

シンポジウム

Can Study for the TOEIC Really Help Develop English Communicative Skills?

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Recent efforts by Japanese universities to improve students' scores on standardized English proficiency tests have led to major changes in the goals of language teaching, curricula, materials and staffing. Although TOEIC has demonstrated validity and reliability, questions remain regarding whether curricula aimed at increasing TOEIC scores can also improve students' communicative competence, motivation and interest. Panelists were encouraged to discuss these issues and how they related to their own situations.

Professor Konishi of Waseda University, speaking from experience in the business world, discussed TOEIC as used by companies to evaluate employees, concluded that high scores did not necessarily translate into better communicative abilities or job performance. It was also noted that Waseda was less concerned with TOEIC scores as most students had attained a relatively high level of English proficiency before entering university.

Professor Ishii offered a unique model of how curriculum should fit in with teachers, students, methods, and materials, concluding that over-emphasis on TOEIC may disturb the balance. While discussing the importance Kinki University places on TOEIC, he questioned the pedagogical logic of a TOEIC based curriculum, asserting that learning general English skills would increase both TOEIC scores and communicative ability.

Mr. Tateishi of Matsushita, while stressing that TOEIC scores are not the only criterion used to evaluate personnel, discussed how TOEIC was a factor in promotion and placement. Training programs, as well as improving scores on TOEIC, are aimed at giving employees the skills to function effectively in a global context.

As panel moderator I had expected more discussion on student motivation, interest, and retention of the skills gained from a TOEIC curriculum. In addition, active language skills such as speaking and writing were not sufficiently discussed, and with the exception of Prof. Ishii's remarks, the role of the teacher in a TOEIC based program was not addressed. Considering the complexity and multitude of issues, it was no surprise that a number of questions and comments were offered by the audience following the panelists' remarks.

Though the stated purpose of the symposium was to discuss whether TOEIC study could also improve communicative abilities, the practical consideration of TOEIC's prevalence at Japanese companies and universities took precedence. Along with the 4.5 million tests given annually, this should make Educational Testing Service, TOEIC's creator, extremely happy.