

# APPENDIX O

## GENERAL ANALYSIS OF TEACHER CASES

### 1.1 Results of Interview Analysis

#### 1.1.1 Potential influencing factors in generating test impact.

In order to understand why teachers did what they did when the TOEIC-as-exit-test was used, it was necessary to understand factors that research literature has shown to be possibly involved in forming the test impacts. This section, therefore, presents a description of teachers' perceptions of these sets of factors, namely person factors, test factors, and context factors.

##### ***1.1.1.1 Person factors.***

The teachers had a unanimous opinion about the general purpose of language teaching and learning at university: communicative ability. However, communicative ability is understood differently among the teachers. Four out of the seven teachers referred to the ability to communicate verbally; the others considered it the ability to perform both verbal and written communication.

Concerning their belief about the skills university students should learn, five of them attached the importance to reading because they believed students needed this skill to read specialized materials or other documents at the workplace. Four teachers added speaking and listening skills because they thought these were the most important for communication in the workplace or passing job interviews. Only two teachers believed that writing was important.

The most common belief about the ways to improve students' test scores was doing direct test preparation (five teachers). This included practicing test questions, learning test-taking strategies, getting familiar with the test tasks, taking test preparation courses outside the university. Five teachers mentioned other ways such as reducing the class size, redesigning teaching materials, and students' taking responsibility for their own learning. (See Table 1)

*Table 1. Teachers' Beliefs about Language Teaching and Learning (N=7)*

		No of teachers	Phuong	Thoai	Lan	Hoa	Kim	Quyen	Phong
<b>Purpose of language teaching and learning</b>	To have communicative ability	7							
	Other	3							
<b>Definitions of communicative ability</b>	Ability to do verbal communication	4							
	Ability to do verbal and written communication	3							
<b>Skills university students should learn</b>	Reading	5							
	Listening	4							
	Speaking	4							
	Writing	2							
	TOEIC test taking skills	1							
<b>Ways to improve students test scores</b>	Direct test preparation	5							
	Other	5							

### **1.1.1.2 Test factors.**

#### **1.1.1.2.1 Teachers' perceptions of test purposes.**

*Table 2. Teachers' Beliefs of Test Purposes (N=7)*

	No of teachers	Phuong	Thoai	Lan	Hoa	Kim	Quyen	Phong
Reading	7							
Listening	7							
Grammar	5							
Vocabulary	4							
No writing	4							
No speaking	7							
No communicative ability	4							

All of the teachers knew that the TOEIC test had two sections that assessed the listening and reading skills. Many of them mentioned the other aspects of language that the test also assessed, which were grammar (five teachers) and vocabulary (four teachers). Despite the name Test of English for International Communication, all the teachers added that it could not measure speaking ability, and four of them asserted that it could not assess communicative ability.

#### **1.1.1.2.2 Teachers' perceptions of the test value.**

To some extent, the teachers considered the TOEIC test valuable. First of all, most of them said it was useful for students' learning and their future employment because it motivated them to learn and consequently helped them improve their English and get an English certificate for job applications. Second, they generally agreed that TOEIC was suitable for use as an exit language test for several reasons including its reasonable test-taking fee compared to TOEFL or IELTS, its suitability for employment purposes, and a distrust of the Vietnam National English Certificate.

Table 3. Teachers' Perceptions of Value of TOEIC (N=7)

		No of teachers	Phuong	Thoai	Lan	Hoa	Kim	Quyen	Phong
Usefulness	For learning	6							
	For employment	6							
Suitability for graduation purposes	TOEIC is suitable for students' proficiency	6							
	Other	7							
	TOEIC is not ideal, but most suitable for graduation purposes	4							
Validity	Valid	1							
	Relatively valid	3							
	Not valid	2							
	Other	1							

However, the teachers tended to be rather negative about whether the test could accurately reflect test-takers' language ability. Five of the seven teachers mentioned some validity issues, namely test score inflation due to random guessing and test preparation and/or no assessment of speaking and writing. For that reason, some teachers pointed out that the TOEIC certificate itself was only partially useful for job applications because students still needed real communicative ability in order to pass job interviews or to use English for work.

#### *1.1.1.2.3 Teachers' perceptions of difficulty of TOEIC/TOEIC benchmarks.*

*Table 4. Teachers' Perceptions of Difficulty of TOEIC/TOEIC Benchmarks*

	No of teachers	Phuong	Thoi	Lan	Hoa	Kim	Quyen	Phong
Achievable	4							
Difficult	1							
Easy	1							
I'm not sure	1							
Listening more difficult than reading	6							
Double reading passages most difficult	1							

Four out of the seven teachers said their university's TOEIC benchmark was neither too easy nor too difficult. Only one teacher believed it was difficult for her students, and one teacher thought it was easy. The other teacher was not sure how difficult it was for the whole student population at her university; she mentioned the different degrees of difficulty that different groups of students could experience. Six teachers said the listening section was the most difficult or more difficult than the reading one.

#### *1.1.1.2.4 Teachers' perceptions of test pressure.*

Generally, teachers did not feel test pressure. Most of them (six teachers) said they were not held accountable for students' test results. The university only required them to comply with the right syllabus, teach the right number of hours at the right pace, be punctual, and have appropriate professional conduct. However, several teachers said, although not

responsible for their students' results, as teachers they always tried hard so that their students could achieve the best outcomes.

### 1.1.1.3 Context factors.

*Table 5. Teachers' Perceptions of Context Factors (N=7)*

	No of teachers	Phuong	Thoai	Lan	Hoa	Kim	Quyen	Phong
Influence of colleagues	5							
Availability of resources								
• Enough teaching materials	7							
• Enough equipment	2		NI	NI				
Time constraints	5							

*Note.* NI = No information

Five out of the seven teachers said their colleagues influenced their teaching through the exchange of ideas about teaching methodology, mid-term assessment, and teaching materials. However, this influence did not seem to be strong. Generally, the teachers had enough teaching materials and equipment. Observations showed that at all three universities, each classroom was equipped with a blackboard, a wireless microphone, a CD player, a projector, a screen, and loud speakers. However, time constraint was probably a big issue for the teachers. Five of them said they did not have enough time to teach what they wanted, even to finish their teaching programmes.

### 1.1.2 Impacts of TOEIC on teaching.

When asked how the TOEIC test affected their teaching, all of the teachers admitted the effect of the test on their teaching, but to different extents, from “a lot” to “not much.” Each of them reported at least a couple of signs of teaching to the test, e.g., familiarizing students with the test format and test tasks, focusing more on the tested skills than on the non-tested skills, paying special attention to test-taking strategies. However, some teachers did not only teach to the test. These cases are elaborated on later.

