to be competitive in the job market: ‘My seniors said all students take the TOEIC and there are many people with high scores, so other licences, specs are needed. After I heard that, I thought maybe I’ll try to get a computer licence’ (Int3). Therefore, the experience of preparing for the TOEIC led to increased motivation towards securing other credentials.
e) Guilt, regret and resentment

Four comments suggest Tina experienced guilt, regret and/or resentment when preparing for the TOEIC. Towards the end of vacation she wrote:

I feel sorrow and regret in that I should have studied harder and the new semester will be starting soon. If the test result comes back with a high score, I will feel relieved to know that I spent the vacation resourcefully, but if not, I might suffer from a guilty conscience in that I have wasted the golden vacation period (J18).

In addition to the pressure of utilising ‘golden’ study periods on the TOEIC, Tina also noted resentment towards preparing for the TOEIC as something which reminded her of studying for the Korean university entrance test (KCSAT) in the third grade at high school: ‘I really don’t feel like being a high schooler - giving up my freedom and sitting in front of a desk all day alone like a robot (J7); ‘I hate to study like when I was in the third grade of high school…I don’t want to sacrifice my free time so sometimes I think, why do I have to do this’ (T-Int2).

9.2.5 Overview of Test Activity: Tina

Figure 9.4 provides a summary of Tina’s Test Activity including what was perceived to be positive and negative outcomes in relation to goals, actions and operations driven by a range of influencing factors.
Standard TOEIC score 800 - 850
To secure employment

Influencing factors
- Advice from peers nearing graduation/graduating peers
- Peer pressure/expectations from non-English-majors
- Belief: higher chance of success with TOEIC than teacher’s test

DIRECT Focus on TOEIC
- More study during vacation period
  *Influences:* university work and assessments associated with major; desire for free time during semester
- Hackers TOEIC textbooks
  *Influences:* advice from seniors & online community; little previous experience with TOEIC
- TOEIC Internet community
  *Influences:* recommendation from peers; access to information from successful test-takers; desire to raise scores quickly
- Simulated and practice tests
  *Influences:* subsidies for simulated test by university; organised tests by career support team; advice from seniors

DIRECT Focus on TOEIC
- Greater focus on TOEIC Reading
  *Influences:* more content in textbook
- Focus on grammar and vocabulary
  *Influences:* TOEIC Reading textbook;
- Following schedule provided by book
  *Influences:* previous inexperience with the TOEIC
- Memorisation, review & repetition
  *Influences:* memorisation and review linked to TOEIC Reading textbook & familiar culture of learning; repetition linked to TOEIC Listening text & belief in usefulness of content
- Test-taking strategies
  *Influences:* Internet sites, practice tests
- Practice questions
  *Influences:* TOEIC textbook; inexperience with TOEIC; advice from seniors

INDIRECT Contribution to TOEIC
- Classes related to major
  *Influences:* ‘Issues in the news’ class; Literature classes
- Study groups
  *Influences:* working in a group to maintains motivation
- Television

Positive/Neutral Outcomes
- TOEIC Listening text encourages exposure to different accents
- Listening, grammar and vocabulary from TOEIC texts support everyday English and increase confidence reading longer texts.
- Increase of test-taking strategies linked to Internet site
- Simulated TOEIC tests strengthen motivation toward TOEIC, isolate weaknesses in TOEIC and influence further strategies.
- Growing understanding of competitive job market and the importance of the TOEIC and English
- Increased motivation toward securing other credentials

Negative Outcomes
- Organisation of TOEIC textbook provides less successful method of learning grammar.
- Feelings of pressure, anxiety, worry and nervousness due to first time test-taker and need to justify money and time spent; uncertainty of test content and time pressure
- Guilt and resentment over spending time/not spending time preparing for the TOEIC.

Figure 9.4: Overview of Test Activity - Tina
9.3 Chapter Summary

Chapter Nine reported on the test activity of two English-major participants (Sunny & Tina), each with limited experience preparing for the TOEIC. As with the other-major participants, their stories provide a varied picture of TOEIC preparation motivated by a range of factors, as synthesised below.

Motivated Test Goals

As with the other-majors presented in the previous chapter, central to the test activity of Sunny and Tina was the goal of obtaining Standard TOEIC scores in order to strengthen job placement. Key motivating factors behind this goal include: the relative difficulty of the TOEIC in comparison with other tests, competition within the teaching field, the desire to work outside of teaching, advice from others (including netizens, parents and graduating friends and peers), and pressure from parents. In addition to the motive of employment, the need to provide evidence of English ability especially in response to the expectations of others (Sunny & Tina), and the need to justify time spent abroad (Sunny) also featured as motivating factors behind test goals. Target Standard TOEIC scores between 800 – 900 points emerged for both participants. Given the perceived growing popularity of TOEIC Speaking, and influenced by the netizen community, Sunny formed a second goal late in the study (similar to Santana), i.e. to take and prepare for TOEIC Speaking. Her aim was to reach level 7.

Actions

Sunny appeared to take an holistic view of her English language learning, recognising both direct and indirect actions as supporting test preparation. Indirect actions included: watching television and movies in support of TOEIC Listening; weekly conversation groups in support of TOEIC Reading and Speaking; and major-related classes (though not many) which strengthened areas of the TOEIC requiring grammatical knowledge. Tina on the other hand, initially viewed her general English study as having little relation to TOEIC preparation. It was not until later (as a result of keeping journals) that she began to see how her general English study overlapped with TOEIC preparation. Both participants drew upon TOEIC preparation materials (textbooks and practice/simulated tests) as a direct action. Tina also used online communities. Key motivating factors behind the use of preparation materials included limited experience with the TOEIC (Sunny & Tina), the desire to quickly increase
scores (Sunny & Tina), the perceived difficulty of TOEIC Reading Part 5 (Sunny), advice from seniors (Tina), and subsidies provided by the university for simulated tests (Tina).

Operations
With regard to the type of operations Tina and Sunny engaged in, reading, grammar and vocabulary preparation through TOEIC textbooks appeared to dominate the focus of content. A key reason for focusing on reading and grammar, in the case of Sunny, was lower scores in TOEIC Reading in comparison with TOEIC Listening, and the perceived difficulty of Part 5. Common strategies used during both test activities included test-taking strategies (such as producing language under time pressure in the case of Sunny) and practising test items. These strategies were mentioned in connection to: Internet sites (Tina), practice tests (Tina) textbooks (Sunny & Tina), inexperience with the TOEIC (Tina), and advice from seniors (Tina). Memorisation and/or review was a further strategy mentioned in connection with: TOEIC vocabulary (Sunny), TOEIC reading (Tina), textbooks (Tina & Sunny), study group practice, and a familiar culture of learning (Tina). Finally, in the case of Tina, the use of repetition was linked to TOEIC Listening, textbook material and belief in the usefulness of TOEIC Listening content for everyday English.

Outcomes
Tina and Sunny expressed a number of positive and negative outcomes associated with their test activity. Results show that focusing on grammar and vocabulary was linked to strengthening English in general and further increased Sunny’s motivation toward learning areas of language she might not have ordinarily focused on. Test preparation exposed Tina to the competitiveness of the job market, the importance of the TOEIC and English, and increased motivation toward securing other qualifications for employment. Test preparation also led to the exposure of accents other than American (Tina), and increased confidence in reading longer texts (Tina). Sunny also experienced increased confidence in English in general due to an increase in TOEIC scores (Sunny). At the same time, lower than expected TOEIC scores also led to a decrease in confidence (Sunny). Further negative outcomes included: the narrowing of content and learning strategies due to the formulaic nature of textbooks (Sunny & Tina); anxiety and nervousness due to inexperience with the TOEIC (Tina), and pressure and anxiety over the need to justify time and money invested in test preparation (Tina). A discussion of these results, in combination with the results of Chapters Six to Nine, follows in the next chapter.
Chapter Ten
DISCUSSION

10.0 Overview
Chapter Ten combines the results of Phases One and Two into a discussion on the washback of the TOEIC on student learning. From a macro perspective, the first part of this chapter explores the impact of the TOEIC and highlights (through Activity Theory) how interrelated interests and motives between different constituents may contribute to the construction, impact and wider stakes of the test. From this position, the second part of the discussion turns to the individual test-taker. It explores the influence of the test, community and test-taker factors on individual test stakes, learner action, and the outcomes of student test activity. Seeking to expand upon the conceptualisation of washback, the final part of the discussion introduces tentative steps towards a model of washback on learning from a sociocultural perspective.

10.1 TOEIC IN THE WIDER CONTEXT
Previous literature has long highlighted the influence of test stakes on washback. Alderson and Wall (1993) hypothesize that tests that have important consequences will have washback, and Hughes (1993) states that in order for washback to occur ‘success on the test must be important to learners’ (p. 2). Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) further posit that washback will vary according to the status or level of the stakes of a test. In light of these assumptions, it appears, as Saville and Hawkey (2004, p. 75) argue, that washback cannot really be substantiated without full consideration of the impact of a test (i.e. a test’s influence within the wider society). The first part of the discussion, therefore, focuses on the impact and stakes of the Standard TOEIC within the business and tertiary sector, as perceived by the participants in this study, and also comments on the impact of the newly introduced speaking and writing components. Then, guided by Engeström’s (1999b) schematic of Activity Theory (see Chapter Four), the discussion explores how interrelated, and interdependent stakeholders within the wider socio-historical-cultural context may influence the impact and stakes of a standardised proficiency test such as the TOEIC.
10.1.1 TOEIC in the Business Sector

Profilling the Impact and Stakes of the Standard TOEIC in the Business Sector

Focusing mostly on Japan, Moritoshi (2001) describes the TOEIC as ‘a powerful management tool’ that has deeply impacted company decision-making policies and operations (p. 3). Rebuck (2003) and McCrostie (2009) outline a similar picture describing the widespread adoption of the test among Japanese companies and the growing status of the TOEIC as one of the best-known tests in Japan (McCrostie, 2009). In Korea, Choi (2008) portrays the TOEIC as one of the most influential tools used by companies in South Korea for hiring employees. The results of this study appear to confirm this wide scale impact, particularly with regard to hiring as highlighted in the following comments from focus group discussions and individual case study data:

TOEIC is essential for getting a job...It’s a desperate thing, like life or death (N1M2).

Everywhere asks for your TOEIC score. If you want to apply for a job, you need a TOEIC score (E2F3).

In recent times, almost all corporations look at TOEIC scores...[it] is needed no matter what occupation I aim for. Anywhere and everywhere requires the TOEIC (Jessica).

In an evaluation of the use of the TOEIC by Japanese companies, Rebuck (2003) concludes that it is certain that a high TOEIC score, in particular, ‘is advantageous for graduates entering what is an extremely competitive job market’ (p. 29), and Cunningham (2002) describes how high scores ‘are intrinsic to finding employment’ for graduating Japanese students (p. 4). Findings from the present study support a similar picture where a common perception was the need for scores of at least 700 points (rated as high-intermediate by ETS). Others acknowledged a score of over 800 (advanced proficiency) as advantageous, and in some cases a necessity:

Most big companies demand over 800, small places require around 750 (E2F2)...Without a TOEIC score you can’t send out your resume to companies. It is said you have a chance to be hired if you have 800 (N2F1).

In support of Rebuck (2003) above, fierce rivalry among job applicants in a competitive economy emerged as a key influence behind this perception: ‘Students try to get all the specifications needed for employment today. The Korean economy isn’t good right now, so I feel I must not fall behind’ (Jessica). Another participant similarly noted feeling ‘strong competition’ where scores were ‘compared with one another’ (N2M2). For one student, the process was compared to being at war, and to another, a matter of ‘life and death’.
Beyond recruitment, large numbers of Japanese employees are required to regularly take the TOEIC and test results are often used for job evaluations and promotions. Where the responsibility for the English language needs of a company in the past may have fallen on a few specialised employees, the spread of the Internet and daily use of E-mail messages has made English a necessity for a greater proportion of employees (Rebuck, 2003). As such, the TOEIC has become an influential tool used to maintain a ‘reserve army’ of workers who are able to communicate in English should the need arise (Kinomoto, 2000). Due to a lack of research, it is unclear if Korean employees undergo a similar situation. Of interest, however, Santana (Case Study Two, pp. 189-201) noted that he would continue preparing for the TOEIC after securing a job since scores influenced promotions within that company.

Despite the widespread adoption and impact of the TOEIC in the business sector, surprisingly little research has explored the extent by which companies actually use TOEIC scores, for what purposes, and importantly, how this might differ from the perceptions of job applicants. Of the small number of studies to explore the uses of the TOEIC by companies, Kenji (2002) and Fungai (2000) suggest that relatively few companies make language ability an absolute requirement, and that TOEIC scores are but one factor considered when making personnel decisions. As one Japanese personnel officer explained, ‘Although English ability is important, business skills and personality factors are still the basic criteria of evaluation’ (Fungai, 2000, p. 44). The results from the present study support a somewhat similar impression where participants recognised that high scores did not necessarily guarantee jobs:

One of my friends got a job with Asiana Airlines. His TOEIC score was 720 and his GPA was 3.2. Someone I know failed to get the job with a TOEIC score of 900 (N1M1); Two friends of mine got jobs in Korean banks. One had a score of 620 and the other 860’ (N1M1).

Although companies may not make decisions based solely on TOEIC scores, it is possible, however, that high scores are particularly advantageous during the initial phases of screening. For example, where hundreds of applicants with similar credentials apply for limited positions, TOEIC scores may become an important advantage in passing through to subsequent stages in the recruitment process. As one participant noted:

A TOEIC score of 900 doesn’t guarantee getting a job...It’s only useful for passing the first round’ (N1M1)...Even though I’m better at other things, I can’t pass the first round without a good TOEIC score (Steave).

Related to this, a common metaphor used by students was that of the TOEIC as a filter:
TOEIC is a filter (N1M2)...big companies filter applicant’s resumes using a computer system’ (E1M1)...TOEIC makes you feel like it’s all in vain. You prepare hard, but TOEIC scores are only used for filtering job application forms (N1M1).

Another participant explained that while some companies conducted their own English interviews, Standard TOEIC scores were still used as a ‘filter’.

The notion of TOEIC scores as a type of filter may reflect the use of scores beyond that of providing a measure of English proficiency. In relation to Japan, Rebuck (2003), for example, suggests that ‘an employee’s TOEIC score has come to be regarded as more than an indicator of English ability, it is also viewed as a signal of their overall motivation’ (p. 28). Certainly, a common theme to emerge from the case studies of Tina and Jessica was that preparing for the TOEIC takes constant effort. Others spoke of how it took a long time to gain competitive scores. Examples of the types of words participants used during their test preparation included: ‘difficult’, ‘hard work’, ‘diligence’ and ‘effort’; and despite the perception that TOEIC schools helped raise scores quickly, one participant also recognised that ‘learning in those schools requires personal effort’ (N1F3). In this way, TOEIC scores have perhaps come to provide a measure of the degree by which future workers may be willing to work hard and commit to the interests of the company.

High TOEIC scores may also reflect important Korean cultural values. As noted in Chapter Two, in the 1940s Korea made revisions to the education system based on life- and morally-centred Confucian values where formal learning was seen as a way of achieving ‘personal and moral perfection’ (Seth, 2005, p. 5). Drawing upon similarities with Japan, McNamara (2008) notes, one of the goals of the Japanese education system ‘is to build the moral character of its citizens, and this is seen as achieved by demanding subject matter which is both cognitively challenging and which requires stamina and consistent effort on the part of the student’ (p. 419). Influenced by cultural values, therefore, it is possible that TOEIC scores may be used as a measure of self cultivation. The following comment by one participant supports this idea:

We need visible evaluation tools. In interviews, without visible evaluations, interviews can be influenced by personal feelings and emotions. It is unfair. A TOEIC score can show your victory against yourself and give you competitiveness (N1M2).

No doubt, more research is needed to confirm the extent to which TOEIC scores are used by companies and for what purposes. Nonetheless, previous research, supported by student perspectives in the present study, appears to confirm the high stakes status of the Standard
TOEIC fuelled by perceived demands from the employment sector. The next section discusses the impact of the relatively new speaking and writing components of the TOEIC within the business sector.

The Impact of TOEIC Speaking and Writing in the Business Sector

Despite the fact that TOEIC Speaking and Writing tests were introduced in late 2006, little research has been published regarding the use and/or impact of these tests. ETS, itself, has not disclosed the number of test-takers who have taken these components. However, perhaps somewhat indicative of the lack of popularity of TOEIC Speaking and Writing in Japan, the Institute for International Business Communication (a public interest corporation that operates the TOEIC under government agencies) reported the newly established TOEIC Speaking and Writing tests as its biggest money loser. Results from the present study reveal that after three years in circulation (at the time of data collection) many participants were surprised to hear of TOEIC Speaking and/or Writing components. Only two participants across both phases had taken TOEIC Speaking, and two participants took the test for the first time while participating in the study. No student had taken or mentioned any intention of taking TOEIC Writing. A small number of participants, however, did recognise growing interest among larger companies for EFL speaking scores: ‘these days some companies demand speaking scores, so people take TOEIC Speaking...some companies prefer people who have speaking scores’ (E1M1). Another student described the benefit of TOEIC Speaking scores in raising an applicant’s competitiveness. In general, however, the participants expressed very little demand for components of the TOEIC from companies other than the standard test.

A perceived lack of demand for TOEIC Writing and Speaking is perhaps surprising given concern raised by researchers (e.g. Chapman & Newfields, 2008; Cunningham, 2002; Knapman, 2008; Stoynoff, 2009; Weir, 1990) over the use and interpretation of Standard TOEIC scores as a potentially invalid measure of communicative English language ability. Moreover, as noted in Chapter Two, ETS maintains that none of the TOEIC tests should be regarded as an appropriate substitute for any of the others, and that only with the addition of TOEIC Speaking and Writing are employers able to ‘gain a full understanding of the complete spectrum’ of an employee’s language proficiency’ (Liao, Qu & Morgan, 2010, p. 13.11). Knapman (2008) also concludes that while there is evidence supporting the concurrent validity of the Standard TOEIC alongside other measures of listening and reading...
skills, ‘there is little concurrent validity in the productive skills of speaking and writing’ (p. 38). A modest demand for productive measures, as perceived by the participants, therefore, may draw attention to a possible lack of genuine need among employees for communicative English ability, which, therefore, raises concern over whether interpretations of Standard TOEIC test scores are meaningful and appropriate.

Akiyama (2004) may further shed light on the possible lack of demand for speaking in particular. The author explored the feasibility of introducing an English speaking component in the highly competitive senior high school test (used to control entry into the most prestigious senior high schools in Japan). The author found that an important cultural value serving as an obstacle was that speaking was not as culturally prized as other areas of English that were perceived to require a greater degree of discipline and hard work, i.e. that which the Japanese school system encourages. These results link closely to discussion above on the use of the Standard TOEIC as a type of gate-keeping device used to filter those with the highest level of motivation and display of self cultivation. At the same time, there are no figures supporting the genuine demand or lack of demand for TOEIC Speaking and Writing within companies, and it is important to stress that at the time of the present study the Speaking and Writing components had only been on the market for three years. More research is needed in this area after a more extended period of time.

Competing EFL Tests in the Business Sector
While most participants acknowledged the prolific use and need for Standard TOEIC scores, a theme that emerged in Steave’s case study (pp. 202-216) and from a small number of focus group members was: ‘Changing perspectives regarding the importance of the TOEIC’. Within this theme, students described a growing demand among companies for EFL tests other than the TOEIC, such as the TOEFL, OPIC, and in particular TEPS, which was developed and distributed by Seoul National University in 1999 as a replacement to the Standard TOEIC. As N2M1 described it:

My friend studied hard for the TOEIC for one year to get a job. His highest score was 780. During the job interview, he heard from the interviewer that companies in Seoul check TEPS scores. TEPS has become a popular test of English ability in Seoul.

The popularity for TEPS appears to be growing as thousands of Koreans take the test each year; however, changing perspectives with regard to the importance of the TOEIC was not a dominant theme, as supported by the following quote, ‘I think there are so many English tests, IELTS, SAT and so on, but among them TOEIC is still a popular test’ (N2M1). Nonetheless,
the idea that one test may become more popular in comparison with another, particularly where nationalism and regionalism is concerned, highlights how competition within the test market may influence test stakes.