### **1.1.2.1 Impacts of TOEIC on teaching content.**

In order to see the impact of the TOEIC test on the content of their teaching, the teachers were asked to indicate the differences in the amount of time they devoted to the language skills between the current classes and the classes before the introduction of TOEIC or the communicative classes they had taught depending on their teaching experience. Although the number of participants was small (seven teachers), their answers still showed clear patterns of teaching to the test. The teachers tended to devote more time on the tested skills, namely listening, reading, grammar and vocabulary than before. On the other hand, they inclined to either spend less time or the same amount of time on non-tested skills (see Table 6).

The largest time increase was for *listening and reading*. Six out of the seven teachers said they spent a lot more time on these skills than before. *Grammar and vocabulary* came next in terms of time increase. Four teachers indicated that the time they devoted to grammar and vocabulary increased, and, generally, this time increase was large. The reason for the time increase was that these skills were believed to be tested in the TOEIC test. Some teachers added that the time spent on grammar increased because grammar in TOEIC preparation courses was more complicated than that in General English or Communicative English courses.

On the contrary, time for *speaking* was reduced dramatically. Five out of the seven teachers said that they completely or almost completely abandoned speaking, or reduced it a lot. One teacher added that she only used speaking for giving instructions or classroom management. Generally, time for *writing* also decreased. However, writing was a little different from speaking because it was little taught even before TOEIC. One of the teachers, who said she spent the same amount of time on writing, said that she did not teach writing in both general English classes (before TOEIC) and TOEIC preparation classes. The decrease in time devoted to speaking and writing was also explicitly linked to the TOEIC test: These skills were not tested.

Table 6. Changes in Time Teachers Spent on Skills (N=7)

	No of teachers	Phuong	Thoai	Lan	Hoa	Kim	Quyen	Phong
<b>1. Listening</b>								
Increased	6							
Unchanged	1							
<b>2. Reading</b>								
Increased	6							
Unchanged	1							
<b>3. Grammar</b>								
Increased	4							
Unchanged	2							
Decreased	1							
<b>4. Vocabulary</b>								
Increased	4							
Unchanged	2							
Decreased	1							
<b>5. Speaking</b>								
Increased	2							
Decreased	5							
<b>6. Writing</b>								
Increased	1							
Unchanged	2							
Decreased	4							
<b>7. Pronunciation</b>								
Increased	1							
Unchanged	3							
Decreased	3							



Teaching to the test was obviously the main trend among the teachers. The patterns of test impact clearly correspond to the teachers' perceptions of the TOEIC purposes. However, there were deviant cases. Phuong, a teacher at University A, and Kim, a teacher at university C, tended to have opposite patterns of change. They only shared with the other teachers the tendency to increase time for the two tested skills, i.e., listening and reading in the case of Kim. For the other skills, when most of the other teachers spent more time than before, they spent less and vice versa. For example, despite the fact that the majority of the teachers stopped teaching speaking or minimized the time spent on speaking, Phuong and Kim said they spent more time on speaking. These teachers both asserted that this was not an influence of the TOEIC test, but their own awareness of the importance of speaking for students. Both Phuong and Kim were in the group of older teachers. They seemed to be strongly influenced by their own beliefs. However, Phuong's case also revealed another very important factor that influenced teachers' teaching.

#### ***1.1.2.2 Impacts of TOEIC on teaching methods.***

When asked whether their teaching methods had changed since the introduction of the TOEIC test, only four teachers said "yes." However, the subsequent questions about classroom activities and the classroom procedures they used helped reveal that, actually, there were some changes in most teachers' teaching methods.

##### ***1.1.2.2.1 Changes in time spent on teaching and learning activities.***

Table 7 shows a general pattern of shifting from more communicative activities to more traditional ones since the introduction of the TOEIC test. The teachers tended not to use communicative activities including information gap, survey, and group discussion and English as frequently as in their communicative classes/general English classes. Especially, they said that the time for activities such as information gap and survey reduced a lot, even to zero. (It is necessary to note that some teachers never used some of the communicative activities in both types of classes, TOEIC/TOEIC oriented and General English). On the other hand, they inclined to explain grammar rules, let students do grammar exercises, and use translation more than before. This pattern of change was explained to be due to the nature of TOEIC preparation courses with a high volume of advanced grammar and vocabulary to teach.

However, again, Phuong and Kim, generally, did not fit this pattern. They spent either the same amount of time or more time on communicative activities. In addition, Phuong spent less time on traditional activities such as explaining grammar rules and doing grammar exercises, and talked less.

Table 7. Changes in Time Spent on Teaching and Learning Activities (N=7)

Activities	No of teachers	Phuong <sup>a</sup>	Thoai	Lan <sup>b</sup>	Hoa	Kim <sup>a</sup>	Quyen	Phong
<b>1. Explaining grammar rules</b>								
Increased	3					NI		
Unchanged	1					NI		
Decreased	2					NI		
<b>2. Doing grammar exercises</b>								
Increased	3					NI		NI
Unchanged	1					NI		
Decreased	1					NI		
<b>3. Translation</b>								
Increased	4			NI				
Unchanged	2			NI				
Decreased				NI				
<b>4. Teachers' talking time</b>								
Increased	5							
Unchanged	1							
Decreased	1							
<b>5. Information gap</b>								
Increased								
Unchanged	3							
Decreased	4							
<b>6. Survey</b>								
Increased	2							

Activities	No of teachers	Phuong <sup>a</sup>	Thoai	Lan <sup>b</sup>	Hoa	Kim <sup>a</sup>	Quyen	Phong
Unchanged	1							
Decreased	4							
<b>7. Group discussion</b>								
Increased	1							
Unchanged	1							
Decreased	5							
<b>8. Teachers' use of English</b>								
Increased	1							
Unchanged	1							
Decreased	5							

*Note.* NI=No information. <sup>a</sup>Kim never used information gap activities both before and after TOEIC; <sup>b</sup>Lan never used survey in both TOEIC and General English classes.

#### *1.1.2.2.2 Impacts of TOEIC on the ways teachers taught language skills.*

The teachers were asked to compare the ways they taught language skills in their current TOEIC/TOEIC oriented classes with their non-TOEIC classes. Their responses revealed a lot of changes in their teaching methods. Change most often occurred to listening, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and reading (see Table 8). All of the changes were attributed to the purpose and/or the nature of the TOEIC preparation courses. Generally, the teachers, especially those who taught TOEIC preparation classes, tended to change their teaching procedures, use fewer types of teaching techniques, focus on forms, exclude communicative activities, require memorization, and only aim at superficial understanding. Students only acted as a passive receiver of knowledge. In general, the TOEIC test had negative impact on the ways teachers taught language skills. However, again, Phuong and Kim denied any changes in their teaching methods. They explained that their beliefs about language teaching were unchanged.

*Table 8. Impact of TOEIC on the Ways Teachers Taught Language Skills (N=7)*

	No of teachers	Phuong	Thoai	Lan	Hoa	Kim	Quyen	Phong
Listening	5							
Grammar	5							
Vocabulary	5							
Pronunciation	4							
Reading	3							
Speaking	2							
Writing	1							

### **1.1.2.3 Direct test preparation.**

*Table 9. Teachers' Direct Test Preparation Activities (N=12)*

	No of teachers	Phuong	Thoai	Lan	Hoa	Kim	Quyen	Phong
Teaching test-taking strategies	7							
Using TOEIC-related extra materials	5							
Using TOEIC format exercises	3							
Other (giving advice to students, giving students an overview of TOEIC)	3							
Teaching TOEIC-related content (grammar, vocabulary)	2							

All of the teachers reported one or more direct test preparation activities. The most common activity was teaching test-taking strategies. The extent to which the teachers taught these strategies varied. Some teachers were more enthusiastic about this (Phong, Lan, and Quyen). Others were not much engaged in teaching these skills (Phuong).

The next most common activity was teaching TOEIC-related extra materials (five teachers). Again, the degree the teachers employed these extra materials depended on the nature of their courses, time availability, and their personal views. Lan and Hoa used extra materials a lot. The others only sometimes used them.

## 1.2 Results of Observation Analysis

### 1.2.1 Information on classroom observations.

A total of 22 observations were made by the researcher at the three universities. Each teacher at University A was observed four times, and each teacher at Universities B and C, except for Kim, was observed three times. Each of the teachers was observed for a period of time that covered at least one completed textbook unit.

*Table 10. Information on Classroom Observations*

Teachers	Universities	Types of courses observed	Levels observed	No of sessions observed	No of minutes observed
Phuong	University A	BE	BE3	4	635
Thoai	University A	BE	BE3	4	499
Lan	University B	TOEIC preparation	English 4	3	483
Hoa	University B	TOEIC preparation	English 4	3	393
Quyen	University C	TOEIC preparation	TOEIC 5	3	368
Phong	University C	TOEIC preparation	TOEIC 5	3	454
Kim	University C	TOEIC preparation	TOEIC 3	2	191
<b>Total</b>				<b>22</b>	<b>3,023</b>

### 1.2.2 Teachers' actual teaching.

#### 1.2.2.1 Teaching content.

Table 11 shows the percentage of time the teachers spent on TOEIC and non-TOEIC content. The former refers to materials, exercises and activities that aimed at preparing students for the TOEIC test directly or indirectly. The latter includes materials, exercises and activities that did not aim at TOEIC preparation.

Table 11. Time Spent on TOEIC and Non-TOEIC Content

Universities/ English courses	Teachers	TOEIC			TOEIC + Non- TOEIC	Non-TOEIC			
		TOEIC textbook	TOEIC extra materials	TOEIC test materials	TOEIC + Non- TOEIC workbook	Non-TOEIC textbook	Non-TOEIC work book	Non-TOEIC extra materials/ activities	Non-TOEIC test materials
University A Business English	Phuong				19.81%	70.13%	4.09%	2.52%	3.46%
	Thoai				27.45%	39.68%		17.64%	15.23%
University B TOEIC preparation	Hoa	24.94%	17.81%	57.25%					
	Lan	51.04%	43.98%					4.98%	
University C TOEIC preparation	Phong	88.99%				11.01%			
	Quyen	80.11%				19.89%			
	Kim	40.31%	7.85%			37.17%		14.66%	

University A apparently differed from Universities B and C in the content focus. The teachers at University A spent the majority of their class time on Non-TOEIC content, while those at Universities B and C, except for Kim, used the largest part of their time for TOEIC preparation. The reason was that the teachers closely conformed to their universities' objectives, syllabus, and course materials. Table 11 shows that, except for Lan, the teachers spent most or all of their time on course materials. Extra materials and activities if used also served the course objectives. The teachers from University A, where the main objective was teaching Business English, only used non-TOEIC extra materials and test materials. These included a broadcast from a radio station, a vocabulary exercise designed by the teachers, and end-of-unit tests. All of them focused on business English. The end-of-unit tests helped students review and assess the knowledge gained after each unit in the textbook – Market Leader – and get familiar with the final tests. On the contrary, the teachers from University B mainly used TOEIC supplementary materials (18 out of 21 times). The TOEIC materials they used included practice tests and grammar exercises taken from other TOEIC test preparation books, or grammar reviews of points often tested in TOEIC. The three non-TOEIC materials including video clips and English riddles were used only for fun (Lan). Kim, who taught a TOEIC preparation course at University C, added presentation topics to those specified by the university, and selected to teach not only grammar points that are included in the TOEIC textbooks, but also the ones she thought would be useful for her students.

In spite of the fact that the teachers at the same university were very similar in their content of teaching, there were slight differences between them. Some of the differences were due to the teachers' beliefs. However, other differences might not be teacher-related factors. For example, Hoa used a lot of test materials, while Lan did not use them at all. The reason was that teachers were allowed to choose the time to administer midterm tests to their students, and the researcher happened to observe Hoa during the weeks when she planned to give her students mid-term tests. This did not mean that Lan use less test materials than Hoa.

Kim was a special case. She was more flexible in dealing with the textbooks and the syllabus and spent much more time on non-TOEIC content than the other teachers at University C. These differences could probably be attributed to her strong beliefs about language teaching and learning. However, they might also be due to the fact that she taught



a lower level class, which might have allowed her more time to teach what she wanted. Also, she was observed for much less time than the other teachers (less than a half), so what was observed might not be completely typical of her teaching.

### **1.2.2.2 Teaching methods.**

The following is a description of some features of the teachers' teaching methods observed in class. These included the use of participant organizations, the use of some teaching and learning activities, and teachers' talking time and their use of English in class.

#### **1.2.2.2.1 Use of participant organization.**

Participation organization refers to "the patterns of organization for classroom interactions" (Allen & Others, 1983, p. 235) or "how the students are organized as participants in classroom interaction" (Allen & Others, 1983, p. 236). Fröhlich, Spada, and Allen, the designers of COLT observation scheme, distinguished three basic patterns of participant organization: whole class, group work, and individual work. The following descriptions of these patterns were taken from the scheme (Fröhlich, Spada, & Allen, 1985, p. 53).

#### **A. Whole Class**

1. Teacher to student or class, and vice versa (One central activity led by the teacher is going on; the teacher interacts with the whole class and/or with individual students.)
2. Student to student, or student(s) to class (Students talk to each other, either as part of the lesson or as informal socializing; one central activity led by a student may be going on, e.g., a group of students act out a skit with the rest of the class as the audience.)
3. Choral work by students (The whole class or groups participate in the choral work, repeating a model provided by the textbook or teacher.)

#### **B. Group work**

1. All groups at work on the same task
2. Groups at work on different tasks

**C. Individual seat work** (Students work on their own, all on the same task or on different tasks.)

In this study, there were occasions when a teacher assigned different tasks to different groups of students; however, the students still worked on their own. These incidents were still counted as individual work because there were not compulsory interactions among group members in order to successfully complete the group task.