10.1.2 TOEIC in the Tertiary Sector

In addition to the impact of the TOEIC in the business sector, Choi (2008) and Cunningham (2002) document the widespread adoption of TOEIC scores in Korean and Japanese universities where it is used as a legitimate test of qualification for graduation and/or scholarships (see Chapter Two of this work). Studies by Newfields (2005), Iwabe, (2005), Ikeda (2005), and Lee (2005) have also drawn attention to the use of the TOEIC for purposes of selection and placement highlighting both positive and negative outcomes, as discussed in Chapter Three. Findings from the present study appear to confirm the impact of the TOEIC in the university context where scores were connected to scholarships, entry into university programs (including volunteer programs and English-only dormitories), extra points on tests, and placement for English programs. The TOEIC was also used by one transferring student to support admission into the university. As described in Chapter Five, a growing number of departments also began establishing EFL test scores as a requirement for graduation. These results perhaps reveal a range of applications in addition to those previously mentioned in literature, calling for more research into the impact of the TOEIC across universities at large.

However, although participants in both phases acknowledged a number of applications within the university setting, the overriding motive for TOEIC scores among students in Phase Two was securing employment. In other words, the university context did not appear to directly impact the stakes of the test to the same degree as the business sector. In fact, none of the individual case studies from Phase Two related their test preparation to meeting requirements within the university setting. These findings may reflect the fact that many students were in their final year and were more focused on employment. Moreover, new school policies establishing TOEIC scores as requirements for graduation may not have had sufficient time to influence the stakes of the test. A further explanation may be that required entry and exit scores were low enough for students to use previous test scores. Nonetheless, the results reveal a strong presence of the TOEIC in the tertiary sector as supported by the university administration through voluntary TOEIC classes and regular simulated (mock) TOEIC tests.
Of interest, one participant also connected the presence of the TOEIC in the university context with the employment sector as follows:

The aim of universities is that their graduates get as many jobs as possible. They can get a better reputation for that. That’s why my university asks us to get a decent TOEIC score’ (N1M2).

Essentially, by promoting or enforcing the TOEIC (or other EFL test scores) for a range of purposes, universities may enhance student job prospects, which in turn may improve the reputation of the university. In addition to establishing a strong reputation, it became evident from a number of faculty meetings (attended by the researcher) that government funding was also connected to numbers of graduates who gained full-time employment. The idea that the stakes of a voluntary standardised proficiency test may emerge as a consequence of the interests of interrelated communities suggests a complex, ecological view of the impact of a test. Based on Engeström’s (1999b) schematic for understanding complex human activity, this notion is presented in more detail below, and provides a platform from which to better understand motivating factors driving student test activity.

### 10.1.3 Interrelated Stakeholder Interests

Traditional investigations of the washback of high stakes proficiency language tests have tended to spotlight a test (and its developers) and the use of a test within a specific context as powerfully influencing what teachers teach and learners learn. However, this may be somewhat of a limited view in that it fails to account for the larger social context of the test, and the ways in which tests affect and are affected by a wide community of interrelated stakeholders that may have mutual and/or conflicting interests. In particular, in cases where students independently prepare for and take proficiency tests outside of any one specific context, the interests of different stakeholders are likely to strongly influence the actions learners take, and therefore, play an important role in the overall process of washback. In the present study the business sector (and tertiary sector to a lesser degree) emerged as key stakeholders driving the stakes of the TOEIC for university students; however, this is part of a much more complicated web of stakeholder interests. Drawing upon sociocultural theory (introduced in Chapter Four), this section explores how different communities affect and are affected by the TOEIC and form a complex network of interrelated stakeholder interests within which the test and test-taker is placed.
**The Central Activity: Test Maker and Test-Taker**

In sociocultural terms, central to human activity is the idea that in order to fulfil some type of need (or desired outcome), individuals, or a group of individuals, will direct their attention toward a particular object. This is true in the case of ETS, the private company that constructs and distributes the TOEIC program. Essentially, in order to continue creating and constructing tests (a desired outcome), ETS requires end users, i.e. test-takers (the object). One of the instruments (or mediating artefacts) used to accomplish this desired outcome is the TOEIC test program and all its components; including for example, the test construct, content, structure and format, test conditions and test assessment criteria, etc. (see Saville & Hawkey, 2004). Other mediating instruments may be used to draw test-takers, such as those used in the marketing and distribution of the test (e.g. TOEIC preparation materials, websites, and practice tests developed by ETS). In this sense, it may perhaps be argued, as Brown (2005) does, that test-takers come to represent both clients and learners. Figure 10.1 below presents this central activity below.

![Figure 10.1](image)

**Figure 10.1**

*The Central Activity of Test Makers and Test-Takers*

As recognised by Engeström (1999b), and discussed earlier above, this central activity fails to conceptualise the collective and socially distributed aspects of human activity. Given that TOEIC test scores may serve a range of functions, different communities of stakeholders benefit from the testing program and from individuals as test-takers. As such, the test makers (ETS) work as part of a wider community to achieve their objective in generating test-takers. This socially distributed aspect of the central activity is represented in the bottom tier of Figure 10.2 based on Engeström’s (1999b) conceptualisation of an activity system (detailed
in Chapter Four). It includes: the community, division of labour and rules, as discussed in more detail below.

**Figure 10.2**

*Interrelated Stakeholder Interests*

![Diagram showing interrelated stakeholder interests]

The **Community** and **Division of Labour**

The *community* at the base of the schematic represents those who share the same object (test-takers) as the test makers and, importantly, influence and shape the activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The roles that different community stakeholders play in encouraging TOEIC test-takers are represented as a *division of labour* which, in sociocultural terms, refers to the horizontal actions and interactions among members of the community (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). As presented in the schematic, this includes the specific requests for and use of TOEIC scores across different communities.

For example, in addition to the business and tertiary sectors, as discussed in the first part of this chapter, the wider political, governmental, and cultural sector may also benefit from and encourage test-takers. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Korean economy is founded on human resources and is heavily dependent on international business (such as in the export of electronics, telecommunications, automobile production, chemicals and ship building). As such, the TOEIC (as with other tests) contributes to the screening and cultivating of fierce
competition within a global market, which in turn plays an important role in driving economic reform (Choi, 2008). TOEIC scores are further used to recruit, promote and hire employees in government agencies (ETS, 2008), and, as mentioned by Choi (2008), TOEIC scores are used as a prerequisite for national exams such as the Sasi (the Korean version of the Bar exam). Aware of this fact, one participant noted: ‘Without a TOEIC score of 700, you are not qualified to take the state law examination’ (N1F1). Distributors of the TOEIC, preparation schools, textbook publishers and creators of online websites and resources also contribute to the central activity. No doubt, a major consequence of the TOEIC has been the emergence of what Knapman (2008) terms as a TOEIC industry, or as one participant described, the ‘commercialisation’ of the TOEIC: ‘There are so many language institutes and famous instructors. They have commercialised the TOEIC; they just want to make money...’ (N1F3). These stakeholders certainly benefit from test-takers. As McCrostie (2009) notes, companies have been profiting from the TOEIC from its earliest days.

The schematic also highlights a range of complex symbiotic relationships within the activity. In addition to using test scores, for example, stakeholders within the wider community may also contribute to the test - as depicted by Saville and Hawkey (2004) in Figure 10.3 below. The TOEIC first emerged in response to a call from the Japanese government and business sector with regard to the need for an English proficiency test. Recent changes to the TOEIC, as a further example, came in response to the business sector demanding a better reflection of international business language communication scenarios and real language contexts (In’nami & Koizumi, 2012).

![Stakeholders in the Testing Community](source: Saville and Hawkey, 2004)
Distributors, preparation classes, material designers and publishers also serve to fuel a sense of urgency and need. One theme to emerge in the case of Tina (Case Study Five), for example, was a growing realisation of the importance of English and the TOEIC as a result of using on-line TOEIC resources. Miller (2003) also describes how ‘schools promoting TOEIC preparation courses, and publishers printing massive numbers of TOEIC study books has led many to feel a sense of urgency to jump on the TOEIC bandwagon’.

The relationship between the test makers and different communities is also likely to influence the activity. The way that ETS defines their construct, for example, is likely to affect how different community sectors use and interpret test scores and therefore promote future test-takers. As Knapman (2008) notes, ‘if ETS were to clearly redefine the construct of the standard TOEIC, the test might then be seen as an inappropriate test of workplace English communicative proficiency’ and used ‘for other purposes such as a measure of reading and listening skills’ (p. 93). Yet as the author points out, ‘it is perhaps in part because of the dependence of ETS as an industry, on the number of test-takers that such a redefinition of construct has been avoided’ (ibid, p. 93).

Test-takers (i.e. the object in the central activity) may also influence the central activity. For example, as communities of test-takers increase in test-wiseness (a recurring theme in this study) test makers may be inclined to readdress the test format and/or structure. Communities of test-takers may also motivate a need for TOEIC scores perhaps beyond that demanded by key stakeholders. For instance, a common theme to emerge across both phases was the influence of peers. In addition to demands made by companies, one participant explained, ‘I take the TOEIC because everyone else does’ (E2F1). Another student noted, ‘My friends influence me...I know that test scores like TOEIC and TOEFL are essential to society’ (N2F2). The sheer numbers of test-takers (often reported through different forms of media) may also perpetuate the perceived need for TOEIC scores, as Tina notes: ‘When I went on-line today...I realised how many people were actually taking the TOEIC in Korea...Everyone seems to be working so hard and I feel I started too late’. Test-takers, therefore, may play a key role in sustaining and supporting the central activity.

Rules and Interrelated Communities

Rules associated with different stakeholders and interrelated communities may also affect the central activity. In sociocultural terms, rules refer to ‘the explicit norms and conventions that encourage or constrain actions within the system’ (Kim, 2009, p. 275). Drawing upon
previous discussion, rules surrounding entry into programs, placement, scholarships and graduation requirements within the university sector, and company policies regarding recruitment and promotion are likely to influence the stakes of the TOEIC and encourage greater numbers of test-takers. In the business sector, the following student comment provides an indication of how personnel decisions may operate in response to company policy:

An applicant’s cover letter, how much the applicant knows about the company and the skills that are important to the company are important for choosing employees. However, some companies still have conservative and strict policies [with regard to the TOEIC] when choosing their people’ (N1M1).

Rules regarding the months that companies recruit and promote their own tests, and the period where universities conduct final exams, may also influence the central activity. For example, a recurring theme to emerge from focus groups was that ‘Time of enrolment for the test is important’. Due to the TOEIC being a ‘relative’ (norm-referenced) test, one participant noted, ‘There are lucky months that you can get a good score easily and there are doomed months where you can’t get a good score easily’ (E1F1). Lucky months included October, December and January where fewer people took the TOEIC due to focusing on other important tests promoted by large companies and by universities. Although it is unclear why participants believed that fewer test-takers would encourage greater test scores, these comments show how company and academic rules may influence the numbers of TOEIC test-takers at certain months of the year.

Rules created by the government sector may also influence the central activity. This was evident in the case of one participant who pulled out of the research due to the ministry of education no longer accepting EFL test scores as contributing points toward the national teacher’s examination process. Government policy backing the introduction of a new national English test by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) in 2012 is also likely to influence the central activity. The new Internet-based test (composed of writing, listening, reading and speaking), aimed at replacing the TOEIC, was recently coined the ‘TOEIC Killer’ by the Korea Times (Kim, 2010). However, a spokesperson for the key distributor of the TOEIC in Korea (YBM-Sisa) suggested it would take time for the KCCI to establish itself and it would be difficult to replace the international reputation of the TOEIC (Kim, 2010). Nonetheless, competition within the testing market is sure to influence different communities of stakeholders and the central activity at hand.
The rules of one community may also influence the way other communities contribute to the central activity. For example, as noted in the first part of this chapter, government policies concerning funding connected to numbers of employed graduates may influence how stakeholders in the tertiary sector promote the TOEIC in connection to the perceived need for TOEIC scores in the workplace. These connections emphasise how the vertical power and status of one community sector may influence another, and the central activity at hand. The following example further highlights the complex relationship that exists between the business and tertiary sector. As reported in a TOEIC Newsletter (2002: cited in Rebuck, 2003) the manager of the Human Resources Department of a Japanese advertising company (Dentsu) describes his policy on recruitment as follows:

It is true that many students put their TOEIC test scores on their resumes, but we look for various experiences one has had during school and the underlying potential we can expect from such experiences (TOEIC Newsletter, 2002).

In reality, however, TOEIC scores may serve as a prerequisite to many such experiences. As one participant described, in order to enter the Buddy Program on campus (a program where Korean students pair up with an international student to help their assimilation into Korean culture), he required TOEIC (or other EFL) test scores. This experience not only reveals a candidate’s English proficiency but also suggests something of their openness to other cultures, desire to help others, and national and regional pride – qualities that may be advantageous on a resume. As such, the use of TOEIC scores at the tertiary level may strongly influence decisions made by companies. In other words, although some companies may give a greater weight to certain criteria over TOEIC scores, due to policies at the university level, TOEIC scores may indirectly influence the competitiveness of a candidate, making it difficult to separate the influence of communities within the activity.

The relationship between the wider, historical, cultural, economic and political sector (both within Korea and globally) and the business community is a further example of how complex relationships between communities may lend shape to the central activity. As Rebuck (2003) notes, ‘the widespread adoption of TOEIC by the business world...should be seen in the context of interrelating factors of globalization, economic change, and company reform’ (p. 23). Evidence of this is shown in the case studies of Santana and Jessica, where globalisation and a competitive economy (respectively) emerged as key influences behind taking the TOEIC in support of securing jobs. McCrostie (2009), as a further example, attributes the
birth and growth of the TOEIC (in part) to the sweeping impersonal forces of history, including rises in the yen’s strength, the price of oil and Japan’s economic power.

It is also important to highlight the major influence of cultural rules and conventions in encouraging the use of TOEIC scores and generating test-takers. As described in Chapter Two, standardised tests carry great importance in Korean culture dating as far back as the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1897), where tests were used to employ government officials of high rank. They also support the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of Confucian values. The former dimension is that of bringing about the same result in every person (Legge, 1960) and observing the rules of propriety, i.e. knowing one’s place and role within society (Guilloteaux, 2007). Standardised tests (such as the TOEIC) support this dimension of Confucianism by motivating individuals toward common goals and practice, while at the same time acting as gate keeping devices controlling entry into prestigious colleges and social status. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, standardised tests support the intrapersonal dimension of Confucianism, i.e. that of self cultivation in one’s knowledge through life-long learning. After years of preparing for national standardised tests from middle school to university, individuals continue to prepare for tests for employment, and perhaps later for purposes of promotion. The TOEIC, therefore, provides a powerful mediating tool, for encouraging these cultural norms and conventions.

In summary of the first part of this chapter, Cunningham (2002) describes how the high-stakes status of the TOEIC has been influenced by the use of baseline TOEIC scores by companies and universities. The results of this study certainly support the high stakes nature and impact of the TOEIC in both these sectors. Discussion above, however, also emphasises the complex interdependent relationship that exists between the test maker, the test, different community sectors and test-takers who contribute to the wider impact and stakes of the TOEIC – that which ignites student test activity and, in turn, washback on learning as explored in the second part of this chapter.

10.2 THE TOEIC AND STUDENT LEARNING

The second part of the discussion centres on the TOEIC at the micro level, exploring the influence of the TOEIC on learners and learning. Drawing upon previous literature addressed in Chapter Four, Breen (2001) posits that an adequate explanation of how a person learns another language must account for what learners contribute to the process; the language data
made available to the learners in the communicative environment in which the learning occurs; the interaction between learners and the environment in terms of the situated learning process; and the actual outcomes from the learning. These variables reflect important constituents in allowing for a basic construction of washback, i.e. the participants, processes and products (Bailey, 1996; Hughes, 1993). They also support the notion that in order to understand the language learning process, ‘we need to reflect upon individuals…and individuals as members of groups (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008, p. 240) – a view often neglected in previous studies on washback. Founded on these ideas, and directed by the tenets of Activity Theory (see Chapter Four), discussion on the washback of the TOEIC begins with an exploration into how the test and participants (including the wider community and test-takers) may contribute to individual test stakes, test motives and goals (RQ1). Discussion continues with an investigation into how these motives and goals, and other factors motivate learner action (RQ2); and how interaction between learners and different communities of practice influence learning operations (RQ3). The final part of this section discusses the outcomes of this process with regard to the degree and depth of learning and attitudes (RQ4).

10.2.1 Individual Stakes, Motives and Goals

The first part of this chapter evidenced the high stakes profile of the TOEIC and described how the interests of interconnected communities may interrelate with a test and drive the test stakes. Previous washback studies, which have tended to focus on specific language learning contexts, however, reveal that while high profile standardised tests may influence large numbers of learners in similar contexts, test stakes are also likely to vary from student to student (see for example: Shih, 2007; Shohamy et al., 1996). In the case of the present study, where students voluntarily take and prepare for the TOEIC, and come from, and participate in any number of learning communities, test stakes are perhaps even more likely to vary, and play an important role in the actions learners take. In sociocultural terms, drawing on the fundamental principles of Activity Theory, individual test stakes play an important role in impelling a subject’s motive toward the activity of preparing (or not preparing) for a voluntary standardised proficiency test such as the TOEIC; and in essence, become a ‘guiding or integrating force’ (Wertsh, 1985, p. 212), without which there would be no test activity (Leont’ev, 1977), and therefore no washback (see pp. 93-94 of this work). Given the importance of individual test stakes on learner motive, RQ1 asked: What factors influence the motives and goals of English and other-majors to take and prepare for the TOEIC.
In conjunction with interrelated test and wider community factors presented in the first part of this chapter, findings emphasise the role of individual learner factors on individual test-stakes and learner motive. As highlighted in Shih’s (2007) model, and evident in the present study, the immediate importance of the test was a key individual factor. For example, students approaching graduation voiced increased pressure toward taking the TOEIC: ‘When I was a sophomore and junior, I didn’t have such a burden’ (Santana). Cho (2010) similarly found that the intensity of washback increased as students over three years drew closer to the test. Perceptions of test difficulty in relation to student proficiency also appeared to influence test motive. In the case of both Tina and Sunny, the need for TOEIC scores increased since the TOEIC offered a greater chance of success for them in comparison with other tests such as the OPIC and the national teacher’s test. Test motive was also connected to the number of other qualifications students had. For example, Sunny and Santana decided (in part) to take TOEIC Speaking to boost the absence of other qualifications: ‘I suddenly felt like I should write something down in the resume’ (Sunny). Moreover, findings also show that type of major and projected career path also appeared to influence individual stakes and test motive. As mentioned, EFL test scores were a necessary prerequisite for taking the bar exam, for one law student. For other majors, TOEIC scores did not seem to be as important: ‘My major is education so they [peers in education] aren’t really interested in TOEIC’ (Sunny).

The perceived need to ‘keep up’ with others appeared to be an additional factor encouraging test motive, in connection to securing a job: ‘Lots of friends got a good score – over 900, so it pushes me’ (Sunny); ‘This sense of inferiority will force me to do it [take the TOEIC]. I’ll be thinking, everyone else does it, so why can’t I?’ (Jessica). The desire to please other members within different community groups (particularly parents) also seemed to contribute to student motive, as shown in the case of Sunny who did not want to disappoint her parents with lower than expected scores. Results such as these highlight a fusion between the wider community and individual learner motive and agency. As noted in Chapter Four, learner agency is never a property of a particular individual but ‘a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large’ (Lantolf, 2001, p. 148).

In response to the motive of securing test scores for employment (motivated by a range of factors) case studies 1 – 5 created goals of target scores ranging from 700 – 900 to be achieved over a period of months to a year. A range of individual factors emerged to
contribute to these specific goals. Perceptions of expectations related to major and projected career path was one factor: ‘Engineers are busy trying to gain a high score. The requirements used to be about 600, but now it's more like 700 – 800’ (Steave). Tina also linked high scores to her major: ‘People think that all English majors are good at English, so my non-English-major friends say, “You must have a good score right?”’ (Tina). The following comment from an English-major in Phase One supports this notion: ‘Since my major is English I have pressure to have a better score than students in other majors like engineering’ (E2F3). Results also show how language ability may influence target scores. For example, although Jessica recognised scores of over 800 as desirable for purposes of employment, her target score was 700 due to believing that she was not ‘that good at English’.