*Table 12. Time Teachers Spent on Types of Participant Organization*

Teachers	Universities/English courses	Whole class	Pair work/ group work		Individual work
			Pair work	Group work	
Phuong	University A Business English	84.72%	12.28%		2.99%
Thoai		85.77%	3.41%	1.80%	9.02%
Hoa	University B TOEIC preparation	96.70%			3.30%
Lan		74.74%			25.26%
Phong	University C TOEIC preparation	82.60%			17.40%
Quyen		86.96%			13.04%
Kim		100%			

Table 12 shows the percentage of time the teachers spent on each type of participant organization. It is necessary to note that 60 minutes of Hoa's teaching, when she had her students do the second mid-term test, was not recorded, so the time she spent on types of participation organization was only calculated based on the teaching time recorded. The most common type of participant organization was whole class with the time spent on it varying between 74.74% and 100%. This implies that teachers were still the dominant figure in all of the classes. However, a striking feature was shown in Table 12. Those teachers who taught TOEIC preparation courses did not employ pair work or group work at all, while both teachers who taught Business English courses used them. This was likely due to the course nature, especially the textbooks because some teachers (Hoa and Phuong) mentioned that they only let students do communicative activities such as information gap activities included in the textbooks.

However, the extent the teachers employed certain types of participant organization also depended on individual teachers. Both Phuong and Thoai came from the same university, taught the same programme, and used the same textbooks, but Phuong took advantage of

pair and group work much more than Thoai did (12.28% vs. 5.21%). Unlike the other teachers at her university, Kim did not use individual work at all. Many of the differences among teachers could be explained by the teachers' beliefs about what teaching and learning should be. Phuong, for example, spent much less time on individual work compared to the other teachers. She required her students to prepare for their lessons at home, e.g., look up new words in the dictionary and read reading passages at home, so that they could have more time for interaction with others in class and the development of their communication skills. There were also other factors involved in the explanation of the teachers' differences. One example is the content the teachers taught while they were observed. Hoa also seemed to spend little time on individual work like Phuong but for a different reason. Most of the time she was observed was devoted to listening, which did not allow for much individual work.

#### *1.2.2.2.2 Use of teaching and learning activities.*

Table 13 shows several types of teaching and learning activities teachers used in class. Clearly, those activities characterizing the communicative approach such as *pair/group discussion and role-plays* were only used with Business English classes in University A. *Summarizing reading and listening texts*, an activity that required deeper understanding and demanded greater language use ability, was also used at this university only. According to the teachers' explanations, this was due to the nature of the textbooks (Phuong and Hoa).

*Presentations* were used for both business English at University A and TOEIC preparation at University C. However, they were totally absent at University B. Therefore, textbooks did not seem to be the sole factor that affected teachers' use of teaching and learning activities. Looking at the universities' policies helped explain this phenomenon. At University A, presentations were encouraged by the Department, but they were only optional. This is the reason why during the observed periods, Phuong used them twice, but Thoai did not. By contrast, at University C, presentations were compulsory on top of TOEIC preparation. The assessment of students' presentations was counted towards their mid-term grades. Here presentations were not associated with the TOEIC preparation content, but with the university's policy. At University B, presentations were not required by the Department and the test preparation content did not require these activities, either. This was the reason why the teachers there did not use them. In short, the use of

presentations was determined by the nature of the textbook, but this relationship was mediated by the university's policy or course objectives.

The other activities such as *explaining grammar rules and vocabulary*, *doing grammar and vocabulary exercises*, *translations* were used in all the observed classes. However, it was impossible to count the number of times they used them. The problem was that teachers rarely spent a whole episode teaching a specific grammar or vocabulary topic or doing translations. Instead, they often explained individual grammar and vocabulary items as they appeared in reading or listening texts. They translated phrases and texts into Vietnamese or asked their students do this whenever needs arose. This type of teaching was seen in both TOEIC preparation classes and Business English classes; however, it was more common in the former. The reasons were likely to be, again, the nature of the course or textbooks. In the Business English classes, each unit focused on a certain topic, e.g., careers, selling-online, and companies, so vocabulary also centred on the topic and grammar was organized in topics. Therefore, in the Business English classes, there were still episodes when the teachers focused on only vocabulary or grammar. The TOEIC preparation classes, on the contrary, mainly involved doing practice tests, which included all possible types of vocabulary and grammar, so the teachers explained them as they appeared and as students needed them.

Nevertheless, the teachers' use of teaching and learning activities also seemed to depend on the person factor, i.e., teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning. Kim, a teacher from University C, said that she always let her students practice speaking at the beginning of every class because she considered it important for students to be able to speak a little. In addition, Lan, although teaching TOEIC preparation, often supplement the practice tests with grammar points often assessed by the TOEIC test and spent whole parts of lessons only teaching a grammar topic, for example, types of questions and their responses.

Table 13. Use of Teaching and Learning Activities

Teachers	Universities/ English courses	Pair/group discussions	Role- plays	Questions– answers	Summarizing reading/listening texts	Presentation	Explaining grammar rules	Doing grammar exercises	Translations	Repetitions
Phuong	University A Business English	11	2	1	2	2				
Thoai		4		1	1					
Hoa	University B TOEIC preparation									
Lan										
Phong	University C TOEIC preparation					2				
Quyen						3				
Kim				1		2				

#### *1.2.2.2.3 Teachers' use of English and teachers' talking time.*

Observation data were consistent with what the teachers said and explained about their use of English and their talking time in the interviews. Observations showed that the teachers in Business English classes used English a lot and, on the contrary, those in TOEIC preparation classes mainly used Vietnamese. It is also clear that the former talked less than the latter. In the Business English classes, students had a chance to interact with their teachers and their classmates in pair/group work and discussion activities. In the TOEIC preparation classes, the teachers talked most the time. The students mostly listened quietly, and, if they wanted to, they could give their teachers some short responses, such as their choices A, B, C or D or the Vietnamese equivalent or occasionally the synonym of an English word. There were some exceptions in University C when students made presentations. (See teaching excerpts from Phuong, Lan, and Phong in Chapter 7)

In brief, the observation analysis revealed a striking contrast between University A and Universities B and C, or, in other words, between Business English courses and TOEIC preparation courses. Generally, the Business English classes were much more communicative in nature, while communication was almost absent in TOEIC preparation classes, especially those at University B. In Business English classes, most of the content was non-TOEIC; there were pair work/group work and some communicative activities like group discussion, questions–answers, and role-plays; there was also some genuine communication between teachers and students; instruction was done in English most of the time. By contrast, in TOEIC classes, most or all of the content was TOEIC; all communicative activities were absent except for presentation activities and some question and answer activities in Kim's classes. Another interesting finding from the observation was that Thoai, a teacher at University A, who seemed to be very similar to the other TOEIC teachers from the interview data, actually taught much more like his colleague, Phuong. It seemed that Thoai's teaching was still dominated by the integrated skill textbook, but as he said, without TOEIC, he would use more pair work and group work, and he would use them for a wider variety of activities.

# APPENDIX P

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT CASES

### 1.1 Results of Interview Analysis

#### 1.1.1 Potential influencing factors in test impact generation.

##### *1.1.1.1 Person factors.*

##### *1.1.1.1.1 Participants' English learning background.*

The seven-year compulsory English programme had been at all of the students' schools. While at school, only four of them, who were all top students, took extra English classes. At the time the study was conducted, only two students were taking TOEIC preparation courses outside their universities, one was taking an IELTS course, and another was taking a TOEFL IBT course.

The students experienced a similar kind of English teaching and learning at school (see Table 1). The most striking features of this experience were a focus on grammar and vocabulary; little attention to listening, speaking, and writing; and the use of translation as a means to teach and learn (students translated reading texts and vocabulary in order to understand, and teachers used translation to explain teaching materials).

Table 1. English Teaching and Learning at School (N=12)

Features	No of students	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
Focus on grammar	11												
Focus on vocabulary	7												
No or little listening	11												
No or little speaking	9												
No or little writing	7												
Translation as a means of teaching and learning	5												
Proficiency level		Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University		University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information



#### *1.1.1.1.2 Students' beliefs about language learning.*

Answering the question about the purposes of language learning, the students often stated more than one purpose. The most frequently mentioned ones were learning a language for communication (nine students) and for employment (eight students). However, these two purposes did not necessarily exclude each other because five of the students mentioned both of them. Also, all of them believed that English, particularly communicative ability, was very important for their future jobs because with a good English proficiency, they could get better jobs, higher salaries, and more chances for promotion. In fact, eleven out of the twelve students wanted to achieve communicative ability in order to get a good job after graduation. Thus, the end purpose of English learning was essentially future employment. Only a few students added that they needed English to read specialized materials for their current studies, future work, or for further education (see Table 2).

Nine out of the twelve students understood communicative ability as the ability to communicate verbally, which involved only listening and speaking. Only three students incorporated the ability to do written communication into communicative ability on top of the ability to do verbal communication. However, the first thing they thought of when asked for a definition was still the ability to be able to converse in English.

Table 3 shows that listening and speaking were considered the most important skills to learn by the majority of students. Although half of the students acknowledged that it was necessary to learn all the skills, they generally still gave priority to listening and then speaking. It was likely that this priority was associated with their understanding of communicative ability. According to them, students needed communicative ability for their future employment, but communicative ability was thought to include speaking and listening only.

Eight out of the twelve students considered using language for communication, especially with foreigners, as one of the best ways to learn a language. Two students believed that reading and listening to media in English could help them learn new grammatical structures and vocabulary. Other students emphasized that patience was a necessary quality for language learning: One needed to learn it bit by bit every day.

Table 2. Students' Beliefs about Language Learning (Part 1) (N=12)

Features	Total	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
<b>Purposes of language learning</b>													
• For communication	9												
• For jobs	9												
• For reading specialized materials	3												
• For further education	2												
• For graduation	3												
• Other	2												
<b>English is important for jobs</b>	12												
<b>Definitions of communicative ability</b>													
• Ability to do verbal communication	9												
• Ability to do verbal and written communication	3												
Proficiency level		Top	Bottom	Top	NI	Bottom	Top	Bottom	Top	Bottom	Top	Bottom	
University		University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information

Table 3. Students' Beliefs about Language Learning (Part 2) (N=12)

Skills university students should learn	Total	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Listening and speaking</li></ul>	2												
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Listening</li></ul>	1												
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>All the skills are important, but</li></ul>													
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>listening and speaking are most important</li></ul>	4												
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>listening is most important</li></ul>	1												
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>listening, grammar, and translation are most important</li></ul>	1												
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>It depends</li></ul>	1												
Proficiency level		Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University		University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information

Table 4. Students' Beliefs about Language Learning (Part 3) (N=12)

The best ways to learn a language	Total	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
• Using language for real communication	8												
• Frequent exposure to language	3												
• Learning bit by bit	3												
• Reading or listening to English media	2												
• Self-learning	2												
• Other	3												
Ways to improve TOEIC test scores													
• Learning test taking strategies	12												
• Learning the tested skills	9												
• Practicing test questions	3												
• other	4												
Proficiency level		Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University		University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information

All of the students agreed that learning test-taking strategies was useful for improving test scores. However, they attached different levels of importance to test-taking strategies. Ten out of the twelve students considered these strategies important or very important. The second most popular opinion was learning what was tested, especially listening. The third opinion was to practice test questions.

### **1.1.1.2 Test Factors.**

#### *1.1.1.2.1 Students' perceptions of test design.*

The students knew the test design well. Essentially, all of them knew the test had the listening and reading sections. However, while they all said that the TOEIC test assessed listening, only ten of them said it assessed reading. The reason was that Huyen considered the reading section grammar, and Luong believed it was not necessary to learn reading because he could use test-taking skills to answer questions correctly. Grammar and vocabulary each were mentioned by five students. Eleven out of the twelve students said the test had a multiple-choice format. Only Huynh thought the test assessed all four language skills and included speaking topics.

#### *1.1.1.2.2 Students' perceptions of test value.*

The values of TOEIC were judged through its usefulness for employment and learning, its validity, and its suitability for graduation purposes.

#### *Students' perceptions of usefulness of TOEIC*

Five out of the twelve students agreed that the TOEIC test was useful for their employment either because learning for the test would help students improve their language ability for their future jobs (four students) or a TOEIC certificate with a high score could help students get good jobs and high salaries (one student). Three other students also agreed that TOEIC was somehow useful for jobs, but did not think a TOEIC certificate was enough to get a good job or to use English effectively for work. In their opinion, students still needed real communicative ability. Only Hoang said that the TOEIC or any other English tests were not useful for job applications at companies that actually used English for communication at the workplace. Essentially his argument was not different from the other three students above, but he was more assertive.

All ten students who were asked about the usefulness of TOEIC for learning students agreed that the TOEIC test was useful for learning in one way or another, e.g., for their language ability improvement and for motivation. However, three students pointed out that the TOEIC test was not useful for improving students' communicative ability.

#### *Students' perceptions of validity of TOEIC*

Only two out of the twelve students considered the TOEIC test valid because it did not allow cheating, and one needed to truly learn in order to achieve a high score. Two other students said the test was only relatively valid. Eight of the students, however, believed that the test did not accurately reflect learners' language ability. It is interesting that essentially both the "relatively valid" and "not valid" students used the same arguments for their opinions. They mentioned the discrepancy between test scores and learner's overall language ability due to the lack of the speaking skills the test score inflation due to test preparation, the use of test-taking strategies, and random guessing. The only difference between them is that the former group sounded more positive and milder and the latter – more negative and more assertive.