In summary of discussion related to Research Question One, the first part of this chapter highlights the high stakes nature of the TOEIC as a result of a complex interplay between the test makers, the test, community stakeholders, and test-takers. Results also support the idea that individual stakes, test motive and goals may differ across learners due to a range of learner factors that interplay with the test and wider community such as: major, year, previous TOEIC experience, language ability, perceived difficulty of the test (in relation to language ability and other tests), qualifications, peer pressure and the desire to please parents. The next section explores the actions learners take in response to the motive and goals of taking and preparing for the TOEIC.

10.2.2 PROCESSES: Learner Action in Context

This section, ‘Learner Action in Context’ explores motivated learner action - how a test, situated within the wider community, and individual factors (including test motive and goals) may influence the actions learners take toward test preparation (RQ2). It also discusses situated learner action - the influence of different communities of practice on the language data and operations of student engagement (RQ3).

10.2.2.1 Motivated Learner Action

Research Question Two asks, ‘What actions do English and other-major students engage in when preparing for the TOEIC, and what key influencing factors may be behind this? As described in Chapter Five, this question explored the different approaches students took in response to the test and other influencing factors. Three major approaches emerged from the
results: a) Instructor-led preparation classes, b) English learning communities (not related to the TOEIC), and c) TOEIC preparation materials. These are discussed in turn below.

**Instructor-led Preparation Classes**

One consequence of the TOEIC, as Knapman (2008) notes, is the ongoing demand for TOEIC preparation classes (represented as a key stakeholder in the first part of this chapter). In the case of the present study, TOEIC classes (online or as a part of a school) featured as a key approach toward test preparation for other-majors, motivated by different learner factors as summarised by three metaphors. To begin with, results from both phases, support the notion of *preparation classes as a bridge to the TOEIC*, i.e. classes viewed as a way for students to strengthen familiarity with test format, content and structure. Time restrictions imposed by the test structure, in particular was a recurring concern raised by students. Miller (2003) supports the need for preparation classes noting that ‘even individuals of advanced ability cannot be expected to perform at their best if they are encountering a test format for the first time’ (para. 9). The following comment from focus group participant N1F3 appears to support this: ‘Some people who have good English ability or have lived in English speaking countries get reasonable results, but without special training for the TOEIC test, they can’t get fantastic results’. As such, Miller (2003) concludes that one legitimate reason why students may wish to, or perhaps should be encouraged to take TOEIC preparation classes is that ‘a thorough knowledge of the test format is important for test-takers if they are to display their true proficiency’ (para. 9), and therefore increase the validity of test results.

A more dominant influence behind learner action, however, was that of TOEIC preparation classes as *shortcut to success* - summed up well in the following comment: ‘Once I finished my course, my TOEIC score increased even though I didn’t study for it’ (N1M2). Similar to Roberts (2002) where students described TOEFL preparation classes as the most ‘expedient method for achieving a high score’ (p. 103), TOEIC classes were often perceived to raise scores over a short period of time. Across both phases, participants voiced a focus on test-taking strategies or test-wiseness as a key influence behind the perceived success of preparation classes, as later discussed. Results further suggest that students nearing graduation, in particular, may be drawn to preparation classes as the immediate importance of the test increases (Shih, 2007). As one student noted, ‘People in a hurry to get a job go there to get help (N1F3). Those with target scores significantly beyond their English ability may
also be drawn to preparation classes as perhaps a quick fix solution toward countering limitations in English.

A further metaphor to emerge from results was that of TOEIC classes as a zone of familiarity, *i.e.* where actions toward instructor-led learning contexts reflect preferred or familiar learning environments. The results of Jessica’s test activity, in particular, show how preparation classes (online and on campus) helped motivate her to keep on task: ‘I can concentrate better when I’m watching a lecture compared to when I study by myself...If I study individually, I forget’. A further comment by Jessica suggests that it may also be linked to a familiar culture of learning: ‘If I study alone, I can’t study because it’s difficult for a Korean to study English by books alone’. Students’ previous experience with private institutes or cram schools that focus specifically on improving test-taking skills for the KSAT (Guilloteaux, 2007) may also support TOEIC preparation schools as a familiar community of practice.

Of particular interest, however, the results of Jessica and Steave’s test activities show that more independent methods of study (including using materials from classes and TOEIC books) dominated TOEIC preparation toward the end of data collection. Cho (2010) similarly found that over three years preparing for the KSAT, students relied more on institutes in their first year and as they drew closer to the test they preferred methods of self directed study, which were seen to be more efficient. A contributing factor may be that as students move through a process of legitimate peripheral participation, becoming ‘increasingly experienced in the practices that characterize the community’ (Norton 2001, p. 160), they become less dependent on that community and turn to more efficient and economical methods of test preparation.

Of importance, results also show that other-majors reported greater use of preparation classes than English-majors. In particular, preparation classes were a form of action dominated by other-majors in focus groups, and five out of six other-majors from Phase Two participated in TOEIC classes, however, none of the English-majors mentioned TOEIC classes at any time before or during the research. TOEIC classes, therefore, may play a more prominent role in the learning process of other-majors. Results also show that English-majors tended to participate in more methods of self-directed study or rely on learning communities established in relation to their major (as discussed below).

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12 It is important to note that three of the six other-majors were recruited from TOEIC classes.
English Learning Communities/Resources

In preparation for the GEPT, Shih (2007) found English majors counted on their regular English study as a key method of test preparation, suggesting that they may experience less washback as a result. Most English majors in the present study similarly indicated general English study (i.e. that not directly related to the TOEIC) as contributing to their preparation for the test, particularly in the case of TOEIC Listening. However, although English-majors recorded many cases of indirect preparation, surprisingly few journal entries related specifically to English major classes. These results appear to contradict the results of focus groups where English majors connected their major classes to supporting preparation for the TOEIC. One explanation behind this may be that participants were not aware of how the content of their major supported their TOEIC preparation. Tina, for example, noted that it was only after keeping a journal that she started to become aware of how her classes supported preparation for the TOEIC. A further explanation may be that the content of classes did not relate closely to the TOEIC. Sunny for example, had only one class taught in English. The remaining classes, such as English Literature were taught in Korean.

Rather, the results reveal that the actions of English-majors outside of classes appeared to play a greater role on test preparation – highlighting, as Gosa (2004) points out, the importance of researching the study practices of learners outside of the classroom. In particular, as shown in the quantitative analysis of journals, English-majors from Phase Two engaged in a number of non-TOEIC resources that were seen to directly or indirectly support TOEIC test preparation. This included: watching TV/movies, creating study groups, using non TOEIC English textbooks, and preparation for other EFL tests. Therefore, although results show little connection between English major classes and the TOEIC; in support of Shih (2007), English majors did tend to rely on their general English study as a form of test preparation in comparison with other-majors. Although Santana mentioned participating in English conversation study groups, only one other-major (Brie) recognised English resources not related to the TOEIC as contributing to test preparation. No doubt, English-majors are likely to have more experience directing their own English language learning and have access to a wider English language community with which to draw upon in comparison with other-majors who, as a result, may be more inclined to connect to mediating language resources through TOEIC preparation classes. This point would benefit from wide scale quantitative research.
In addition to major, a further factor that may have contributed to the use of non-TOEIC resources was learning preference. For Sunny, in particular, exposure to interesting, enjoyable and motivating content was a key influence behind using movies and television to indirectly support her TOEIC preparation. Tina also expressed that working as part of a study group was motivating due to the sense of accountability she felt. English language ability and test factors such as previous scores, may also contribute to the use of non-TOEIC materials. Sunny for example felt that because her TOEIC listening scores were high enough, she did not need to focus on that part of the Standard TOEIC and could, therefore, use her general study as a means of maintaining her level of listening ability. A complex range of factors may contribute to the type of content a learner focuses on in situ, in response to a test.

**TOEIC Preparation Materials**

Although English-majors reported a greater reliance on general English study, TOEIC preparation materials featured as a recurring method of direct preparation across both major groups in Phase Two, influenced by a number of factors. Advice from peers, for example, was one influence behind using textbooks (and choice of publishing brand name). TOEIC Tomato and Hackers emerged as the most popular series of preparation manuals. Perceived English ability was a particular motivation for Jessica in choosing Tomato books, which were seen to be somewhat easier than other texts. TOEIC textbooks were further connected to material used in preparation classes, and were also used as a bridge to the test, especially in the case of Sunny who took TOEIC Speaking for the first time.

Textbooks also appeared to serve as a short cut to success through the teaching of test taking strategies (as suggested by the name Hackers). In addition to textbooks, results also show that students utilised simulated and practice tests to increase test familiarity and, in particular, practice time management skills in response to test structure. In the case of English-majors in particular, TOEIC preparation materials, appeared to support areas of the test that general English ability or study did not seem to support. The difficulty level of Part Five of the Reading section was a specific test factor that motivated some participants toward the use of textbooks. Sunny, for example, found that she could rely on her general English study for much of the test but that Part Five required extra work and assistance. Online TOEIC communities also served as a bridge to the TOEIC and a short cut to success for Tina who reported learning a number of test-taking strategies which she believed greatly supported test preparation. Up until that time, Tina noted, ‘I thought my English skills were bad’; however,
through online communities she came to realise that certain test taking abilities were an important factor toward strengthening scores.

A key point to emphasise here is that while test familiarity is an important factor toward showing what a student can do (and therefore increases the validity of test scores), the prolific use and marketing of TOEIC preparation materials brings into question the categorisation of the TOEIC as a proficiency test – a common phenomenon attached to proficiency tests (see Davies, 1990). As Knapman (2008) stresses in the case of the TOEIC, given that achievement tests, rather than proficiency tests, aim to measure how well students have covered material, there is some confusion over the status of the TOEIC as a proficiency test (pp. 90-92). In other words, TOEIC scores come to represent a record of achievement representing a test-taker’s ability to successfully complete a set of criteria as established within a hidden English curriculum promoted through TOEIC preparation materials.

At the same time, while preparation materials emerged as a common approach among the participants, it is important to highlight examples of outliers who participated in forms of test preparation perhaps counter to common practice (also found by Roberts, 2002). One focus group participant, for example, noted changing his study method from a grammar focused TOEIC approach (which he believed to be a typical form of test preparation) to focusing on English for communicative purposes. In Phase Two, Brie, the only other-major to record activities indirectly related to the TOEIC, believed that focusing on the TOEFL would support both her TOEIC preparation and general English to a greater extent than focusing on TOEIC alone. Moreover, Santana, recognising that his approach perhaps ran counter to common practice, described focusing on English conversation before and in tandem with TOEIC preparation, as a way of strengthening both his general English and TOEIC scores at the same time. Key influences behind this approach included advice from peers and the desire to work for an international company.

The degree by which learners perceive the need for English as part of their imagined communities, i.e. ‘groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination’ (Kanno & Norton, 2003), may be a key influence behind approaches toward test preparation. For example, those who envision using English in their future may be drawn toward forms of test preparation in support of both TOEIC scores and general English. The results also show, however, that students who were interested in improving their general English appeared, at times, to experience a metaphorical
tug of war with regard to content believed to support communicative English and that connected to bolstering scores. After buying a vocabulary book that had lists of frequently used words in the TOEIC, Sunny began memorising the definitions in the hope that she could ‘improve [her] score in a short period of time’. However, realising that this was not the most effective language learning strategy for long term language use, she stopped using the book and changed her method to finding new words in sentences, guessing the meaning and then memorising the words within the sentence. The choices students make in response to potential conflicts between long term English language learning goals and short term test goals is an interesting area to explore further.

In summary of RQ2, exploring motivated learner action, discussion above highlights how other-majors may turn to instructor-led TOEIC preparation classes (online or shared classes), due to limited participation in English language learning communities, as a result of major. Individual factors such as previous experience with the TOEIC, familiar and preferred cultures of learning and advice from peers may also contribute to a learner’s choice to take instructor-led test preparation classes. Students with goals of target scores significantly above their language ability, but perceived as a necessary requirement among companies, and/or those with limited time may further be drawn to TOEIC preparation classes as a shortcut to success. While English-majors may rely on aspects of their general English study in support of test preparation, results confirm the extensive use of TOEIC preparation materials across both groups (in classes and/or through independent use), highlighting the perceived need to focus on content outside of general English study - particularly that related to Part 5 of TOEIC Reading. The wide scale promotion and use of preparation material also brings into question the role of the TOEIC as a proficiency test. Long term English language goals may further influence learner action toward different approaches to test preparation where other-majors with strong imagined communities of English practice may be more inclined to engage in activities outside of TOEIC preparation classes in support of both TOEIC scores and general English ability.

10.2.2.2 Operations: Situated Learner Action

Research Question Three asks, ‘What operations do English and other-major students engage in when preparing for the TOEIC; and what key influencing factors may contribute to this? As explained in Chapter Four, operations refer to ‘the real-time in-process means by which an action is carried out’ under appropriate meditational means (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p.
Accordingly, this section explores the hypotheses that a test will influence what learners learn, how learners learn and the rate and sequence of learning (Anderson & Wall, 1993). This section accordingly, explores washback on content (the what of learning); and strategy use and the rate and sequence of learning (the how) in relation to situated learner action.

**Washback on Content**

Examinations have the power to drive the content of teaching and learning in the direction of what is required in an examination, where what is assessed becomes what is valued, which in turn becomes what is taught (Cheng, 1998a; McEwen, 1995). As such, in order to harness the effect of tests, many studies on washback have focused on the degree by which standardised tests within specific learning contexts can and do (or do not) influence teaching and learning toward the content and format of an established curricula, i.e. curriculum alignment (Shephard, 1990). Given that the TOEIC is constructed by an independent company for independent use, the present study explores a somewhat different conceptualisation of washback on content. Where there is no one specific mediatory context, or focus on curriculum alignment, attention is placed on the type of content students focus on in relation to direct test preparation, as independently navigated by the learners and influenced by language learning communities that students choose to participate in.

Not surprisingly, given that this study predominantly followed the independent test activity of students taking the Standard TOEIC, the results show that receptive areas of language learning (reading and listening) dominated the focus of their test preparation. Upon closer analysis, however, quantitative results reveal that within these language areas, grammar and vocabulary emerged as major points of focus. In the case of other-majors, in 60% of all cases, where content was mentioned, grammar and vocabulary was cited as a focus of the activity. Reading as a holistic task was mentioned in only 8% of all cases and listening in 19% of cases. While English majors seemed to report reading and listening in more holistic terms, grammar and vocabulary still emerged as a focus of content in 42% of all cases. In addition to this, qualitative journal entries reveal numerous examples of grammatical and/or lexical forms often described in detailed metalanguage.

The results certainly appear to direct attention toward the nature of the Standard TOEIC as promoting a focus on grammar and vocabulary as opposed to language in use as promoted by the test construct. Data from journals and interviews, in particular, emphasize TOEIC
preparation classes and materials directing students toward areas of discrete point grammar and vocabulary practice, as reflected in the model of the test. In a similar way, before major changes to the TOEFL, Hamp-Lyons (1998) reported student tendency to focus on learning chunks of language rules and vocabulary in response to test preparation textbooks:

Because the books are built around the model of the test and because the test is not intended to reveal or reflect a model of language in use...teachers and learners find themselves teaching-and trying to learn discrete chunks of language rules and vocabulary items without context or even much co-text (p. 332).

Related to this, a further recurring theme across both groups was ‘solving problems/analysing question types and/or practice tests’ through TOEIC preparation materials linked to TOEIC Reading, Listening and Speaking. In relation to the Bac (the Romanian high school graduation test), Gosa (2004) similarly found that students extensively practiced exam tasks (p. 226) both inside and outside of the classroom. In Japan, Brown (2005) describes how students voiced appreciation for the ‘TOEIC-ness’ of preparation classes that focused on the analysis and practice of discrete items. The author found, from developing preparation classes which centred on English skill-building as a route to TOEIC success (as opposed to directly focusing on the TOEIC), that students often complained that they did not want to study English; they wanted to study the TOEIC.

Since the earlier situation described by from Hamp-Lyons (1998), the TOEFL now offers, as Stoynoff (2009) notes, a better representation of the L2 construct that ‘relies less on discrete-point test items and multiple choice responses’ (p. 14). Despite recent changes to the TOEIC, however, the Standard test essentially remains an indirect, discrete point, multiple choice test that promotes a cognitive structuralist model of language (Knapman, 2008). As such, in the hope of bolstering test scores, it is not surprising that students are drawn to materials that support discrete point language rules. A negative consequence of this, as Nall (2004) notes is that: ‘rather than learning the broad range of content and skills that the test is intended to assess, students simply learn the far smaller set of various test-taking strategies and/or specialised content’ (Nall, 2004). Accordingly, given the aim of test designers to produce a test based on a communicatively defined test construct, the TOEIC appears to promote weak content and construct validity (Knapman, 2008), and strengthens the potential for negative washback with regard to the narrowing of content.

At the same time, Miller (2003) stresses the potential for positive washback on content where, in the case of Japan, TOEIC test-takers may be exposed to listening content that is more
communicative than that promoted in university English classes which ‘focus on single sentence translation or analysis of obscure poems from classical literature’ (para. 8). While it is not possible to confirm this from data associated with the present study, Cho (2010) reports that the reading section of the KSAT (Korean university entrance test), making up 75% of the test, tended to dominate student focus. Through preparation for the TOEIC, therefore, it is possible that Korean students also experience exposure to more communicative content through the listening section of the test. Moreover, in response to changes made to the new Standard TOEIC, Tina and Jessica both recorded increased attention on accents other than American. Given that American-based English study materials dominate English education in Korea, linked closely to the influence of America in the previous century, Korean students may greatly benefit from exposure to different accents. As Tina recognised, ‘These are accents I am not used to’. Students’ educational background within socio-historical contexts may be a key influence, therefore, on washback.

The results also confirm the difficulty of concluding whether the consequences of a test are positive, neutral or negative, since this may depend on the perspective of the evaluator (Watanabe, 2004). Case study Four (pp. 216-233) provides a good example. Despite having excellent communicative competence, Sunny felt compelled to focus on discrete grammar items in relation to part five of TOEIC Reading. As she described, if it were not for the TOEIC she would not have focused on grammar as much. As a result of focusing on discrete point grammar problems, she became aware of specific weaknesses in her grammatical competence. Given that she later secured a position as an English teacher at a local high, where class content often focuses on grammar in response to the KSAT, this focus on content may have been particularly beneficial.

In addition to the test and the context of student learning, results also show a range of individual factors that may mediate the washback effect on learning content. Roberts (2002), for example, reports how individual learner factors such as beliefs, culture of learning and previous language learning may influence a student’s choice of content focus. In particular, the author found Korean students to centre on the listening section of the TOEFL, believing that the emphasis of grammar by the Korean public education system would support other areas of the test. The same students dedicated less time on the writing section, believing that it was relatively unimportant. While the results of the present study run counter to Roberts (2002) with regard to less focus on grammar, student beliefs did seem to motivate learner
action. For example, despite noting dislike toward focusing on grammar in preparation classes, Steave also recognised that it should be a priority above other areas of English such as speaking, and continued focusing on grammar after leaving the institute. Washback on content, therefore, can be mediated by what students choose to focus (or not focus) on – again emphasising the role of learner agency.

Type of major, previous language experience and test scores may also influence the type of content students focus on. As mentioned, English majors appeared to rely more on their general English study as a way of indirectly supporting TOEIC preparation and were therefore drawn to areas of content not as readily supported by their previous/other study of English. Experience overseas was also linked to greater focus on TOEIC Reading; and previous test scores also seemed to influence the type of content students focused on, as exemplified in the case-studies of Sunny and Santana. A range of factors outside of the test, therefore, may contribute to the type of content students engage in and the potential outcomes of this.