#### *Students' perceptions of suitability of TOEIC for graduation purposes*

Two of the twelve students agreed that the TOEIC test was suitable for use as a university exit test because it was more suitable for Vietnamese students' language proficiency than other international tests. Four other students indicated that the TOEIC test was generally suitable for graduation purposes because it was suitable for students' ability and helped students improve their language ability. However, they were concerned about the lack of the speaking skill, test score inflation due to test preparation, multiple choice format that allows random guessing, and unsuitability for non-economic majors. Two students rejected the use of the TOEIC test for graduation purposes because of its inability to assess communicative ability, especially the speaking skill.

Table 5. Students' Perceptions of Values of TOEIC (N=12)

Usefulness of TOEIC	No of students	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
• For jobs													
- Yes	6												
- Yes, but...	3												
- No	1												
• For learning													
- Improving language ability	6												
- Enhancing students'	6												
- Helping students with goal setting	3												
- Not for improving	3												
- Other	4												
Validity of TOEIC													
• Valid	2												

Usefulness of TOEIC	No of students	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
• Only relatively valid	2												
• Not valid	7												
• It depends	1												
Suitability for graduation purposes													
• Yes	2												
• Yes, but	4												
• No	2												
Proficiency level		Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University		University A				University B				University C			

*Note.* NI = No information



#### *1.1.1.2.3 Students' perceptions of the difficulty of the TOEIC test.*

Five out of the twelve students said the test or the TOEIC benchmark was difficult for them. Three students said it was achievable, and another three students considered it easy. It is interesting that while five out of eight students from University A and University B found the test difficult, all of the students at University C considered it easy or achievable. Probably, one of the reasons was that at the large city universities, students had to take the international test and achieve higher benchmarks, while at the provincial university, students only had to take the internal test, which was usually perceived as easier than the international one, and the benchmark was also lower. Another reason might be that students at University C had learned four TOEIC preparation courses before, so they knew how to use test-taking strategies to gain a high score. This was confirmed by Luong. Most of the students (eight), however, said that the listening section was more difficult than the reading section.

Table 6. Students' Perceptions of Difficulty of TOEIC/TOEIC benchmarks (N=12)

	Total	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
Difficulty of the whole test/ TOEIC benchmarks													
• Difficult	5												
• Achievable	3												
• Easy	3												
• Unclear	1												
More difficult parts													
• Listening	8												
• Reading	1												
• Same difficulty	1												
• Other	1												
Proficiency level		Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University		University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information

#### *1.1.1.2.4 Students' perceptions of test pressure.*

The most common source of test pressure came from students' awareness of the consequences of failing the test (see Table 7). All of the students admitted that the consequences would be serious because they would not have a degree in order to get jobs. Ten students said the most important factor that made them prepare for the TOEIC test was to get a degree and graduate. Only three others mentioned that they would feel guilty and remorseful for not meeting their family's expectations. They indicated that their families had been trying so hard to support them through university. The next most common source of pressure was peers. Students often said that their peers asked them to take TOEIC preparation courses with them. Some students admitted that the fact that their peers had already got certificates and high scores created some pressure on them.

Family members and teachers did not have much influence on students' learning. This could probably be explained by the fact that university students are mature people, who are usually not supervised strictly by their families or teachers. In fact, most of the students emphasized their autonomy in their learning. Also, many students added that their parents were farmers, so they knew very little about their children's studies.

Table 7. Students' Perceptions of Test Pressure (N=12)

Sources of pressure	Total “Yes”	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
Awareness of consequences of failing	12												
Pressure from peers	5										NI	NI	NI
Pressure from families	3												
Pressure from teachers	3					NI							
Proficiency level		Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University		University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information

### **1.1.2 Impacts of the TOEIC test on students' learning.**

#### ***1.1.2.1 Impacts of the TOEIC test on students' motivation.***

Eleven out of twelve students said that they were motivated by the TOEIC test to different extents. Top students including Hoang, Thien, and Ngoc perceived this impact of the test to be very minimal. They said they had always been taking English learning seriously, and they were aiming for communicative ability, not for TOEIC or not just for TOEIC. The lower ability students were more strongly influenced by the test. Generally, the students were behaviourally, cognitively, and or emotionally more engaged in their learning. For example, they displayed more effort, persistence, concentration, attention, contribution to class learning, and autonomy. They also began to use a more strategic and deeper learning approach including making plans for their own learning and trying to truly understand what they had learned. Additionally, they were more aware of the importance of English. However, the use of a strategic and deep learning approach was still very limited. In addition, it was not always easy to disentangle the impact of TOEIC and of other factors on students' motivation such as the awareness of the importance of English for their studies and future jobs.

#### ***1.1.2.2 Impacts of the TOEIC test on students' learning content.***

The students were asked to indicate the changes in the time they spent on learning each specific skill compared to high school and the reasons for the changes. Table 8 shows that the most dramatic time change had occurred to the listening skill. All of the students said they spent more time on listening compared to in high school, and seven of them said this time increased a lot. The next largest change was with the reading skills with all of the students spending more time on it than before. However, the most common degree of change was only increased slightly (five students). The time increase for listening was larger probably due to the fact that the listening section was perceived to be more difficult to all the students.

None of the students spent less time on learning vocabulary. The number of students who reported a time increase distributed evenly across the three categories (three students each). Only two students spent the same amount of time on vocabulary. Most of the students also spent more time on pronunciation, except for one student who said his time on this skill was decreased moderately.

The time change for grammar was more complex. While time spent on this skill was still increased by a large number (seven) of students, it was also decreased by the largest number of students compared to the other “decreased” groups for the other skills.

As for speaking, similar to the listening and reading skills, no one reduced their time for this skill. However, five of the twelve students said their time reserved for speaking remained the same, and only two students (Hoang and Ngoc) said it went up significantly.

As far as writing was concerned, Table 8 shows less time increase than the other skills. The largest groups were “stayed the same” (four students) and “increased slightly” (four students). There were two students who reported they spent less time on writing.

Generally, the time increases for listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary were due to TOEIC or TOEIC and other purposes such as improving communicative ability, meeting course requirements and teachers’ demands, reading specialized materials. However, the time increases for speaking and writing were completely attributed to other factors, e.g., the desire to obtain communicative ability/general English ability, learning for IELTS, or personal needs of using the language to communicate with foreigners. Only one student who misperceived that the TOEIC assessed all four language skills said he had learned these skills for TOEIC. All of the students saw the connection between the TOEIC test and the time they spent on at least a couple of language skills. Only Hoang, a top student at University A, denied any effects of the test on his time changes.

When the time spent on learning the skills remained the same or reduced, this was because the skills were not tested by the TOEIC test, or students believed they were good enough at them. For example, the top students including Cuc, Ngoc, Hoang, and Thien explained that they had already learned a lot of grammar at school.