**Washback on Strategy Use**

Purpura (1999) defines learning strategies as ‘the specific actions, activities or behaviours that are directly linked to some processing stage of language acquisition, use or testing’ (p. 23). The type of data collected in this study does not provide a detailed account of all strategies used by students; however, recurring themes provide an indication of the type of strategies students engaged in, and key influences behind their use. Linked closely to test format and the content of student learning from TOEIC preparation classes and materials, developing test taking strategies or ‘test-wiseness’ (Alderson et al. 1995, p. 45) emerged as the dominant theme across both phases. Participants commonly referred to these strategies as: locating patterns, using tricks, and learning formulas. Given the high stakes nature and multiple-choice format of the TOEIC, previous research highlights the tendency for students to turn to preparation schools and materials to support the development and use of test taking strategies. Choi (2008) describes how EFL instructors in private language schools often teach special EFL examination classes such as the TOEIC and TOEFL which tend to focus on test-taking skills. Knapman (2008) further confirms how students frequently develop test taking strategies and rote learn answers in response to the multiple-choice format of the TOEIC in the hope of achieving higher scores (p. 90); and Miller (2003) emphasises how TOEIC test-
takers often resort to test taking strategies such as ‘using the multiple choice format to one’s advantage in eliminating distracters’ (para. 7).

As mentioned earlier, test familiarity and test taking strategies, such as negotiating time, may have positive results in providing students with the opportunity to display their true proficiency’ (Miller, 2003, para. 9). However, the reliability of test scores comes under threat where test strategies and techniques support higher scores than a student’s language ability would perhaps allow (Sewell, 2005). Construct validity is also threatened where, as Knapman (2008) suggests, the Standard TOEIC provides a better indication of a student’s ability to answer a test question as opposed to their ability to perform in future contexts of communicative interaction, (p. 88). As a consequence to the learner, Andrews et al. (2002) further posit that ‘familiarisation with the exam format, and rote learning of exam specific strategies and formulaic phrases’ may lead to memorisation rather than meaningful internalisation (pp. 220-221). While it is not possible to connect memorisation directly to test taking strategies, memorisation featured as a recurring theme, in the individual case studies of Jessica, Steave, and Tina.

The TOEIC is certainly not the only test to be associated with test taking strategies and memorisation. As Choi (2008) notes, ‘negative washback effects are perpetuated in secondary education, where students are inevitably forced to employ test-taking strategies and prepare for college entrance exams’ (p. 58). Cho (2010) confirms this in her study of Korean high school students preparing for the KCSAT. Adapting a survey based on Green’s (2007) modification of the SILL, Cho (2010) found that the item to which respondents gave the highest score was, ‘I tried to learn test-taking skills for the KCSAT’. Focusing on test taking strategies is perhaps a familiar method of study for many students, and a strategy that continues from high school into the university setting.

Memorisation, closely linked to listening, reading, grammar, vocabulary and speaking practice, also appeared to be influenced by a familiar culture of learning. Sunny and Tina, for example, used memorisation skills in relation to preparation with other tests, and Steave connected memorisation to learning English in high school: ‘Phrases that appear in the TOEIC are sometimes those we used to memorise in high school...students tend to memorise a lot of sentences to be able to speak in a similar way’. Tina also linked the memorisation of English vocabulary to memorising Korean: ‘It’s not too different from learning vocabulary in Korean – as in a typical Korean style of vocabulary memorisation’. Of interest, Stanley, one
of the translators in this study, voluntarily added the following comment: ‘Many Korean English teachers who are not really grammatical or structural experts tell their students to memorise answers’. Students’ previous and familiar culture of learning, therefore, may strongly influence test-taking strategies and the memorisation of discrete areas of language.

At this point, it is perhaps important to consider the degree by which strategies linked to discrete point teaching and learning actually influence test scores. Brown (2005) describes how, as a result of isolated point teaching, test-taking strategies often led learners to focus on questions as linguistic puzzles rather than trying to understand what the questions were asking. The following comment from Jessica supports these results well, ‘It seemed I didn’t really know how to solve the questions, partly because I memorised everything’. Robb and Erkanbrack (1999) also found that TOEIC preparation classes were only effective in improving scores for lower level students. Of interest, Green (2007) found incongruence between what students believed and what actually proved successful in the IELTS. As such, irrespective of what is proven to be effective, student beliefs in the types of strategies that successfully raise scores may play an important role in the learning process. The results of the present study suggest that peers may have an important influence on such beliefs. Focus group discussions contained a number of stories of learners who had dramatically raised scores due to focusing on test taking strategies – tales such as these are likely to encourage others to follow similar paths. Direct advice from peers and seniors may also encourage learner strategies. Steave, for example, described how peers, who had taken TOEIC Speaking, had advised him to ‘just memorise Part Four’. As he notes, ‘people tell me to think of things simply; try to memorise grammar and things like that while studying for the TOEIC’. Despite acknowledging how focusing on test taking-strategies and memorisation did not ‘work’ for him and made him ‘feel bad’, he noted doing it ‘because other people are doing it’.

Although certain strategies were linked to preparation classes and materials, it is also important to stress differences between similar learning communities. For example, memorisation featured as a dominant theme in Steave’s test activity strongly connected to his TOEIC preparation class: ‘In the institutions, I just memorised - memorised as much as I could’; ‘Memorise this word because it’s on the TOEIC, you don’t need to memorise this because it’s not on the TOEIC – that’s how they teach’. He also noted taking part in ‘memorisation quizzes’. Santana, on the other hand, only once used the word memorisation in journals and explained how, in comparison with his previous teacher who encouraged
memorisation of words in isolation, his new teacher focused on grammatical structure and vocabulary in context. Subsequently, his learning style appeared to change from solving problems as linguistic puzzles, to referring to questions and vocabulary in relation to the text, as he notes, ‘Before I met that teacher, I only studied one word and one meaning’. He further found his writing ability to improve as a consequence. Teachers, no doubt, play a powerful mediating role in student test preparation and washback on strategy use.

Previous learning experiences and communities attached to a students’ major, may also influence the strategies learners use when preparing for the TOEIC. As Donato and McCormick (1994) point out, strategies are a by-product of mediation and socialisation into communities of language practice. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, given that English majors are likely to have access to more English learning communities (including peer groups) than other-majors, they are perhaps more likely to employ a wider range of strategy use in response to the TOEIC. Certainly, in the present study, English majors appeared to draw upon a wider and more flexible choice of strategies, particularly in relation to shared activities such as discussion, peer teaching, working on problems together, etc. As such, due to limited exposure to English communities and little English language learning beyond high school, one potentially positive washback effect for one other-major (Jessica) was the discovery of new independent learning strategies. For example, test preparation through a TOEIC Listening textbook appeared to support new independent English language learning strategies not previously experienced, given her limited experience learning English. This point again highlights the importance of identifying the evaluator when passing value judgements on washback.

Specific areas of test content may also promote different types of learning strategies. Shih (2007), for example, found students who prepared for the speaking section of the GEPT used more diverse observable learning strategies than in other language areas. In the present study, the use of repetition was commonly linked to Listening in the case studies of Jessica, Tina and Sunny. However, a preferred learning style of making study fun and interesting also appeared to influence the use of repetition in the case of Sunny. Moreover, repetition was also linked to a low tolerance for ambiguity in Jessica’s test activity. As she explained, ‘that is how I study – understanding fully before I move on to the next subject’; ‘I need to know all the context and grammar before I can understand’. Brown (2005) expressed similar findings where learners in TOEIC preparation classes in Japan displayed a generally low tolerance for
ambiguity – ‘feeling that it is necessary to understand each and every word in a problem was common among learners. Having a general understanding was insufficient’ (online). As noted in Chapter Three, the choice of strategies that students engage in may be influenced by the content of student learning but also by a range of interrelated factors making it difficult to solely attribute washback on strategy use to a particular test, or part of a test.

Washback on Rate and Sequence of Learning
Rate and sequence of learning refers to how quickly and in what order learners learn (Alderson and Wall, 1993). With regard to the sequence of student learning, linked closely to washback on content, findings show that test-takers focused more on reading and listening before speaking and writing; and grammar and vocabulary appeared to dominate test preparation before other areas of language. High stakes perceptions of the Standard TOEIC over other strands of the test may be a contributing factor. TOEIC preparation classes and materials may also influence the rate and sequence of student learning. Jessica, for instance, described how certain preparation classes focused on different areas of content depending on targeted bands of test scores. Of interest, no passing grades or prerequisite scores were required for different level classes. It is not difficult to imagine, therefore, how student goals of target scores may contribute to the level of class students take irrespective of language ability. TOEIC textbooks also appeared to influence the rate and sequence of Tina’s learning. Due to inexperience with the TOEIC, she closely followed the timed study schedule recommended in the books.

A further finding to emerge from this study was how preparing for the TOEIC influenced the rate of student learning in other subjects. Due to spending much time focusing on the TOEIC students expressed frustration at being distracted from their major studies. The theme: Preparation for the TOEIC competes with other studies emerged from Jessica’s test activity. As she notes:

The time needed to study English prevents one from studying something one wants to study but doesn’t have time for. If they could study something in their own interest in the time they spend on TOEIC, they could use their knowledge for their majors more efficiently and become a better person.

This is perhaps particularly frustrating for students who feel that English does not play an important role in their future career, or imagined community. As one focus group participant expressed it: ‘Why do we need to study English if we are not going to use it? (N1M1).
Perhaps the most important finding with regard to washback on the rate and sequence of learning, however, is how participants Jessica and Steave appeared to study from mediatory preparation materials significantly above their English ability. Miller (2003) draws attention to this concern noting how low-level learners who engage in preparation courses and materials encounter unmodified language including natural speed for native speakers, advanced vocabulary and idioms, and complex sentence structure that learners usually acquire only after extensive English study. As introduced in Chapter Four, SCT highlights the importance of conceptualising language learning as a process that is mediated by assisted performance through semiotic tools and resources (such as those related to TOEIC preparation classes and materials). Mediation acts as a type of scaffolding providing a supportive framework for the construction of knowledge. However, as Harmer (2007) notes, ‘a key element of successful scaffolding is that the learners can only benefit from it if they are in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)’ (p. 59). The results from Jessica and Steave’s case studies suggest that they were potentially studying outside of their ZPD. For example, in assessing her overall preparation for the TOEIC, Jessica made the following comment: ‘In the reading comprehension section, I didn’t have all the basics, so even though I listened to the lectures, I wasn’t able to apply them...the study method wasn’t right for me’. Steave also noted: ‘It was difficult to understand the words and grammar that I memorised’.

Exposure to materials beyond a learner’s ZPD may well lead to strategies such as test-taking strategies and memorisation as opposed to meaningful learning. It may further impact the rate of learning, where, as explained, in order to understand the material, Jessica felt the need to continuously repeat and review, which she recognised took more time than other methods of study. After one semester of preparing for the TOEIC in this manner, with little improvement in scores, she expressed great disappointment and demotivation. It is not surprising, as Miller (2003) notes, that low level students are ‘apt to feel frustrated, and with good reason’ (para. 12). These results further support findings from Watanabe (2001) who found that a test can be motivating and have a positive effect on students’ test preparation if it is of the appropriate difficulty to the learner. Outcomes associated with test preparation on learner affect are discussed in more detail in the next part of this discussion.

In summary of discussion related to Research Question Three, which explores the type of operations students engaged in and key influences behind this, results emphasise a narrow focus on discrete point grammar and vocabulary problems, particularly linked to TOEIC
Reading, and test preparation materials used independently and/or in preparation classes, and at times beyond student ZPD. Closely connected to the content of student learning, results also show the fostering of memorisation and test taking strategies which as discussed may negatively affect meaningful internalisation, and threaten construct validity. The form, structure and content of the Standard TOEIC is no doubt a key influence behind the focus of student content and strategy use; however, results also highlight the complexity of forming a one to one relationship between washback and the test alone. The mediatory roles of teachers, peers and instructional material across different communities of practice become key variables in the operationalisation of learning. Individual learner factors, such as familiar culture of learning, beliefs about language learning, previous English language learning experiences, long term English goals and short term test goals, major etc. may also interplay with content, strategy use and rate and sequence of student learning. Further to this, results also support the difficulty of establishing positive or negative values of washback on learning operations since what may be beneficial to one learner’s context may not be to another.

10.2.3 PRODUCTS: Outcomes of Learning

Research Question Four of this study asked, ‘What are the perceived outcomes of preparing for the TOEIC for English and other-major students; and what may be key influences behind these perceptions?’ Outcomes, as established in Chapter Five, refer to the hypotheses that a test will influence the degree and depth of student learning and learner attitudes (Alderson and Wall, 1993). The results from previous studies on learning outcomes support another of Alderson and Wall’s (1993) hypotheses: tests will have washback effects for some learners but not for others. Ferman (2004), for example, found students to report different levels of improvement in their overall command of English in response to the new national EFL oral matriculation test battery in Israel. Shohamy (1993) further found mixed results regarding the way students perceived and reacted to the Arabic as a second language test (ASL): sixty percent of students claimed that the test positively increased motivation while 38% of students reported negative feelings of fear, pressure and anxiety believing that the test did not reflect real learning. As mentioned, Watanabe (2001) also discovered washback on motivation to vary according to the language ability of the student. Findings from the present study also support mixed perceptions with regard to washback on the degree and depth of learning and attitudes as discussed below.
Washback on the Degree and Depth of Learning

Sfard (1998) highlights that a key aspect to learning is the ability to generalise knowledge from one experience and apply it in new contexts:

Our ability to prepare ourselves today to deal with new situations we are going to encounter tomorrow is the very essence of learning. Competence means being able to repeat what can be repeated while changing what needs to be changed. How is all of this accounted for if we are not allowed to talk about carrying anything with us from one situation to another? (p. 9).

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss this aspect of learning in any systematic way, the results present insights into the learners’ own perceptions of the relevance of TOEIC preparation toward other areas of second language use.

‘Preparing for the Standard TOEIC ‘helps’ general English ability’ was a theme that emerged from focus groups, dominated by English-majors. At the same time, a near equal combination of English and other-majors contributed to the idea that preparing for the TOEIC was not useful, practical or applicable to authentic situations – voicing a mismatch between ‘the degree of correspondence of the characteristics of a given language test task to the features of [its] TLU [target language use] task’ (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 23). In other words, this findings emerged despite the fact that ETS promotes TOEIC as a measure of ‘a person’s ability to communicate in English in the context of daily life and the global workplace environment using key expressions and common, everyday vocabulary’ (Powers, 2010, p. 1.2).

The results of individual case studies also reveal mixed perceptions among students. Overall, Steave and Jessica appeared to experience limited understanding, internalisation and application in response to TOEIC preparation materials (quite likely beyond their ZPD), centring on grammar and vocabulary, memorisation and test-taking strategies. Not surprisingly, both felt that their preparation for the Standard TOEIC had little application toward English for purposes other than the TOEIC. Santana, Sunny and Tina, on the other hand, acknowledged how preparation for the TOEIC had strengthened different areas of their English, including listening, grammar, vocabulary. Santana also explained how his general speaking ability had improved as a result of preparing for the Standard TOEIC. Factors contributing to more positive outcomes of learning in the case of Sunny, Tina and Santana may include a higher level of language ability, and a focus on content more closely matched to the student’s ZPD. In other words, a combination of language ability, in conjunction with
the type of content students focus on in situ, may greatly contribute to varying degrees and depths of student learning. The type of instruction and learning strategies associated with Santana’s test preparation classes may also have been a key element contributing to more positive internalisation of language data.

It is, no doubt, beyond the methodology of this study to definitively attribute different learning outcomes to specific factors. On the contrary, discussion up to this point emphasises how any combination of test, community and intrapersonal factors may influence the actions that learners make in context and the possible trajectory of learning outcomes. Tsagari (2007) also emphasises the difficulty of providing evidence of whether students have learned better or more (as a result of a particular test) through stakeholder perceptions alone. The results of this study certainly highlight this fact where student perspectives appeared to be influenced by different moods or contextual factors. Jessica, for example, seemed to reflect more positively on the degree and depth of her learning when she maintained a constant pace of study: ‘It seems like practicing untiringly will make it possible for someone to converse with a foreigner’. Moreover, given that Santana, Sunny and Tina each participated in English language communities for purposes other than the TOEIC, it is perhaps more likely that they noticed test preparation as applying to English for purposes outside of the TOEIC.

**Washback on Learner Attitudes**

The results of Phase Two support findings by Shohamy (1993) that students may experience different types of washback on their affect in response to the same test. With regard to negative outcomes, Steave experienced decreased enjoyment in English. Previous language learning experiences, which appeared to centre on interesting communicative content, in comparison with his TOEIC preparation classes, seemed to be a key influence behind this perspective. Jessica further expressed feelings of ‘severe’ stress and pressure closely related to reaching her target score, justifying a year absence from classes, and starting her TOEIC preparation at a later stage than peers. The year that students begin test preparation and their previous experience with the TOEIC are undoubtedly likely to influence test anxiety. Santana, the only participant to not mention negative outcomes, for example, began preparing for the test in his junior years and had taken the simulated and official versions 30 times. Further negative outcomes included decreased confidence in English, in the case of Sunny and Tina, closely connected to lower than expected scores. Those who view a test as having higher face validity may be more susceptible to the influence of test scores on learner affect. The results
of Phase One show mixed views on the degree by which scores represent an accurate measure of language ability. English-majors tended to favour the view that TOEIC scores did reflect a measure of English competence. English majors, therefore, may be more susceptible to the influence of scores on perceived language ability. The effect of simulated and official TOEIC scores on learner affect is certainly an area warranting further exploration.

With regard to positive and neutral outcomes on learner attitudes, Sunny experienced increased confidence (also in response to scores), and increased motivation to study areas of English she would not have otherwise focused on (such as grammar and vocabulary), as previously noted. Connected to preparation classes, Steave expressed concern over focusing on accuracy and the effect of this on his interlocutors, but interestingly noted that this was neither positive nor negative - again highlighting the difficulty of making value judgements without identifying the evaluator (Watanabe, 2004). As a further example, of complex relationships between the test and individual factors on learner attitudes, one focus group participant noted feeling ‘despair’ over the TOEIC, but found that he had not lost confidence in English due to other positive English language learning experiences. As with washback on learning outcomes, results such as these continue to support the complex nature of washback. Learners with individual histories, influenced by various communities may contribute in different ways to the influence that a test has on the outcome of learner attitudes.

As Burrows (2001) notes, the notion that learners may experience different levels of washback, as a result of the same test in similar contexts, moves away from traditional views of washback that, for the most part, tend to credit the positive and negative effects of testing on the quality of the test. Findings from the present study, as discussed, support a range of interrelated factors (such as those shown by Shih, 2007) that may contribute to the outcomes of student learning. Discussion above also highlights how the individual choices of learners within different contexts and at different stages of the learning process may also contribute to learning outcomes in response to a test – a key element missing from Shih’s model. The final section of this discussion seeks to include these ideas in an expanded, situated conceptualisation of washback.

10.3 EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF WASHBACK
Traditional conceptualisations of washback stress the directional influence that tests have on learning and teaching, where tests that come at the end of a course of study work in a
backward direction (as reflected in the term itself) to influence the attitudes, behaviours and motivation of teacher’s and learners (Pearson, 1988, p. 98). As Cheng and Curtis (2004) note, in cases where public standardised tests are used as levers of change, materials are designed to match the purposes of a new test, and school administrators, teachers, and students are generally required to work in alternative ways, and often work harder, to achieve high scores on the test. In such cases the authors argue that it may be more a case of tests coming first in the teaching and learning process (pp. 11-12). For years researchers have focused on the feasible and desirable power of examinations to bring about beneficial changes in teaching and learning, and as such, traditional views of washback have tended to credit the positive and negative effects of testing on the nature and quality of the test (Burrows, 2001). The following quote by Hughes (1993) highlights this well:

The nature of a test may first affect the perceptions and attitudes of the participants towards their teaching and learning tasks. These perceptions and attitudes in turn may affect what the participants do in carrying out their work (process), including practicing the kind of items that are to be found in the test, which will affect the learning outcomes, the product of the work (p. 2).

Although this conceptualisation allows for a somewhat incremental view of how learners may move through a process of learning in response to a test, it presents, nonetheless a perspective that fails to account for the myriad of forces operating within any educational context that may contribute to, or ensure the washback effect on teaching and learning (Cheng & Curtis, 2004). Research by Qi (2005), presented in Chapter Three, emphasises this point clearly. When Qi (2005) investigated why changes to the NMET (National Matriculation English Test) failed to bring about intended changes, she found that the beliefs and goals of teachers and students greatly mediated the intended washback effect of changes to the test. Without doubt, as notes, one of the key findings in the field of washback to date is that it is a highly complex rather than monolithic phenomenon (Watanabe, 2004, p. 19), where, as several washback studies have demonstrated, a wide range of intertwining factors and forces may mediate the washback effect of a test (Anderson et al., 1990; Cheng 1999; Cho, 2010; Herman 1992; Madaus, 1988; Qi, 2005; Shih, 2007; Wall, 2000; Watanabe, 1996).

A handful of models have emerged over the past fifteen years that reflect this. Bailey’s (1996) basic model of the participants, processes and products involved in washback (p. 36 of this work) depicts how a test may interrelate with different stakeholders, and how these stakeholders might influence each other; yet given the scope of the model, it does not detail the type of learning processes students might engage in and how this relates to the products of
learning. More recently, Green’s (2007) model of washback direction (p. 63 of this work) suggests how participant characteristics and values may contribute to test stakes and preparation. However, it fails to include the wider community and how test preparation may influence learning outcomes. Shih’s (2007) model of student learning (p. 65 of this work) presents an array of different test factors, learner characteristics and contextual factors that may work together to influence the washback of a test on student learning and psychology; however, as noted, his model is limited in that it does not account for the incremental nature of learning mediated by learner choices in relation to particular learning communities.

Moreover, as presented at the beginning of this chapter, washback will vary according to the status or level of the stakes of a test (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hughes, 2003). Therefore, what appears to be missing from previous conceptualisations of washback is the influence of the wider community and test-takers themselves on the wide scale impact and stakes of a test. Tests are instruments created by people for people in unique socio-cultural settings; therefore, in order to understand how a test might influence learning it seems important to consider the people and systems who contribute to the construction and use of the test and how they might interrelate. Furthermore, since studies on washback have tended to focus on teaching, what is also perhaps missing from previous models of washback is the important role of situated learner action, where learners with past histories, experiences, cultural associations, attributes, conceptualisations and agency (in context) play an important role in the washback effect of a test. This is particularly important given the growing number of English proficiency tests outside public education which involve a great deal of learner choice, and where test-takers may participate in any number of learning communities. In the case of public examinations, however, as found by Gosa (2004) and Cho (2010), students are also likely to engage in test preparation outside specific classroom contexts.

In light of the discussion in this chapter, and the limitations of previous models, Figure 10.4 introduces a sociocultural conceptualisation of washback that situates the learner and test as part of, and influenced by, the wider community. It also presents a view of washback that emphasises the incremental nature of learning in response to learner action in context.
Test-Taker, Community & Test Complex

Test-Taker
Attributes, conceptualisations and affect
Individual test stakes, motive and test goals

Extended Community
To which the test and test-taker previously belonged, currently belong, and seek to belong

Test
Wide-scale test stakes, construct, content, structure, nature of tested skill, status of tested language, test format, tested skills, test scores etc.

Processes: Learner Action in Context

Particular Learning Community:
Instructor-led (online or class), peer group and/or independent learning through mediatory materials

Content
Content related to the test and test construct & other

Strategies
Test taking strategies & other

Rate & Sequence
Sequence of learning within/outside ZPD
Time on learning/not learning

Outcomes

Products of Learner Test Activity

Test Scores
Mock or official

Learner Attitudes
(Attributes, conceptualisations and affect)

Degree and Depth of Learning

New Learning Strategies
English language learning and other

Achievement of Goals
i.e. joining imagined community

Figure 10.4
Washback on the Processes and Products of Learner Test Activity
The three major components of the model include: (a) the test-taker, community and test complex; (b) processes: learner action in context; and (c) products from student test activity. Each is discussed in turn below.

Test-Taker, Community & Test Complex
Moving away from earlier linear models that begin or end with the test as a central catalyst, Figure 10.4 presents the test-taker, community and test as part of an interrelated, interdependent complex that contributes to the wider impact and stakes of a test and to motivated learner action (as highlighted in the first part of this chapter). The test-taker, with learner attributes, conceptualisations and affect, (as presented in Breen’s, 2001 profile of learner contributions to language learning - page 79 of this work) may include for example: individual differences, self/social/cultural identity, constructs of self as learner, conceptualisations of classroom and communities, attitudes, and beliefs. In conjunction with the test and wider community, these individual factors play an important role in establishing individual test stakes, influencing a test-taker’s motive in the activity of preparing (or not preparing) for a test, and subsequent test goals. They also engage learners toward the facilitation and/or constraint of learning outcomes.

The extended community includes all groups and individuals related to the test and test-taker. As previously presented in Figure 10.2 (depicting interrelated stakeholder interests) this may include the test maker, the wider cultural, political, economic sector, preparation schools, textbook publishers and other invested stakeholders within the testing community. It may also include members of the community linked personally to the test-taker, e.g. parents, siblings, friends, peers, colleagues etc. (Shih, 2007). Acknowledging the important influence of history in SCT (i.e. different community states included in Breen’s, 2001 model), the extended community also represents that to which the test and test-taker previously belonged, currently belong, and seek to belong. For example, previous learning experiences in different communities may have a strong influence on learner motive and action where an individual’s goals ‘are formed and reformed under specific historical material circumstances’ (Lantolf & Genung, 2002, p. 191). A learner’s future imagined community, i.e. that which is not immediately tangible but whom we connect with through the power of imagination (Kanno & Norton, 2003), may also influence an individual’s goals (test and other) and subsequent learner actions. The TOEIC program also represents years of test development influenced by
previous stakeholders, and may also be influenced by the future needs of stakeholders and future markets.

Finally, drawing on previous research and models, the test may include any number of test-specific factors including: test qualities, such as test construct, content, structure, format and tested skills (Saville & Hawkey, 2004, & Shih, 2007), and other factors such as scoring procedures and facets related to the wider community such as the status of the tested language, wider stakes, and degree to which the test is counter to current learning practices (Shih, 2007). It is important to point out that in sociocultural terms, the three elements of the test, test-taker and wider community influence, and are influenced by each other. From the test-taker’s perspective in particular, as noted in Chapter Four, human agency involves a complex interplay between the individual (intrapersonal) psychological plane and the social (interpersonal) plane. As Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) stress, individual learner agency is ‘never a property of a particular individual’; rather it is ‘a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large’ (p. 148). Therefore, although the test-taker is presented in a separate box, it is important to highlight that individuals are not autonomous and bounded; rather, boundaries between the individual and their context are blurred and changing.

**Processes: Learner Action in Context**

Absent from other models on washback, the remainder of Figure 10.4 captures the incremental nature of learning as washback evolves through different hierarchical levels of learner activity in response to a test (as portrayed in Leont’ev’s (1978) conceptualisation of human activity). It begins with motivated learner action where the test, community and test-taker factors (including individual stakes, motive and test goals) together motivate learner action with regard to the type of learning context(s) students choose to engage in (i.e. the particular learning community as represented in Breen’s (2001) diagrammatic representation of learner contributions in context). As found in the present study, particular learning communities may include contexts where students directly engage with others, including instructor-led classes (test preparation classes or other English classes), and peer group contexts (study groups or on-line chat sites). Students may also participate in independent learning contexts that involve indirect engagement with others, e.g. through online lectures, or through the words of authors in preparation textbooks etc. From a sociocultural perspective, these communities of practice and associated materials mediate student learning through a
stage of other regulation, where varying levels of assistance, direction and scaffolding influence the type of content, strategies and rate and sequence of learning that students participate in.

The content, strategies and rate and sequence of student learning may be classified in numerous ways, and it is beyond the scope of this study to provide an exhaustive categorisation of the different types of learning operations students may engage in. At the risk of oversimplification, however, results revealed two major types of content that students appeared to focus on during test preparation: that directly related to the test, such as practice tests and preparation materials; and content indirectly related to the test, i.e. that contained in mediatory materials and contexts related to English for purposes other than the test. The degree by which the content of student learning relates to the test construct (as shown in Green’s, 2007 model) may perhaps be another way of distinguishing the content of learning.

Two major categories of strategies also appeared to emerge: test-taking strategies – strategies directly related to the test format and structure; and other strategies focused on test content or English for general purposes. Rate and sequence of learning, as presented in results, may include learning within and outside students’ ZPD; it may also include time spent, or not spent on learning. No doubt, more research is needed in categorising the different areas of washback on content, strategy use and rate and sequence of learning. It is also important to point out that one learning operation may be influenced by another in response to a test. For example, what students focus on (the content of their learning) is likely to affect how they learn (strategies and rate and sequence of learning) and vice versa - complex relationships in need of further exploration. Of further importance, a key finding to emerge was that although different learning communities may influence learning processes, students may also exercise their agency, in support of or in opposition to that promoted in the learning context (as motivated by individual factors, outside community factors, and specific test factors).

Products from Student Test Activity

The final stage in Figure 10.4 presents the outcomes of student test activity. From a SCT point of view, students move through the process of other regulation to internalisation resulting in the outcomes of student learning. In relation to previous hypotheses on washback, this may relate to the degree and depth of student learning, and attitudes (Alderson and Wall, 1993). It may also include new learning strategies internalised by students as a result of their test preparation. As found in the results of the present study for example, Jessica learned new
independent language learning strategies through independent test preparation. The outcomes of student learning may also include test scores (i.e. the product of taking simulated and official tests) and the extent by which the goals of student test activity are achieved, i.e. the extent by which learners are able to meet their target scores and join their imagined communities. The products of student learning are also likely to interrelate. For example, test scores and the degree and depth of student learning may influence learner attitudes in terms of confidence and motivation toward English (as in the case of Tina and Sunny). Test scores are also likely to influence the degree by which learners feel their goals have been achieved.

As indicated by the arrow that leads from the first box (test-taker/community/test complex) to outcomes, how students internalise the outcomes of their learning may not only be influenced by learner action in context but be further influenced by test/community/individual factors outside of particular learning communities. For instance, the test scores of others may play an important role in the formation of learner attitudes when comparing their scores with others. English learning communities outside of particular TOEIC preparation contexts may also influence the product of learner attitudes. For example, in cases where students are able to apply their TOEIC preparation to contexts not connected to the TOEIC, they may develop more positive attitudes toward the product of their learning. Parental and peer response to test scores may also influence learner attitudes with regard to the outcomes of their test preparation. The initial motives and goals of students will also influence the degree by which they feel their goals have been met.

The final part of Figure 10.4 includes a directional arrow leading from the products of student learning back to the test-taker/community/test complex. The outcomes of student activity are likely to influence test-taker motive to continue (or discontinue) preparing for the TOEIC or to increase or decrease test goals. Different communities of stakeholders interested in test scores will also be influenced by the outcomes of a students’ test activity where scores are used for multiple purposes. As test scores inflate, test makers may be interested in finding ways to reduce the influence of test-taking strategies on test scores. Moreover, a common theme to emerge from the study was the idea of students engaging in different types of test preparation because ‘everyone else does’. The outcomes of student test activity on learner attitudes are likely to feed back into the wider community where others are encouraged to follow similar paths. These are but a few examples of how a learner’s test activity may wash back into the test-taker, community, and test.
It is important to point out that Figure 10.4 depicts an early theoretical representation of how washback may be conceptualised from a sociocultural perspective. It does not aim to provide an exhaustive list of learner, community and test factors that may influence washback on student learning or the operations that students might engage in. Certainly, as opposed to seeking a generalisable ‘correct interpretation’ (Duff, 2008) it is important to reiterate that a major aim of this study was to represent possible interpretations of human experience in the hope of generating ‘ideas which are sufficient to make us think again’ (Holliday, 2010, pp. 101-102). In essence, Figure 10.4 suggests a possible shift in the direction of the field of washback toward a more situated view of how a test, embedded in sociocultural, historical, political and economic contexts, may influence the actions of learners operating within particular communities of practice.

10.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter Ten presented a discussion on the combined data set of Phases One and Two of the study. Based on Engeström’s (1999b) representation of an activity system, the first part of this chapter provided a conceptualisation of the wider impact and stakes of the TOEIC as influenced by complex, interdependent relationships between the test makers, the test-takers and invested stakeholders within different community sectors. As such, the chapter argued for a perspective on washback that does not begin with the test alone, but rather one that situates a test as embedded within complex social, cultural, political and economic settings. Based on Leont’ev’s (1978) conceptualisation of an activity system, the second part of the chapter presented a view of washback where the products of student learning (test scores, attitudes, degree and depth of learning, new learning strategies, and the achievement of goals) are mediated by the contributions that learners make within particular learning communities as influenced by a range of test/community/individual factors. The discussion has also highlighted, in particular, the powerful influence of individual motives and goals and learner agency. Combining the macro and micro levels of exploration, the chapter ended with a model of washback on student learning – one that emphasizes a fusion of the test, test-taker and community as motivating learner action toward the processes and product of student learning in context. In light of this discussion, Chapter Eleven presents the final conclusions and implications.
Chapter Eleven
CONCLUSION

11.0 Overview
Chapter Eleven provides a summary of the purpose and significance of this study, acknowledges the limitations, synthesises major findings and contributions, and raises important implications for key stakeholders involved.

11.1 Purpose and Significance
This work has centred around three aims: to investigate washback from the perspective of learners, to explore the washback of the TOEIC within the context of Korea, and to examine washback as a socially situated phenomenon. A review of each aim and its significance to the field of language testing follows below.

Washback on learning from the perspective of learners
Testing is never a neutral process; there are always consequences, and there remains little doubt that external tests exert a powerful influence on the classroom, education system and society as a whole (Alderson & Wall, 1996; Stobart, 2003). However, as established in Chapter Three, washback is a highly complex phenomenon where ‘we cannot be confident that certain aspects of teaching and learning perceptions and behaviours are the direct and causal effects of testing’ (Cheng, 2008, p. 358). Rather, studies (including this one) show that a range of test factors, learner characteristics and contextual factors may work together to influence the washback effect of a test (Anderson et al., 1990; Cheng 1999; Cho, 2010; Herman 1992; Madaus, 1988; Qi, 2005; Shih, 2007; Wall, 2000; Watanabe, 1996). Consequently, as Cheng (2008) observes, although there exists a set of relationships between testing, teaching and learning, questions remain as to what factors are involved in washback and under which conditions beneficial washback is most likely to be engineered (pp. 349-355). A key purpose of this study, therefore, was to better understand how different factors and conditions may work together to influence student learning as a result of preparing for a high stakes test.

In order to promote potential positive washback, Bachman and Palmer (1996) stress the need to collect information from test-takers about their perceptions of a test and test tasks (p. 33). Watanabe (2004) further posits that since attempts to innovate in education simply by
changing examination systems through a top-down approach have been unsuccessful, then it may be more appropriate to take a bottom-up approach, i.e. one that starts at the individual level. Despite these claims, and the need to better understand those perhaps most affected by language testing, relatively little research has documented washback from the perspective of learners (Bailey, 1999, Tsagari 2007). This longitudinal study, which closely tracked the attitudes, actions and behaviours of learners in response to a high stakes test, therefore, contributes to a much needed area of study in the field of washback within language testing.

**Washback of the TOEIC at one Korean university**

Worldwide, high stakes English language tests often perform crucial gate-keeping roles leading to important life consequences for large numbers of test takers, and exert a powerful influence on English language learning (Cheng, 2008; Hawkey, 2006). The TOEIC within the context of Korea is a strong case in point. Chapter Two of this work established the test as a major tool in the hiring of employees, and one that contributes to important decisions within Korean universities. Yet despite the popularity and stakes of the test in Korea (and Japan), and its growing influence worldwide, very little research has focused on the TOEIC program, especially in comparison to other major EFL tests, and particularly in relation to washback on learning. A further goal, therefore, was to better understand the nature of washback on learning with respect to the TOEIC in the context of Korea.

**Exploring Washback as a Socially Situated Process**

A third aim of this study was to broaden our understanding of washback as a socially situated process. Previous studies on washback have tended to focus on observable behaviours within specific classroom settings, independent of the wider social context. However, as Cummins and Davison (2007) observe, ‘learners are a part of a larger social matrix, affiliated with diverse communities and interacting in dynamic ways with members of these communities’ (p. 615). This aspect of learning and context has yet to form an integral part of studies on washback, but seems vitally important, especially in the case of test-driven cultures and societies such as Korea. A key focus of this study, therefore, was to provide new insights into how different sociocultural factors may mediate the washback of a test at different stages of the learning process, and to place the learner within a much larger social matrix. This was achieved by tracking the actions of learners beyond the influence of a single classroom setting, and drawing upon SCT (Activity Theory) to support data analysis – an approach that to date has received relatively little attention within the field of language testing.
11.2 Limitations

Before summarising major findings and conclusions, it is important to emphasise the boundaries and limitations of this study with respect to scope and transferability, and methodological procedures.

Scope and Transferability

A key question under investigation in studies on washback is whether students have learned ‘more’ or ‘better’ as a consequence of a test (Tsagari, 2007); however, it was beyond the scope of this work to present any quantifiable or systematic measure of this. Rather, the major focus of this study was on the process of student learning. What this research has been able to present and discuss with regard to the degree and depth of student learning, however, are learner perceptions on the influence of TOEIC preparation on learning, and the relevance (or applicability) of this to other areas of L2 use. It has also explored learner perspectives with regard to affective outcomes associated with student learning. As shown, learner perceptions play a powerful mediating role in the process of washback, and are an important factor to consider when evaluating the outcomes of student test preparation as positive, negative and/or neutral, since this will greatly depend on the context of the learner.

Issues of validity are also central to studies exploring washback. As introduced in Chapters Two and Three, Messick (1996) suggests that washback should not be considered in isolation but as one of multiple forms of evidence needed to sustain valid language use. As he explains, ‘by attempting to minimize sources of invalidity in language test design, the test deficiencies and contaminants that stimulate negative washback are also minimized, thereby increasing the likelihood of positive washback’ (p. 243). However, it was beyond the scope of the present study to collect the various forms of evidence required for a comprehensive evaluation of the validity of the TOEIC, of the kind that Messick envisaged. Any attempt to evaluate the test on the basis of existing evidence is also hampered by the fact that relatively little has been published by ETS on the validity of the TOEIC, especially in contrast to the numerous validation studies of other major international English proficiency tests. The best that could be done in this thesis was to provide, in Chapter Two, a detailed review of the available evidence from ETS and other sources on this topic.

Furthermore, given the small sample of carefully chosen participants typically associated with qualitative research, it is also not possible to generalise the results of this study to wider
populations. However, the intention of data collection was to inform and enhance our understanding of washback through thick description; therefore, internal validity played a more distinctive role than external validity in this study. A major strategy used to establish internal validity was that of exhibiting researcher integrity, i.e. maintaining transparency of method, examining researcher biases and outliers, leaving an audit trail, providing thick description and demonstrating an emic perspective. Validity/reliability checks were also established through respondent feedback and peer checking. Research design strategies used to strengthen internal validity included method and data triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, and submission (see pp.100-104). Therefore, although the findings of this study are not generalisable to wider test-taking populations, they provide an internally valid, reliable, and in-depth look at the contributions a particular set of test-takers made in directing the outcomes of their learning in response to a high stakes test. As suggested by Mackey and Gass (2005), the results also add to a wider body of research, which together may be used to help draw firmer conclusions.