Table 8. Changes in Time Spent on Language Skills (N = 12)

	Increased a lot	Increased moderately	Increased slightly	Stayed the same	Decreased slightly	Decreased moderately	Decreased a lot	I don't know
<b>Listening</b>	7	3	2					
<b>Reading</b>	3	3	5	1				
<b>Vocabulary</b>	3	3	3	2				1
<b>Pronunciation</b>	3	3	2	3		1		
<b>Grammar</b>	1	4	2	1	2	2		
<b>Speaking</b>	2	3	2	5				
<b>Writing</b>	1	1	4	4	1	1		

### ***1.1.2.3 Impact of the TOEIC test on students' learning activities.***

The results showed that the introduction of the TOEIC test directed students toward both direct and indirect test preparation activities. In this thesis, direct test preparation activities included those activities that students used to prepare for the TOEIC test using materials specifically designed for TOEIC preparation. Indirect test preparation activities were those that students used to prepare for the TOEIC test not using TOEIC preparation materials.

#### ***1.1.2.3.1 Students' direct test preparation activities.***

The most common direct test preparation activity was taking mock tests. The students from Universities B and C tended to be more involved in this activity than those from University A. Eight students mentioned doing mock tests with test preparation purposes in mind. Two other students, Hoang and Mai, also had taken mock tests, but not deliberately for TOEIC preparation. The second most common test preparation activity was learning test taking strategies with eight students using it. Only four students had never done it. These included Hoang, a top student, and Mai, Khoi, Thanh, three bottom students. Practicing test questions were also very popular. Obviously, all the eight students who were doing TOEIC preparation courses at Universities B and C were engaged in this activity. Seven students, including one student from University A, reported doing past tests or practice tests using extra learning materials that they found on the Internet or in TOEIC preparation books.

Eight students also learned extra TOEIC preparation materials. This activity was usually associated with practicing test questions because the test preparation materials usually included practice tests.

Students were also interested in the information about the test, such as its structure, scoring system, and duration. Seven students got the information from the Internet, through their friends, or test preparation materials. Two students said they did not need to look for the information, but they had been actually informed about it by their teachers. Hoang did look for the information, but just to help his mother rather than to prepare for the test himself.



Table 9. Students' Direct Test Preparation Activities (N=12)

	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
Taking mock tests	Yes, but			Yes, but								
Learning test-taking strategies												
Practicing test questions using extra TOEIC preparation materials												
Learning TOEIC extra materials												
Looking for information about the test	Yes, but				No, but		No, but					
Asking teachers for help/advice about the TOEIC test												
Taking test preparation courses												
Proficiency level	Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University	University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information; Y = Yes.

The least popular direct test preparation activities were asking teachers for help or advice and taking test preparation courses outside their universities, which were mentioned by only three and two students, respectively. The little use of the first activity could be explained by the fact that university students are very independent from their teachers.

#### *1.1.2.3.2 Students' indirect test preparation activities.*

Table 10 shows that few students did indirect test preparation activities. Again, the students from Universities B and C tended to be involved in these activities more than those from University A. The most common one was watching media, e.g., videos, cartoons, movies with or without subtitles, in English (five students). The next most common activity was listening to English songs (four students). Both of these activities were done to improve the listening skill. Four other students read media in English, e.g., newspapers, books, short stories, with the main purpose of improving their reading comprehension. The same number of students used non-TOEIC extra learning materials to prepare for the test. These materials were mainly used to learn grammar or listening. Repetition and translation were the least common.

Table 10. Students' Indirect Test Preparation Activities (N= 12)

	No of students	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
Watching media in English	5												
Listening to or singing English songs	4												
Reading media in English	4												
Non-TOEIC extra learning materials	4												
Learning by repetition	3												
Translation	2												
Proficiency level		Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University		University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information

#### *1.1.2.3.3 Students' non-test preparation activities.*

The results above show that the introduction of the TOEIC test made students directly and indirectly prepare for it. It is interesting to know whether the impact of the test was so strong that it made them focus solely on test preparation ignoring learning for other purposes. The results show that some of the students were not only motivated by TOEIC, but by other factors and learned for other purposes. The top students tended to do these activities more than the others.

One of the most common non-test preparation activities was watching media in English (six students). Students usually watched TV programs, videos, and movies. Many of them did these activities for both entertainment and learning. The students said watching media helped them improve their listening skill and learn new vocabulary and grammar. One of them explained that he learned English by watching English media due to his real communication need.

The other most common activity was communicating with others, especially with foreigners. Six out of the twelve students said they did this activity to improve their communicative ability, speaking skill in particular. They denied that they used this activity to prepare for the TOEIC test. Mai, one of the bottom students said that she tried to communicate in English with her friends a little only in order to improve her general English ability without any test preparation in mind (Mai).

Learning English by listening to English songs was popular. Apart from the five students who used songs to prepare for the TOEIC test mentioned above, four other students listened to English songs mainly for entertainment hoping they can learn something at the same time. Interestingly, one student said she listened to English songs to get the inspiration to learn listening because she believed that if she could understand fast songs, she could understand videos more easily.

*Table 11. Students' Non-Test Preparation Activities*

	No of students	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
Watching media in English	6	O	G	O	G	O		O					
Communicating with others	6	O	O		G	O				O			O
Listening to or singing English songs	4	O			O			O				O	
Non-TOEIC extra learning materials	2								O				O
Reading media in English	1	O											U
Learning by repetition	2	O											
Translation	1				O								
Proficiency level		Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University		University A				University B				University C			

*Note.* NI = No information; O = Other (not TOEIC); G = General English; U = Unclear

#### **1.1.2.4 Impact of TOEIC on students' achievement.**

The students were asked about their perceptions of their improvements in the language skills since they entered university. The results showed that the majority of students perceived improvement in all of the language skills. All of the students had improved their *listening* and *reading*, the two tested skills. The improvement in the listening skill was the most radical as many more students said their listening had been improved a lot compared to the other skills. The reading skill came second with six students perceiving their improvement at a moderate level. *Speaking*, *writing*, and *pronunciation*, which were considered by students as non-tested skills, seemed to be the least improved. However, among these three skills, speaking was the most improved and writing was the least improved. *Grammar* and *vocabulary*, which were considered tested skills by around half of the students, had been less improved than the two tested skills, but more than the non-tested skills. The students' perceptions of their improvement seemed consistent with the time increase for the skills.