**Methodological Procedures**

*Data collection*

A further limitation associated with the data set is that it depended on the learner’s own subjective analysis, and the extent to which individuals can analyse all the processes involved in their own language learning is questionable (Heigham & Croker, 2009). As noted by Hall and Rist (1999), interviews in particular may be subject to selective recall, self-delusion, perceptual distortions, and memory loss. Moreover, in the case of the journal data, it is possible that students may have chosen to report on concrete areas of their learning such as grammar and vocabulary rather than other areas of general language use. In other words, the instrument may have influenced what learners chose to report on. Use of these two methods alone would perhaps greatly jeopardise the validity of the study; however, triangulated data involving the use of longitudinal journals and multiple interviews across a number of participants, afforded what this researcher believes to be a representative picture of student learning processes in response to TOEIC preparation. The results also highlight the strength of using journal methodology where one participant (Tina), for example, noted that it was not until she was asked to keep a journal that she realised how much her major (English) contributed to TOEIC preparation. Multiple interviews in conjunction with journal data also allowed for contradictions to emerge which this researcher was able to explore in detail.
Data transformation

A significant feature of the research design is the interpretation and translation of data by third parties, which tends to impose methodological and epistemological challenges for the researcher (Larkin, 2007). Different languages construct different ways of seeing social life, and translators are often faced with an array of possible word combinations that could be used to convey meaning (Larkin, 2007; Temple & Edwards, 2002). As presented in Chapter Five, a number of strategies were established to meet limitations associated with researching in a language in which the researcher had limited proficiency. The team was carefully selected based on language ability, relationship to the researcher and cultural sensitivity. Moreover, given that context is ‘all important in deciding equivalence and difference in meaning’ (Temple & Edwards, 2002), where possible the same interpreter/translator was used to transform data taken from a single context. For example, the interpreter for Phase One also transcribed and translated the data. One translator transcribed and translated all individual case study interviews from Phase Two, and the journal data attached to a specific participant was assigned to one translator. The interpreter and translators were also very active in the research process and participated in regular discussions with the researcher. They also met as a group to discuss any difficulties involved in the translation process. Finally, the translations were also checked by a highly respected Korean professor in the field of applied linguistics, and by a Korean author of high school English language textbooks.

Data Analysis

A strategy toward satisfying issues of interpretive validity was member checking; yet only two of the five participants in the individual case studies participated in this process. Given the longitudinal design of the research and the lengthy process of transcription/translation and data analysis, it was difficult to reengage the interest of participants, and in some cases impossible to re-establish contact. This is unfortunate given the loss of additional data that may have been gained through this process. However, a further strategy in place was peer checking. Where qualitative studies often brush over this process, a key strength of this thesis is that it provides a detailed qualitative analysis of peer checks, outlining each and every area of concern, the actions taken by the researcher (Appendices G and J).

11.3 Major Findings, Conclusions and Contributions

This section presents the main findings, conclusions and contributions. It highlights the need to position the test and test-taker as part of a wider context, draws attention to the role of
motivated and mediated learner action in directing the washback effect of a test, and posits an expanded and deconstructed view of washback on learning.

Positioning the Test, Test-Taker and Washback within the Wider Context
As companies have come to demand greater levels of English among employees in response to a globalised market, the TOEIC has responded to a call for an international English proficiency test within the business sector. However, this researcher has stressed concern over the valid use of test scores and the exceptionally high stakes status of the Standard TOEIC. Although the test makers introduced separate speaking and writing components in 2006, it appears that the practicality and reliability of the Standard TOEIC continues to support the use of the test as a defacto, multipurpose indication of a person’s English ability (Chapman & Newfields, 2008; Choi, 2008). In which case, given the lack of validity attached to the Standard TOEIC as a sole measure of how well a person can communicate in the workplace (Choi, 2008; Knapman, 2008; Liao, Qu & Morgan, 2010; Stoynoff, 2009), there is concern over the meaningful use of test scores. Moreover, since end users have not lobbied for a more appropriate test to any great extent, and productive measures of the TOEIC program appear to have gained little interest, this researcher has questioned the extent of the actual need for a measure of English language competency in the workplace, especially in comparison with the widespread demand for the Standard TOEIC. Rather, in light of powerful cultural-historical values, the discussion has drawn attention to the likely use of the Standard TOEIC as a major gate-keeping device used to filter those with the highest level of motivation and display of self-cultivation. Since test preparation can take a great deal of time and money, as voiced by the participants in this study, this researcher, therefore, has also raised concern over the use of TOEIC scores as a potentially unethical form of social selection.

At the same time, the discussion has also highlighted the complexity of disentangling exactly who or what is responsible for the consequences of a test. As shown, interrelated stakeholders operating in complex social, cultural, political, economic and historical contexts, contribute to the construction, growth, development and, importantly, use and stakes of the TOEIC. Since washback may function in relation to how high or low the stakes of a test are (Alderson, 2004; Hughes, 1993; Alderson & Wall, 1993), this perspective strengthens early observations by Bachman and Palmer (1996) who suggest that washback is a more complex phenomenon than simply the effect of a test on teaching and learning. Rather, as the authors argue, the
Consequences of a test should be evaluated with reference to the contextual variables of society’s goals and values, and the educational system in which the test is used (p. 35). Certainly, as the present study highlights, it is the interconnected goals, rules and values of different stakeholders set within the wider socio-cultural-historical context that essentially become the guiding and integrating force behind student test activity. Without such motivation there would be no activity and therefore, no washback. As such, it seems that any attempt at working toward positive washback would require an evaluation of not only the effect of the test on teachers and learners, but also of the influence of key interrelated stakeholders responsible for contributing to the construction, use and stakes of the test. In other words, washback appears to begin at a societal level, not simply at the level of the test.

**Washback through Motivated and Mediated Learner Action**

Breen (2001) notes that ‘it stands to reason that the outcomes of student learning are, at least potentially and to differing extents, constrained or facilitated by the contributions that learners make’ (p. 179). In a similar way, the results of this study emphasise the important contribution of motivated and mediated learner action in directing the washback effect of a test on learning. Specifically, in addition to the influence of the wider test stakes, the results show that learners may be motivated to prepare for the TOEIC in response to a number of interrelated interpersonal and intrapersonal factors including major, year, previous TOEIC and test experience, language ability, perceived difficulty of the test in relation to language ability and other tests, and importantly pressure and advice from peers and parents. Findings also show that learners may participate in a variety of different mediatory learning communities when engaging in test preparation, again motivated by a range of interrelated factors. These communities, in turn, are likely to encourage what (content of learning) and how (strategies and rate and sequence of learning) students study in preparation for a test. At the same time, the results also show (as supported by Green, 2007), that students are also likely to exercise their learner agency within these different mediatory environments drawing upon an intricate set of experiences, beliefs and affordances. There is no doubt that washback is a complex and dynamic system.

Accordingly, disentangling which factors are likely to lead to any one particular outcome seems somewhat of an impossible task. However, a key finding specific to this study, is that learners with limited English or English learning experience appeared to flounder (often in quiet desperation) over how best to prepare for the TOEIC, and consequently, tended to be
drawn toward the advice, actions and instruction of others. Students with majors other than English, in particular, appeared to participate in and be influenced by instructor-led TOEIC preparation classes and lectures to a greater extent than English-majors. Test takers with more English language learning experience (English-majors in particular), on the other hand, seemed to access a wider set of English language learning resources and communities (also found by Shih, 2007), and utilised a greater variety of language learning strategies. Accordingly, one hypothesis generated from the results of this study is that, students with greater levels of English learning proficiency and/or language learning experience are likely to exercise greater levels of learner agency, and therefore exercise greater control over the washback effect of a test.

A further finding from this study was that TOEIC textbooks and preparation materials, often viewed as a ‘short cut to success’, emerged as a key mediatory action across almost all participants in the second phase. Led by the discrete point, multiple-choice format of the test, which essentially promotes a cognitive structuralist model of language (Knapman, 2008), the results show that TOEIC preparation materials appeared to direct students toward a narrow focus of content and strategy use. These findings confirm reports of negative washback associated with TOEFL preparation materials before major changes to the test (Hamp-Lyons, 1998). A small number of participants, however, strongly motivated by long term English language learning goals were found to reject TOEIC preparation materials, turning instead to alternative methods of test preparation. An early hypothesis to emerge from this is that students with clear long-term English language goals and strong imagined communities (involving authentic English in use) are perhaps more likely to facilitate or constrain the washback effect of a test toward meeting these goals, and therefore experience greater levels of positive washback.

It is, no doubt, beyond the scope of this study to support these hypotheses to any great extent. Nonetheless, what the combined results of this research clearly suggest is that in order to better understand washback, we need to appreciate test-takers as people with powerful motives, goals, beliefs, attributes, conceptualisations, and above all agency. The contributions that learners make (led by these factors) become key variables in potentially constraining or facilitating the washback effect of a test toward positive learning outcomes. In this light, learners have great potential to support a bottom up approach to generating positive washback, as suggested by Watanabe (2004) earlier.
Expanding and Deconstructing Washback

One of the main contributions of this thesis is that it seeks to broaden our understanding of washback as a social phenomenon. Figure 10.4 of this work presents a tentative model which captures a view of washback that moves beyond the simple notion of the influence of a test on teaching and learning. Importantly, it begins at the societal level rather than at the level of the test, highlighting the fact that washback is likely to function in relation to test stakes driven by the goals, rules and values of the test makers and different stakeholders within the wider community. A further feature of this model is that it separates different forms of washback that emerge as a test-taker goes through a process of motivated, mediated learner action (i.e. washback on content, strategy use, rate and sequence of learning), to a level of internalisation (washback on the degree and depth of learning and attitudes on testing and learning). It also highlights the interrelated and influential nature of different forms of washback within the process.

Although the model represents a graphic visualisation of the washback of the TOEIC on the processes and products of student learning, essentially, what is fundamental to this conceptualisation is that high stakes tests work as a part of a complex social matrix to strongly influence how and what learners learn in situ, while at the same time allowing for the powerful role of learner agency. In this respect, it is apt to apply to other high stakes language testing contexts.

11.4 Implications

A chief contribution of this study is that it has highlighted the powerful influence of interrelated stakeholders in directing the washback effect of the TOEIC. This carries with it important implications for the test makers, the wider community, learners and teachers, and researchers, as described below.

The Test Makers

Principles Six and Seven of the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) Code of Ethics emphasise the fact that language testers develop and exercise norms on behalf of society. Accordingly, in these privileged societal roles, they have an obligation to improve the quality of language testing, assessment and teaching services, promote the just allocation of those services, and contribute to the education of society (ILTA, 2000). After a review of literature on the validity of the TOEIC, and despite a recent flurry of research reports
endorsed by the test makers, there appears to be little evidence to suggest that the makers of the TOEIC have worked towards strongly upholding these principles. For decades, ETS has failed to clearly define the theory of language that underpins the test design and without a clear indication of the construct it is difficult to measure or improve the quality of the test, and therefore, work towards the likelihood of promoting a higher level of positive washback (Green, 2007; Messick, 1996).

In particular, until recent changes to the TOEIC program, the Standard TOEIC was promoted as a multipurpose indication of an examinee’s English competence for nearly three decades. Accordingly, there is great need for the test makers to clearly define the construct of the reading and listening components for its end users. As Knapman (2008) notes, if ETS were to do this, ‘the test might then be seen as an inappropriate test of workplace English communicative proficiency’ and not used for purposes other than providing a measure of reading and listening skills (p. 93). There is also a great need for ETS to provide stronger evidence of construct validity beyond outmoded psychometric practices of test validation (i.e. criterion-related validity evidence based on correlations with other tests). The test makers could also improve the quality of the service it provides by researching the consequential and predictive validity of the test, and by introducing more substantial changes to the content and format of the Standard TOEIC, such as those suggested by Chapman and Newfields (2008; p. 30 of this work).

The Wider Community

Test makers are certainly not the only stakeholders developing and exercising norms on behalf of society. This study has drawn attention to how the interrelated interests of stakeholders in the wider community may contribute to the construction, use and popularity of the TOEIC. These stakeholders, therefore, play an important role in driving learners toward test preparation and test washback. Specifically, this study has highlighted the influence of rules and regulations among interested parties in sanctioning or reducing the inappropriate use of test scores. Government intervention, in particular, plays a very powerful role in regulating the inappropriate use of test scores. As shown, one participant instantly ceased TOEIC preparation after learning that TOEIC scores were no longer accepted as a means of gaining extra points on the national high school English teachers exam. From 2011, Korean universities were no longer permitted to use TOEIC scores as part of the admission process. Both of these changes represent positive steps forward. However, in the context of
this study, as found by Choi (2008), TOEIC scores were used among growing numbers of departments as a requirement for graduation, and linked to the allocation of scholarships. These results suggest the need for more research into the uses of the TOEIC within institutes of higher learning, and perhaps a greater level of government intervention.

The findings of this study also highlight the powerful role of companies in driving the stakes of the TOEIC. However, given the paucity of research on the actual use of test scores by companies, it is difficult to establish the degree by which the business sector directly influences the stakes of the test. However, there is no doubt that it plays a pivotal role in motivating what and how university students prepare for employment. Greater transparency of the need and use of EFL tests would greatly influence student test activity. There also appears to be a need for more communication between the business and tertiary sectors as to what exactly companies require from future employees so that universities may better guide students toward credentials of most value to students.

Finally, with the increasing use of international EFL tests, this study also highlights the valuable role of organisations such as the ILTA in encouraging a strong code of ethics within the wider testing community.

_Learners and Teachers_

Given the pervasive role of tests in society, it is not difficult to imagine how students may come to attribute examinations as external uncontrollable factors in their lives, particularly in test driven cultures such as Korea. However, the findings of this study emphasise the equally powerful role of learner choice and agency in affecting how and what students learn. In particular, the results highlight the potential that clear language learning goals (connected to imagined communities) may have on directing student test activity toward outcomes that more closely reflect the needs and motives of the learner. Yet as Jeon (2010, p. 56) notes, ‘While almost all Korean people think English is important, many of them still do not have realistic expectations toward achieving their English learning goals. Some do not even know what goals they are trying to attain (p. 56)’. In such cases, individuals may become driven toward the single goal of bolstering test scores, or blindly follow the actions of others who do not necessarily share the same goals. No doubt, a recurring phrase to emerge from this study was: ‘because everyone else does it’. Teachers, therefore, may play a pivotal role in guiding learners toward appropriate short term test goals and long term English learning goals.
Teachers may also support learners by raising their awareness of the powerful role of learner agency. As noted in Chapter Four, language learning strategies feature as an important variable, or manifestation of agency which can greatly impact learner success. Differences between learner proficiencies tend to reflect the flexible application of strategies that are appropriate to the task at hand, or are appropriate in the sense of what will work for the learner (Green & Oxford, 1995; Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Test preparation teachers, therefore, may benefit from training on how to encourage learners to use a more flexible and effective range of learning strategies. Students with majors other than English may especially benefit from guidance in this area. Educators may also positively influence the direction learners take with regard to their test preparation by drawing attention to the meaning of their test scores. As noted, although Sunny scored relatively highly with regard to vocabulary and grammar (as presented in the breakdown of her TOEIC Reading score), she felt grammar to be one of her weakest areas and continued to focus on grammar. Teachers, therefore, may play an important role in teaching students how to best utilise their test results for future learning.

Moreover, in order to control and minimise the detrimental impact of language tests, Shohamy (2009) suggests that educators become more socially responsible and develop critical strategies to examine the consequences of tests. As she notes, teachers can encourage test-takers and the public at large to question 'the uses of tests, the materials they are based on and, most importantly, the values and beliefs embedded in them' (p. 530). This too potentially supports a bottom-up approach to generating positive washback.

The Research Community

This work has identified a number of areas in need of research (as indicated throughout). In particular, the results emphasise the value of investigating learner contributions to the washback of the TOEIC (and other tests), and the need for more research across wider populations and contexts. In order to strengthen the appropriate and meaningful use of TOEIC scores, findings also call for more data on the actual use of scores among companies, and the predictive validity of the test. Moreover, given that most of the participants in this study focused on the Standard TOEIC, more research is needed on the impact and washback of the speaking and writing components of the TOEIC program.

The results of this study have also stressed the powerful vested interests and influence of the test preparation industry. Since students appear to be greatly influenced by the belief that preparation classes and materials raise scores over a relatively short period of time, learners
may benefit from research that confirms or disproves these beliefs across a range of different student types and contexts (see Bodt & Ross, 1988 as an example). The influence of TOEIC preparation classes on the degree and depth of learning is also in need of systematic research. Research into the washback of the TOEIC would also benefit from a thorough examination of the content of preparation textbooks in relation to the construct, format and content of the TOEIC, such as that conducted by Hamp-Lyons (1998) in relation to the TOEFL. Learners are also likely to profit from more research (particularly action research) investigating ways in which long term English language learning goals may coincide with short term test goals, such as creating test preparation classes that incorporate more English language in use while at the same time strengthening test preparation (see Brown, 2005 for example).

Finally, this thesis underscores the value of employing social theory to illuminate the political, cultural and social contexts of tests, and the influence of this on the outcomes of student learning. In particular, the use of Activity Theory, in the present study, has drawn attention to the powerful role of interrelated stakeholder motives, and the influence of motivated and mediated learner action in directing the washback effect of a test. Without question, in order to expand our understanding of washback we need to recognise it as a socially situated phenomenon. In which case, future studies may need to become more diversely informed, and employ inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary methodological approaches and frameworks beyond those countenanced within validity theory (McNamara, 2008; McNamara & Roever, 2006). Such studies are likely to hold the promise of moving our understanding of washback in new and valuable directions.


Understanding practice: Perspectives on activity and context (pp. 64-103).
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


Jeon, J. (2010). Issues for English tests and assessments: A view from Korea. In Y. Moon & B. Spolsky (Eds.), Language Assessment in Asia: Local, Regional or Global? (pp. 53-76). Seoul: Asia TEFL.


Legge, J. (1960). The Chinese classics in five volumes. Volume 1: Confucian analects, the great learning, the doctrine of the mean (3rd ed.). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.


Appendix A: Journal Template - Pilot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length of Time (Check one)</th>
<th>Was the FIRST aim of this activity: (Check ONE)</th>
<th>Activity (Check appropriate category)</th>
<th>Details of activity (Description of activity and names of any resources used)</th>
<th>Area/s of English or the TOEIC I feel this activity focused on improving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0 – 30 m</td>
<td>Improve my English in general</td>
<td>Study with Tutor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31 – 60m</td>
<td>Prepare for the TOEIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61 – 90m</td>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>91 – 120m</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>121 – 150m</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 hours +</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Prompts**

What were the reasons for participating in today’s activity? Why did you focus on the area of English noted above in today’s activity? What strategies did you use to help you learn during this activity? Why? How successful do you feel today’s activity was in improving your TOEIC score? Why? How successful do you feel this activity was in improving your English in general? Why?
## Appendix B: Revised Journal Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length of Time (Approx)</th>
<th>Was the FIRST aim of this activity: (Check ONE)</th>
<th>Activity (Check ONE)</th>
<th>How I feel this activity contributed to preparation for the TOEIC test.</th>
<th>Area/s of General ENGLISH I feel this activity focused on improving (if any).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APRIL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DETAILS OF THE ACTIVITY**

(Description of activity and names of any resources you used)

**FURTHER RESPONSE TO THE ACTIVITY**

Reason(s) for participating… Why you focused on this area… strategies used and why… success of the activity in terms of TOEIC… success of activity in terms of English in general… any other feelings about today’s activity.
Appendix C: Interview Schedule: Preliminary Questions

Profiling
- Tell me a little about your major.
- How important do you feel English is in your Major?
- How do you feel about your English?
- Tell me a little about your English learning history inside and outside of the formal schooling system.
- How would you describe yourself as a learner?
- How do you feel you learn best?
- Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses with regard to English.
- What factors do you feel contribute to those strengths and weaknesses?

Previous Experience and Reasons for Taking the TOEIC
- When I say the word TOEIC what does that word conjure?
- How many times have you taken the TOEIC?
- Can you tell me why you took the test in each case?
- How did you feel each time?
- Why are you taking the test again?
- Why are you taking the TOEIC and not the TOEFL or IELTS?
- What/Who are your influences for taking the TOEIC? How so?
- How important do you feel the TOEIC is? Why do you say this?

Previous Preparation for the TOEIC
- Tell me about the ways you have prepared for the TOEIC in the past.
- How successful do you feel this preparation was?
- Why do you think you prepared in this way?

Content of Learning
- What content did you focus on when you last prepared for the TOEIC?
- Why was that?
- Do you think you will focus on similar or different content this time?
- Why is that?

Total Time on Learning
- How many hours per week do you think you spent on average preparing for the TOEIC the last time you sat the test?
- What do you feel influenced this?

Washback on Learning Strategies
- What type of learning strategies did you use to help you prepare for the TOEIC previously?
- Why do you think you used these strategies?
- Do you intend to focus on different or similar strategies this time?
- Why is that?

Washback on Learning Motivation
- What factors do you feel affect your motivation in preparing for the TOEIC?
- Why do you say this?
- Describe your motivation for preparing for the TOEIC this time. Why is that?
- Do you feel the TOEIC influences your motivation for learning English in general? How so?
- Do you feel the TOEIC influences your motivation for learning other subjects? How so?
Washback on Test Anxiety
- How anxious did you feel the last time you took the TOEIC? Why do you think that was?
- Has your anxiety changed at all? Why do you think that is?
- How anxious do you feel about taking the test this time?
- How does your anxiety in taking the TOEIC compare to taking other tests? Why do you think that is?

Washback on General English Proficiency
- Do you feel your last experience preparing for the TOEIC influenced your overall English ability? How so? How do you know this?
- How much does improving your General English Proficiency affect the way you prepare for the TOEIC?

Previous Test Results
- How did you feel about your last TOEIC score?
- In what ways do you feel this may have influenced you?

Appendix D: Interview Schedule: Mid-Point
How do you feel about your TOEIC preparation so far?

Tell me about your overall strategy for preparing for the TOEIC so far. How successful do you feel your preparation for the TOEIC is going? Why?

What has been your focus over the past (?) number of weeks? Why?

According to your journal entries you have spent (?) number of hours preparing for the TOEIC. How do you feel about this figure?

Tell me about this journal entry (ask about different journal entries).

How has your preparation for the TOEIC this time differed to previous experiences preparing for the TOEIC? Why?

Tell me about the people who have influenced you with regard to preparing for the TOEIC.

How do you feel your preparation for the TOEIC is influencing your general English ability?

How do you feel about sitting the TOEIC in (?) number of days time?

How do you feel taking part in the research is going?
Appendix E: Interview Schedule: Final Questions

**General Question**
- So, you have finished taking the TOEIC. Tell me about it.

**Washback on Test Anxiety**
- How was your anxiety level before taking the test? Why do you think that was?
- Do you feel your anxiety was different in any way to the previous time you took the test? Why do you think that was?

**Washback on Strategies**
- What do you feel was your overall strategy in preparing for the TOEIC?
- Why do you feel this was your strategy?
- How successful do you feel your strategy was?
- According to your journal entries the most common learning strategies you used were (information from journals). Does this surprise you? Why? Why do you think you used these strategies?

**Washback on Total Time on Learning**
- From your journal entries you spent (?) hours preparing for the TOEIC. Does this figure surprise you? How so?
- What factors do you feel influenced the amount of time you spent on preparing for the TOEIC?

**Washback on Content of Learning**
- From your journal entries it appears that you spent the greatest amount of time focusing on (area of English). Why do you feel you spent this amount of time on this area of English?
- After taking the test do you feel you would focus on another area next time? Why?

**Washback on Learning Motivation**
- In what ways do you feel your experience preparing for the TOEIC has influenced your motivation to learn English?
- Why do you think that is?
- In what ways do you feel your experience preparing for the TOEIC has influenced your motivation to learn in general? Why do you think that is?

**Washback on English Proficiency**
- Do you feel that your experience preparing for the TOEIC influenced your general English ability? How so?
- What factors do you feel influenced this?
Appendix F: Translation Checks – Focus Groups

Translation Concerns at Word Level of Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Translation</th>
<th>Amendment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actually, it was a communication textbook.</td>
<td>Actually, it was a conversation textbook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I studies English communication.</td>
<td>I studied English conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each student spends around two billion won...</td>
<td>Each student spends around two million won.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People can spend 1 to 6 months and get a maximum of 350 points on the LC</td>
<td>People can spend 1 to 6 months and get a maximum of 300 points on the LC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the worst strategies for the TOEIC is remembering all the words.</td>
<td>One of the worst strategies for the TOEIC is memorising all the words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Translation Concerns at Sentence Level of Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Translation</th>
<th>Amendment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every major demands a TOEIC score.</td>
<td>Every major demands a different TOEIC score.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Companies encourage employees to keep studying English these days’.</td>
<td>‘Companies encourage employees to keep studying English these days for promotion’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you want to get a good score, you need to take TOEIC every month for at least 6 months’.</td>
<td>‘If you want to get a good score you need to keep taking TOEIC every six months’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe that’s why I reject the TOEIC</td>
<td>Maybe that’s why I am irritated by the TOEIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including living costs, the total was 1.3 million.</td>
<td>Including living costs, the total was 1.3 million a month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AREA OF CONCERN</td>
<td>THEME/QUOTE IN QUESTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| a) Wording of theme | **Original Theme:** Peers motivate students to increase TOEIC scores | Suggestion – ‘to keep up with the Jones’s, i.e., to maintain face/social status among peers.’ | This theme was simplified to ‘influence of peers’.
| | **Original Theme:** Text books and computer links as a strategy | Suggestion – ‘websites? Web resources?’ | The wording of this theme was changed to ‘Textbooks and web resources’.
| b) Validity of the theme | **Original Theme:** Popularity of the TOEIC in comparison with other EFL tests. | ‘Does not commit to any particular viewpoint’ | Although the researcher disagrees with the point that every theme must commit to a particular viewpoint, this theme was eventually removed from the final data due to word limit constraints and perceived importance in relation to the results.
| | **Original Theme:** Students avoid or do not spend time and money on preparation for the TOEIC | ‘Is it not important to distinguish between inability (from lack of money) and a desire (avoiding spending money)?’ | This theme was eventually removed from the data display and described in the theme as exceptions to the theme ‘preparing for the TOEIC takes time and money’.
| | **Original Theme:** Students prepare during vacation periods and/or avoid preparation during semester time | ‘I would separate need and want because to me it’s a significant difference.’ | Here, the checker was concerned about the term avoid (similar to the problem above). In agreement with this point, the framing of the theme was changed to: ‘Preparation during vacation period’ to become less subjective.
| c) Quote does not fit theme | **Theme:** TOEIC is related to general English ability  
**Quote:** I still have 2 years left to graduate. I will keep studying English and this will affect my TOEIC score. | ‘This doesn’t seem to fit here’ | This quote was removed from the data display.
| | **Original Theme:** Preparing for TOEIC is not useful, helpful and or practical  
**Quote:** Sometimes when I am studying vocabulary, I question why I need to study it. In my opinion it is useless if it doesn’t appear on the TOEIC. | ‘This would seem to support a different idea i.e. that study is useless if not in the service of the TOEIC.’ | I changed the framing of the theme: Preparing for TOEIC is not useful, helpful and or practical for purposes other than TOEIC. |
| **Original Theme:** Students experience negative affective factors related to preparing for TOEIC  
**Quote:** When I first took T, I thought I would get a decent score because my major was English, so I didn’t study at all, and I got a really low T score. I was in despair. | ‘This actually relates to their feeling after they took the test – not related to preparation’ | I changed the framing of the theme to include: Students experience a range of negative affective factors. |
|---|---|---|
| **Original Theme:** Students experience negative affective factors related to preparing for TOEIC.  
**Quote:** You start to worry about your score when you hear that someone with 900 failed to get a job from a company. If you have a lower score than that, it is no wonder that you start to worry about your score. | ‘Relevant, but not directly related to preparation’. | As above |
| **d) Accuracy of transcription/Translation**  
**Theme:** Locating patterns as a strategy for preparing for TOEIC  
**Quote:** ‘Instructors in language institutes teach you T’s patterns. They teach you the patterns that should be the right answer. They can tell you that the certain form of the words are always followed by particular words, so you must choose the ones as the right answers.  
**Theme:** Experience abroad influenced TOEIC scores and/or strategies for preparation  
**Quote:** ‘People who have studied abroad get good LC scores. They count on that so they don’t study for the RC’.
 | ‘I wonder about the accuracy of the translation using “must”’
 | Although this was not the section of the quote particularly related to the theme. The translation was checked and changed to ‘so this allows you to choose the right answer’.
 | 'Is this right? How is it related to doing well on LC?’
 | I re-checked the recordings and this is in fact what the participant said. It remains in the final data display. This theme was also recoded later to a different category and changed to ‘Experience abroad influences focus on TOEIC content, as this is what it more closely reflected.'
Appendix H: Sample of Data Display: Phase One

1) REASONS BEHIND PREPARING FOR THE TOEIC

A) To secure employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other-Major</th>
<th>English Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N1 M1 – I have two reasons for taking T. One is that I like English. The other is that T helps get a job.</td>
<td>E1 M1 – That’s why these days some companies demand speaking scores from job applicants. People take T speaking ...some companies prefer people who have speaking scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 M1 – People study only for getting a job.</td>
<td>E1 M1 – It is not compulsory but there is a tacit understanding that job applicants with a speaking test score will get extra points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 M2 – Companies require a T score above 700, but successful applicants usually score over 900.</td>
<td>E1 M1 – These days, big companies filter applicants’ resumes using a computer system. They throw away resumes with T scores below 900.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 M2 – For me, T is essential for getting a job.</td>
<td>E1 M2 – I am a senior this year. I really need a good T score for getting a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 M2 – Even if you speak English well, if you have only 300 or 400 T score you can’t send out your resume. That’s why I study T for getting a job first. For me, T is a desperate thing, like life or death.</td>
<td>E1 M3 – For university students, it is definitely about ‘getting a job’. Regardless of real E ability, companies judge job applicants’ E ability with T scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 M2 – These days, companies conduct English interviews. T score is a filter. I really hate it. But for getting a job I had to study it.</td>
<td>E1 F1 – I also study T under compulsion for getting a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 M2 – I do not know the other major’s situation, but for our major, getting a good T score is like a war. If you don’t get over 900, you cannot pass the first round reviewing...If you want a job, you should get above 900.</td>
<td>E1 F2 – Originally I wanted to enter graduate school so I didn’t need to prepare for TOEIC, but recently I changed my mind to get a job. That’s why I took TOEIC last month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 F1 – If there wasn’t a box for T score on job application forms, nobody would take T.</td>
<td>E1 F2 – I will graduate this year. I need a good score for getting a job in a company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2 M1 – T is a general test in Korea and it seems that people need a T score to get a job.</td>
<td>E2 M1 – The main reason is to get a job because many big companies in Korea demand T scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2 M2 – the reason I decided to study T is to get a job in a company. However, I recently changed my mind to become a civil servant. It doesn’t require a T score, so I don’t study anymore.</td>
<td>N2 F2 – (Talking about non-English majors) – They have no choice. They are compelled to study T to apply for jobs they want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2 F1 – Without a T score, you can’t send out your resume to companies. It is said you have a chance to be hired if you have 800.</td>
<td>E2 F2 – Most big companies demand over 800, small places require around 750.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2 F1 – Big companies also want T scores. Without good enough T scores, you can’t send out your resume to them.</td>
<td>E2 F3 – These days, everywhere asks your T score. If you want to apply for a job, you need a T score.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Counter opinions to this theme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other-Major</th>
<th>English Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N1 M1 – Two friends of mine got a job from Gookmin Bank and Daegu Bank. The one who go a job from Daegu Bank has a T score of 620. The other has 860. Cases like this happen these days.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 M1 – One of my friends got a job from Asiana airlines. His T score was 720 and his GPA is 3.2. However, someone I know failed to get a job from the same company, even though his T score was 900. Applicants cover letter, how much the applicants know information about the company and what skills are important for the company are important for choosing men for their company. However, some companies still have conservative and strict policies to choose their men.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2 M1 – This is my friend’s case – his major is engineering. He studied T hard for one year to get a job. His highest score was 780. During the job interview, he heard from the interviewer of the company in Seoul that they don’t trust T scores.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B) To provide prerequisite scores and/or promote other benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other-Major</th>
<th>English Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N1 F1 – ‘It gives you extra points for the civil service test……over 600 you get 2. Over 700 or 800 you get 3. Depending on T score, you get different points.</td>
<td>E2 F2 – The original reason to take T is that I wanted to transfer to another university. The university requires a GPA and T score.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 F1 – Without a T score of 700, you are not qualified to take the state law examination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 F1 – T score is important for graduation from my university</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 F1 – T decides scholarships too. If A has a 4.3 GPA and B has 4.2, if B’s T score is 100 points higher, in that case B gets the scholarship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 F2 – ‘For extra points... It gives you extra points on the secondary teacher’s test.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 F3 – My major has no connection to the T. The reason I took T is for extra points on the secondary teacher’s test.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 M2 – A great T score is a very competitive thing for civil servants. If a civil servant has a high T score, he can be promoted easily and go on a business trip to foreign countries.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N1 M2 – Almost every state exam requires a T score of over 700.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix I: Journal Entries and Interview Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nick Name</th>
<th>Month of TOEIC RC &amp; LC</th>
<th>Month of TOEIC Speaking</th>
<th>1st Int</th>
<th>APRIL</th>
<th>MAY</th>
<th>JUNE</th>
<th>2nd Int</th>
<th>JULY</th>
<th>AUG</th>
<th>3rd Int</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SERENA</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 2nd</td>
<td>3, 7</td>
<td>1, 12, 23, 25</td>
<td>no journals</td>
<td>June 28th</td>
<td>completed,</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>August 4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TINA</td>
<td>July/August</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 9th</td>
<td>11,15,28,29</td>
<td>10,12,16,17,23,27</td>
<td>8,9</td>
<td>June 8th</td>
<td>14,14,18,21,</td>
<td>4.5,28.29</td>
<td>July 26th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULIE</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 2nd</td>
<td>6,9,18</td>
<td>7,11,15,22</td>
<td>no journals</td>
<td>July 7th</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>August 7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILEY</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 2nd</td>
<td>6,7,18,27,29,30</td>
<td>7,11,12,13,14,18</td>
<td>cancelled test</td>
<td>July 25th</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>complet ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAX</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 9th</td>
<td>4,6,7,8,13,15,18</td>
<td>18,20,21</td>
<td>no journals</td>
<td>July 10th</td>
<td>20,21,25,29</td>
<td>1,6,10,12,15,16,2</td>
<td>Sept 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNNY</td>
<td>August/Sept</td>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>April 9th</td>
<td>16,22-24,30-31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22,23,24,26,29</td>
<td>June 12th</td>
<td>6,8,9,13,19,20,22,27,28</td>
<td>Aug 12,13,14,17,19,20,27,29</td>
<td>Sept 19 &amp; Oct 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>August 16/23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 9th</td>
<td>9,9,10,10,11,13,14,15,16,17-24,25,26,27-30,</td>
<td>1,2,3,4 &amp; 5,6,7,11,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,6</td>
<td>June 26th</td>
<td>6,7,8,9,10,11,15,1</td>
<td>6,17,18,19,20,21,22,28,29,30</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,7,10,12,13,14,15,16,17,19,20,21,22,23,25,26,27,28,29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Major Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIE</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 2nd</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7,8</td>
<td>28,30</td>
<td>June 12th</td>
<td>1,2,7,8,9,10,13,20,22,23</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>complet ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEVE</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 9th</td>
<td>no journals</td>
<td>6,7,8,11,12,13,14,15,18,19,20,21,22</td>
<td>injury</td>
<td>June 8th</td>
<td>injury</td>
<td>injury</td>
<td>October 30th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERA</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 10th</td>
<td>13,15,16,20,21</td>
<td>6,7,19,20,25,26,28</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td>July 10th</td>
<td>6,9,16,17,21,22</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>September 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI YON</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 17th</td>
<td>27,28,29,30</td>
<td>1,6,7,8,11,12,13,15</td>
<td>no journals</td>
<td>July 14th</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>September 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESSICA</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>April 13th</td>
<td>14,15,16,18,19,20,21,22,24,25</td>
<td>1,7,8,9,12,15,18,19,22,25,26</td>
<td>no journals</td>
<td>July 8th</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>No contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SATANA</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>April 13th</td>
<td>15,16,17,20,21,22,23,24,26,27,30</td>
<td>1,3,7,8,12,14</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>June 12th</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>August</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J: Peer Translation & Coding Checks: Phase Two – Case studies

**CASE STUDY ONE: JESSICA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF CONCERN</th>
<th>THEME/QUOTE IN QUESTION</th>
<th>CHECKER COMMENT</th>
<th>ACTION(S) TAKEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Translation issues</td>
<td>Original Quote: It seems <strong>practising untiringly</strong> will make it possible for one to converse with a foreigner</td>
<td>Should be practicing constantly?</td>
<td>Untiringly changed to constantly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Original Quote: I think I should enjoy studying English, I don’t want to study English like I’m doing now (Int2)</td>
<td>I think I should enjoy studying English. I don’t want to study English because I have to.</td>
<td>The sentence was changed in line with the translations checks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Original Quote: If it was not for my parents, I would not have <strong>withdrawn</strong> from school.</td>
<td>take a semester off</td>
<td>The sentence was changed in line with the translations checks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Original Quote: So even though it helps me understand more grammar and some context in English, I don’t think it helps <strong>much in terms of communication skills.</strong></td>
<td>...in terms of English conversation.</td>
<td>The sentence was changed in line with the translations checks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CASE STUDY TWO: SANTANA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF CONCERN</th>
<th>THEME/QUOTE IN QUESTION</th>
<th>CHECKER COMMENT</th>
<th>ACTION(S) TAKEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Translation issue</td>
<td>Original quote: Depending on the number of verbs, the selection between a preposition and a conjunction is made, and I was able to <strong>constructively</strong> learn this step by step.</td>
<td>The peer checker felt the word constructively had been incorrectly translated and was unclear of the meaning</td>
<td>The word constructively which did not change the meaning of the theme was simply removed from the quote.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| b) Quote does not support theme | Original Category: Goals & Reasons for taking the TOEIC  
Original Theme: To get a job  
Quote: R: Do you intend to take TOEIC S?  
S: Maybe next month. TOEIC Speaking test is very expensive. These days I am breaking from school so I [got] a loan from my parents, so but maybe next month I try to take the test. | Not related to theme | In agreement, this was removed from the data display. |
### Original Category: Goals & Reasons for taking the TOEIC
**Original Theme:** Strong need, desire to study English in general
**Quote:** Japan has high quality machine design or maker materials so I want to study English and Japanese

**Related to job, not English in general.** So as not to confuse this theme with the previous theme of ‘To get a job’, the previous theme was changed to ‘To secure a job’ and the theme in question here was changed to ‘English needed in globalized society and in future career’. It uses the words used by the participant more and shows the need for TOEIC to not only secure a job but also the need for English within that specific career.

### Original Category: Operations
**Original Theme:** Taking notes/ making tables as a strategy

**Quote 1:** I was able to review incorrect answers and organise reminder notes.
**Quote 2:** Sometimes I solve the book and check my questions. I check what I wrote on my wrong answers note[book]
**Quote 3:** In order to not repeat my mistakes, I have created a notebook to review incorrect problems

In these cases, the peer checker thought that the focus of this strategy was ‘reviewing’

The theme was changed to:
Taking notes, making tables and reviewing as key strategies

### c) English used by participant unclear

**Original Category:** Operations
**Original Theme:** Higher scores in TOEIC Listening influence focus on TOEIC Reading
**Quote:** Some people said you have to listen to English or saw the Hollywood movie or English movie, but I think listening skill is more than upgraded, but reading is just steady

Question mark over ‘reading is just steady’

I took this to mean that the participant felt that where his listening score was improving, his reading score was remaining at a similar level and therefore focused more on TOEIC reading. This quote remained as is in the data display.

### CASE STUDY THREE: STEAVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF CONCERN</th>
<th>THEME/QUOTE IN QUESTION</th>
<th>CHECKER COMMENT</th>
<th>ACTION(S) TAKEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Translation issues</td>
<td>Original translation: It was like I was being spoon-fed, unlike before when I just enjoyed learning English.</td>
<td>English translation not matched with Korean. The word ‘spoon fed’ really is referring to being tired and a banking concept of learning</td>
<td>Translation changed accordingly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Original translation:** For now I’m just thinking about what I should do – if I should totally change my course or try to do them (other EFL tests and TOEIC) at the same time...now I want to study other areas like TEPs and TOEFL with my TOEIC studies, not just study TOEIC.

**Translation should read:** ‘I’m thinking whether I should totally change the target language or try different kinds of tests like TEPs or TOEFL...I should try either TEPs or TOEFL in addition to TOEIC.’

**Translation changed accordingly.**

**b) Quote does not support theme**

| Original Category: Goals & reasons for taking TOEIC | Needs to be specified as TOEIC Speaking | The entire theme was changed to ‘Changing perspectives regarding the importance of TOEIC RC&LC and English speaking tests’ |
| Original Theme: Companies influence motivation behind preparing for TOEIC (or not preparing for TOEIC) | | |
| Quote: Lately when you hand in your resume, they say take a look at speaking. It’s like they say they graded based on the TOEIC test but they weren’t able to speak, so they had come to a situation where applicants had to take the speaking examination as well. | | |
| **Original Category:** Goals and reasons for taking TOEIC | Needs to be specified as TOEIC Speaking | The entire theme was changed to ‘Changing perspectives regarding the importance of TOEIC RC&LC and English speaking tests’ |
| **Original Theme:** Less importance/intention associated with TOEIC Speaking | | |
| Quote: I don’t place much importance of speaking tests because only a few places look at them. | | |

**CASE STUDY FOUR: SUNNY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF CONCERN</th>
<th>THEME/QUOTE IN QUESTION</th>
<th>CHECKER COMMENT</th>
<th>ACTION(S) TAKEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a) Translation issues</strong></td>
<td><strong>Original Quote:</strong> There were many several sentences with weird sentence structure so several of the classmates got solve it out.</td>
<td>There were many several sentences with complex sentence structure so several of the classmates got together to analyse the structure and get the meaning.</td>
<td>The sentence was changed in accordance with the peer checker’s amendments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Original Quote:</strong> It seems I concentrated too much on reading the subtitles and I was unable to focus on the English expressions used in</td>
<td>It seems I concentrated too much on reading the subtitles and I was unable to focus on the story line.</td>
<td>The sentence was changed in accordance with the peer checker’s amendments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**CASE STUDY FOUR: TINA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA OF CONCERN</th>
<th>THEME/QUOTE IN QUESTION</th>
<th>CHECKER COMMENT</th>
<th>ACTION(S) TAKEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Translation issues</td>
<td>Original Quote: In terms of effectiveness, I really thought that I should solve more mixed questions</td>
<td>Mixed grammar questions to be exact.</td>
<td>The translation was changed accordingly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**b) Comment by participant not clear enough to support theme**

| Original Category: Outcomes of actions and operations | Original Theme: Test scores influence confidence, motivation and/or focus of future study | Quote: R: What are you going to focus on? S: Reading R: Why? S: Cause listening is more than this one so I should keep studying. | Unclear if the participant is referring specifically to the score | Since dialogue around this quote (not included in the data display) supported her comment as referring to her Listening score, it was kept in the data display. |

<p>| Original Category: Goals and influencing factors behind taking TOEIC | Original Theme: TOEIC in preference to and in competition with other tests | Quote: R: Do you think the TOEIC is more important than the teacher’s test for you at the moment? S: Yes, because that test is really hard to pass – in this year I think it is almost impossible | Unclear if the participant is referring to the TOEIC or to the Teacher’s test. | Again, given that the dialogue surrounding this quote supported the idea that Sunny was referring to the Teacher’s test as being almost impossible to pass, it was kept in the data display. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>b) Not enough information to support theme</th>
<th>Original Quote: The simulated test is fake so it does have that sense of feeling when you take it.</th>
<th>Should read...the mock test doesn’t give me a real sense of TOEIC.</th>
<th>The translation was changed accordingly.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original Category:</strong> Study group and television in support of preparation for TOEIC</td>
<td><strong>Original Theme:</strong> Study group and television in support of preparation for TOEIC</td>
<td><strong>Quote:</strong> There are several news articles in TOEIC Reading and I don’t really like reading those. I let out a sigh even before reading it. However, if I get used to it before the actual test, I will not be so put off by them, if they are familiar to me, it will take me less time to understand.</td>
<td><strong>Did she do the reading in a study group? Unclear.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Subheading unclear</td>
<td><strong>Original Category:</strong> Operations: Direct preparation for the TOEIC</td>
<td>By listening?</td>
<td><strong>Here the peer checker was confused by the subheading. The subheading of the different foci of content was Grammar but the peer checker thought it was still part of the subheading belonging to Listening. The quote remained in the data display with the subheading made clearer.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original Theme:</strong> Content associated with Hacker’s Books</td>
<td><strong>Quote:</strong> I did Part 1 and 3 where I was able to learn new expressions. Especially causative verbs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Data Display – Jessica (Other-Major)

Data Display: Jessica

1) MOTIVES AND GOALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To get a job, get a good score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In general:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: Why did you take the TOEIC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J: because of employment (Int1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: 왜 토익클래스를..?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: Why did you take the TOEIC class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J: 아, 취직때문에...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relation to the Korean economy:
Students try to get all the specs needed for employment today. The Korean economy isn't good right now so I feel I must not fall behind (Int1).
애들이 다 봉사랑 토익이랑 그런거에, 한국에서 취직할 수 있는, 그런, 한국의 경기가 안좋으니까, 취직할 수 있는 기본 바탕이, 스택이, 봉사랑 뒤 토익이랑 이런게 필요하기 때문에, 제가 안하면 안될 것 같고, 또 애들이 점수도 잘 받아고, 그리고 또 이력서를 쓸 때, 또 인턴을 할 때도, 꽤 그런게 있어야지 인턴이 거의 되요. 자기소개서를 쓸 때, 봉사랑 토익점수도 기분 뒤 700, 800 이 되야 되고, 그러니까 인턴을 하려고 하고 취직을 할려고 기본 바탕을 준비를 하려고 하는데 그렇게 하면 안되니까 잘 안되니까 제 발해서는 물론가 취미가 아니라도 토익을 역시로 해야되는거죠 지금 상황에서는.

Extensive need for TOEIC:
If I want to go where I want to go and work where I want to work comfortably, I think TOEIC® is one of the basic necessities...English is needed – no matter which area I wish to go (Int1). ..I have interests in numerous fields and I have no specific job that I would like to do but TOEIC® is required in all fields I want to work in. TOEIC® is needed no matter which occupation I aim for (Int1)
과가 그랑고 제가 원하는 곳을 가려면, 그러니가 좀 더 편하게 편하게 직장생활하고 더 좋은곳을 가려면 토익이 기본이라고 생각해요 영어가, 영어가 기본이라고 생각해서, 어떤 직업을 정하든지 간에 저는 관심이 많은게 많기때문요 지금. 이 쪽으로도 가고 싶고 저쪽으로도 가고 싶고, 근데 제가 가고 싶은곳이 전부다 토익을, 토익을 바탕으로 하고 있어서, 지금 아직 뭐 끝을 정할건데, 정하진 않았지만 꼭 필요한 것 같아서, 정하고 나면 토익 공부 하기엔 너무 늦을 것 같고.

Anywhere and everywhere requires TOEIC these days. In recent times, almost all corporations look at TOEIC® as a given, and they even require English conversation skills as well (J1)

Minimum score required:
When I write my resume or do an internship, when I write a cover letter my TOEIC® score needs to be something in the 7 or 8 hundreds (Int1)
애들이 다 봉사랑 토익이랑 그런거에, 한국에서 취직할 수 있는, 그런, 한국의 경기가 안좋으니까, 취직할 수 있는 기본 바탕이, 스택이,
봉사랑 토익이랑 이건개 필요하기 때문에, 제가 안하면 안될 것 같고, 또 애들이 점수도 잘 받아오고, 그리고 또 이력서를 쓸 때, 또 인턴을 할 때도, 졸 그렇게 있어야지 인턴이 거의 되야. 자기소개서를 쓸 때, 봉사랑 토익점수도 기본 됨 700, 800 이 되어야 되고, 그러니까 인턴을 하려고 하고 취직을 하려고 기본 바탕을 준비를 하려고 하는데 그게 없으니까 잘 안되니까 제 반에서는 공부가 취미가 아니라도 토익을 얻지로 해야되는거죠 지금 상황에서는.

The norm today is to have a TOEIC® score higher than 700, so when I exceed a score of 700, I don't want to study TOEIC® anymore (Int1)

[With regard to 700] - That's the basics...not really enough but a score where I can apply for things – maybe not enough for employment but enough for internships and volunteer work. For example, even in volunteer work for marathons you need TOEIC® to participate. (Int1)

It's not a high score for employment opportunity. You need around 800 or 850 but as I'm not that good at English I want to just make the basic level and try for internships (Int1)

Forced situation:
Even if studying TOEIC® isn't exactly something in my interest, I have to do it by force, considering the situation I am in (Int1)

Peers and parents motivate/encourage preparation toward TOEIC®

Comments: 9
Int1 – 5
Int2 – 3
J - 1
영어를 잘하는 사람이 되게 부러워요. 부럽고, 영어는 꺼 있어야 될 것 같고, 근데 저한테는, 저한테는 힘들어서, 힘들어서. 힘들어서.

R: When your friends got the TOEIC® scores, how did you feel?
J: Inferiority (Int1)
R: 이렇게, 아까 말씀하신 것처럼 토익 스코어를 받아오면 기본이 드세요?
J: 음 열등감 하하하.

I feel bad because not preparing for TOEIC® makes me look bad given my current status as a university student (J1)

I was concentrating on other studies and I realized that my peers were all participating in internships and things now that they were in higher grades. I never even thought about those things. So I thought I had to do those things in order to keep up (Int1)

다른 공부를 하고 있다가 다른 공부를 하고 있다가 이제 막 보니까 애들이 아니 저는 또 인턴십 이런 건 생각도 못했는데, 이제 학년이, 고학년이 되니까, 다른 애들이 다 하는거에요. 그래서 이렇게 맘 애들도 했는데 가서 안하던 어떻게 할까 살아서.

The ones that are falling behind will be working on TOEIC® studies, but the good ones would already have achieved their target scores and now are preparing for speaking, speaking for interviews in corporations because speaking skills are needed for employment in large corporations now like the news informed. TOEIC® (RC & LC) is just a basic now (Int2)

네 저는 근데 그 애들의 수준보다 조금 낮은 상태지만, 같이 공부를 하고 있어요. 그러니까 같이 소통하면서 공부를 하는게 아니라 각자 공부하지만 그룹에서는 되게 잘하는 사람들이 많단 말이에요. 못하는 사람은 토익을 공부하고 있음에요 근데 잘하는 사람들은 토익에 점수를 맞춰놓고 회사 스피킹도, 대기업 같은 데는 스피킹이 필요하니까. 이제 스피킹이 필요하다고 선문에도 나오고 있고 토익은 전부다 이제 기본으로 갖춰야해. 토익 봉사 뭐뭐 뭐뭐 다 애들이 지금 벌써 치는게 다 기본이야. 지금은, 그러니까 전부다 대학생들이 분별력이 없어요. 특히 지방대는.

This sense of inferiority will force me to do it. I’ll be thinking, everyone else does it, so why can’t I (Int2).

그런 열등감 때문에도 네, 네 열등감 때문에도 이런 압박 심한 것 같아요. 말하는것 처럼 복잡해졌고 이것 저것 다 문제가 되니까 시간이랑 돈이랑 네, 지금 그리고 학년이 높으니까 영향이 미치는 것 같아요. 그리고 제가 즐겁게 공부를 영어로 해야 된다고 생각하자 영어를 고호하다고 하면서 공부를 안하니까 그런 것 같아요. 그래서 이제 그런데 이제 정말 해야 되니까 하려구요. 해야 되니까 이제 또 안올라도 그래도 기본 남들은 그래도 스피킹까지 공부하는데 나는 이것도 안하니 살아서 기본이라도 해야되니까.

Peers in her major:
R: Who do you mean by others?
J: Classmates...the students in advertising. Advertising majors seemed to consider TOEIC® scores more importantly than others (Int1)
과 친구들도 그렇고, 이제 그리고 이제 저희 과가, 항상 과가 좀 더 특별히 토익을 보는 것 같아서.

**Parents**

Their influence is large, in the amount and effort that I place into studying. If it was not for my parents I would not be studying for TOEIC, I would not have withdrawn from school (Int1)

부모님은 출정히 제가 뭐 어떤 공부를 하기 위해서 휴학을 하는지 잘 모르시는데, 일단 반대를 하셨고, 근데 제가 좀 더 나은 쪽을 백한다고 설득을 시켰기 때문에, 되게, 지금은 좀, 아직 못미리워 하지만, 그래도 휴학 했는 만큼 쯤 성과는 있음이라 생각해서. 부모님 영향이 많죠 제가 열심히 하는 이유가. 저 부모님 아니었으면 토익 공부도 안했을거고 휴학도 안했겠죠 근데, 설득 시켜서 할만큼 필요하니까 제가 약지로라도 노력을 해서 휴학을 해서 해야될 것 같아요.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Focus on TOEIC® RC &amp; LC – not speaking</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments:</strong> 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int1 – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int2 – J</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I don’t think I could take the challenge of speaking. I will complete TOEIC® (RC & LC) first and then if I have time I will try. For now it’s basic TOEIC® (Int1)

아까 얘기했듯이, 영어는 정말 못해서 아직 스피킹에는 아직 도전을 못하겠어요. 토익을 완성 시켜놓고 나중에 시간이 된다면. 지금은 기본적인 토익이니가.

It’s too difficult to do both at the same time (Int1) [TOEIC® speaking and RC/LC]

같이 하기 너무 힘들 것 같아서요.

I need help from institutions or lessons like now – but for (TOEIC®) speaking I need to speak to foreigners or Korean teachers...that’s kind of burdensome (Int1).

똑같이 학원이.. 학원이나 강의를 들어아가겠지만 그게 외국인이나 한국어 선생님이랑 대화를 해야되잖아요. 그렇게 더 뭐 좀 아직 아직 잘 되있지 않아서 부담스러워요. 아직은.
Appendix L: Data Display – Sunny (English-Major)

1) GOALS/REASONS FOR TAKING TOEIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To get a job, get a good score</th>
<th>Getting a job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments: 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int1 – 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int2 – 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int3 – 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int4 – 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J - 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main goal is get a job (E-Int1)

R: So when I say TOEIC what do you think?
S: Job. Get a job. We need a score (E-Int1)

Being a senior, next year I should get a job, so that is kind of stressful. And then TOEIC score also (E-Int1)

R: So you were studying for the TOEIC and the teacher’s test at the same time. But you didn’t study for the teacher’s test – you just did it. Why did you study for TOEIC and not the teacher’s test?
S: Because I wanna get a job. I don’t want to – I wanna be a teacher but that’s a little bit hard. I wanna get a job...maybe in education...anyway we need English. (E-Int4)

I suddenly felt like I should write something down in the resume. But this was not enough. Lots of people say to me, why don’t you take TOEIC speaking tests so that’s why I suddenly decided that I should take TOEIC® speaking test (E-Int 3).

When I was sophomore, I didn’t think about TOEIC because it wasn’t that important and nobody talked about this. We just focused on our own subjects which were related with our major. However when I was junior and senior, TOEIC was getting important. Everyone who wanted to get a job needed TOEIC score, so lots of students stayed at the library and studied TOEIC® (Follow up questions email)

Scores

Because I should get the score, I spend my time for my goal...more study, more score (E-Int4)

I have to make a good score so I have to study (E-Int1)

R: Why are you taking the TOEIC so many times?
S: Cause I wanna get over 900 score (E-Int4)

S: My father said...so you have a high score? So I say not yet. He say ok, do your best (E-Int4)

With regard to TOEIC speaking:
R: Are you going to take the TOEIC® speaking test again?
S: No, I’m take some other test. Not TOEIC speaking. We call it Opic.
R: Why do you want to take that one and not TOEIC
S: I took TOEIC® speaking and I got the score that I wanted and expected and so I stopped that one and I try, I wanna try another one.
**Peer and parental pressure associated with TOEIC®**

Comments: 9  
Int1 – 2  
Int2 – 3  
Int3 – 2  
Int4 – 2  
J - 0  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friends and peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lots of friend got good</strong> score. Over 900. So, yes. It pushes me like, ‘You should study TOEIC®. Your friend get a good score, you also get a good score too like’ (E-Int1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R: Which people are influencing you the most to study TOEIC®?  
S: **My friends who got high score in TOEIC®**  
Speaking about one friend who got over 900...  
S: I just envied her and I also want to get a high score like her because she was in Canada for a year too like me, but she got high score TOEIC®. I just envied her (E-Int2)  

**Related: Pressure from peers**  
R: When someone asks you for your TOEIC® score, How do you feel?  
S: I don’t say  
R: Why?  
S: Because I think my TOEIC score is no really good to say. **My TOEIC® score is 715 so it’s not pretty good. So usually I don’t say** (E-Int1)  

S: Actually they (students) **don’t say their TOEIC® score if they don’t get high score, so usually they don’t tell** (E-Int2)  

S: Usually **they (peers) think, ‘Oh you were in Canada, so maybe you are great English, so you will get high, high TOEIC® score or something**  
R: Do they seem to expect you to have a high score?  
S: **Too much. Too much. Too much** (E-Int2)  

**However: Influence from peers not necessarily from Education**  
My major is education so they (peers in Education) don’t really...
interested about TOEIC. They don’t take TOEIC® because they have another test. They don’t need this one if they don’t wanna get a job with a company, they wanna go (teach at) school’ (E-Int3)

They (Education majors) don’t study TOEIC®, only two people. One people get score that he wants (E-Int4)

- Parents
  S: My parents kind of push me...before graduating you should get around 900 then you can get a job or something. Sometimes call me, are you studying?
  R: Are you studying TOEIC® or in general?
  S: In general. But it includeTOEIC®.
  R: Do you show them your scores?
  S: Not this one.
  R: Why not?
  S: Because I got better score on the Moe TOEIC® test so I couldn’t tell this score to my parent. I was sorry...maybe they will disappoint (E-Int3).
  R: Did you tell them your speaking test score?
  S: Yes. I told them.
  R: What did they say?
  S: You did a good job....I was happy and I was proud of myself. I should study more about this one.

My father said...so you have a high score? So I say not yet. He say ok, do your best (E-Int4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changing motivation with regard to TOEIC® speaking.</th>
<th>Reasons for not taking the TOEIC® test previous to data collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments: 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int1 – 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int2 – 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int3 – 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int4 – 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J - 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Costly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: I wanna take it (speaking test) but that cost is a little bit expensive. I thinking now. I am going to pay a lot of money in summer vacation (dormitory costs, extra classes etc) (E-Int2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: Why didn’t you want to take the TOEIC® speaking test before?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Cause actually it costs little bit expensive. I was not really interested to take the TOEIC® speaking test (E-Int3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New to the market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: I thought it (TOEIC® speaking) not really important because it is new so a lot of people don’t know about this test. I felt that it not really important (E-Int3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reason for taking the TOEIC® speaking:
S: I suddenly felt like I should write something down in the resume. But this was not enough. Lots of people say to me, why don’t you take TOEIC® speaking tests so that’s why I suddenly decided that I should take TOEIC® speaking test
R: Who exactly?
S: Study group members
R: Ah really,
S: Yes, they took the TOEIC® speaking test and they got a pretty good score so they recommended to me you also take the TOEIC® test (E-Int3)

R: How do you feel about the TOEIC® speaking now?
S: Important.
R: Why?
S: Cause a lot of company like shoe company are about TOEIC® speaking test score. So felt it was really important (E-Int3)

After taking the test:
R: Are you going to take the TOEIC® speaking again?
S: No...because I'm not sure I can get level 8 or not. I feel I cannot get the level 8. I saw one person who is much better than me on speaking and he also couldn’t get the level 8 (E-Int3)
Appendix M: Score Certificate – Sunny (English-Major)