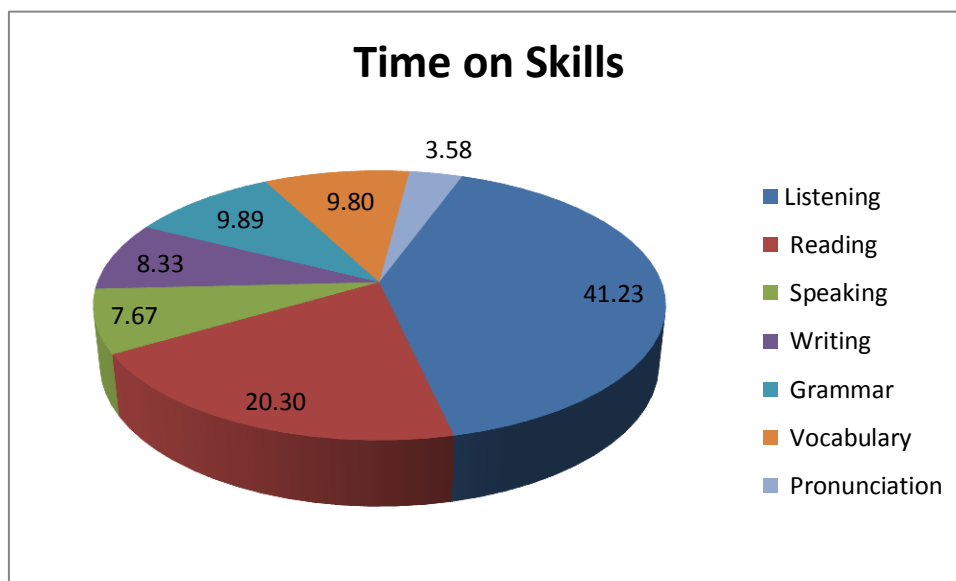
Table 12. Impact of TOEIC on Students' Achievement (N=12)

	Listening	Reading	Vocabulary	Grammar	Speaking	Pronunciation	Writing
<b>Much better</b>	5	3	2	0	1	1	1
<b>Moderately better</b>	2	6	3	3	0	3	2
<b>A little better</b>	5	2	6	5	7	4	3
<b>Unchanged</b>			1	2	4	4	6
<b>A little worse</b>				2			
<b>Unclear</b>		1					

## 1.2 Results of Students' Journal Sheet Analysis

All twelve students completed their weekly journal sheets about their English learning during a period of four weeks. However, Luong submitted only two sheets. One of the reasons was probably that his grandmother passed away in the second week, and he had to come back to his hometown for her funeral. Toan could not record the time he spent on skills and activities during the third week, explaining that he was mainly engaged with his internship trip and had very little time for English learning. He did not usually record his time spent on learning vocabulary, either. Instead, he indicated the number of words he learned each week. Two other students also failed to record the time spent on learning vocabulary for one week. One of them explained that she had difficulty estimating the time she used to learn vocabulary because she learned vocabulary while learning listening and reading, and so it was not easy to calculate the time for vocabulary alone. There was one special case when a student (Thien) spent some time learning both English and French pronunciation.

### 1.2.1 Time spent on skills.



*Figure 1 Time Students Spent on Language Skills*

All of the students spent a total of 378.76 hours learning English out of class during the four week period. The data of time actually spent on skills supported what the students said during the interviews. The largest proportion of time was spent on listening (41.23%). The second largest proportion was devoted to reading (20.30%). A very small amount of



time (less than 10%) was used for each of the other skills. Among this group, time spent on speaking, writing, and pronunciation was the smallest. At first glance, the fact that the time for writing was larger than the one for speaking seemed to contradict what most students said in the interviews. However, a closer look shows that, in fact, five students did not learn writing at all during the period (See Table 13). The number of hours for writing was high due to one extreme case, Huynh, who reported that he spent 16 hours learning writing, which was half of the total writing time (31.31 hours). Nevertheless, in the field of language teaching, what he did for writing was not normally considered writing: For him, writing meant chatting on the computer with his friends.

The actual time spent on vocabulary also seems less than it should be, but it is necessary to note that Toan did not record his vocabulary time for three weeks although he did learn vocabulary every day (eight to ten words a day). Two other students also did not have time records for vocabulary for one week.

Table 13. Journal Sheet Results - Time Spent on Skills (N=12)

Skills	Students												Total	Percentage
	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong <sup>a</sup>		
Listening	38	21.44	7.4	11.84	6.25	9.5	13 <sup>b</sup>	13.5	13.5	3	13	4.5	154.93	41.23
Reading	14.5	6.75	6.1	5.17	3.33	8.08	10	7.5	9.1	1.58	4.17	0	76.28	20.30
Speaking	5	0	2.34	2.5	1.17	1.55	0	2.25	2.83	1.84	6.33	3	28.81	7.67
Writing	3.67	0	4.8	5.17	0.25	0	0	0	1	0.42	16	0	31.31	8.33
Grammar	0	0.75	0	13.5	0.17	7	7.17	0	4.08	2 <sup>c</sup>	0	2.5	37.17	9.89
Vocabulary	5.67	3 <sup>d</sup>	1.73	7.75	1.92	4.2	3 <sup>e</sup>	3.08	5.38	0.59	0	0.5	36.82	9.80
Pronunciation	3.2	0.9	1.93	2.5	0.75	0	0	1.08	1.5	1.58	0	0	13.44	3.58
<b>Total</b>													378.76	

Note. <sup>a</sup>Luong submitted only two journal sheets; <sup>b</sup>No time record for Week 3; <sup>c</sup>No time record for Week 3; <sup>d</sup>No time record for Week 3; <sup>e</sup>No time record for Week 1, Week 2, and Week 3.

### **1.2.1 Learning Activities.**

During the period of time when students recorded their learning, five and seven of them were engaged in direct and indirect test preparation activities, respectively, in their out-of-class learning time. It is noticeable that all of them came from Universities B and C, where the students were taking TOEIC preparation courses. Three students, all from University A, only learned for their general English ability and hoped that this would be useful for TOEIC later. Eight students also did learning activities without a test preparation purpose in mind. Hoang, a top student from University A, only did this type of activity, and he did them much more frequently than the other students. (See Table 14.)

Table 14. Journal Sheet Results – Students' Learning Activities (N=12)

	No of students	No of times	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
Direct test preparation	5	15					2	2	2			4		5
Indirect test preparation	7	31					3	8	1	2	6	10		1
General English	3	47		18	12	17								
Other	8	41	14				2		4	3	4	1	12	1
Unclear	6	17					7		3	5	2			
Proficiency level			Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University			University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information

### 1.2.2 Use of materials.

Table 15 shows the categories of materials the students used to learn English, the number of students who used each category, and the total number of times they all used it. All the materials were classified into six categories: TOEIC materials, non-TOEIC materials for TOEIC preparation purposes, non-TOEIC materials for other purposes, non-TOEIC materials for TOEIC preparation and other purposes, non-TOEIC materials for General English, and unclear purposes.

*TOEIC materials* referred to compulsory TOEIC textbooks used at the universities and extra TOEIC preparation materials including books, internet files, and websites. The results showed that except for comprehensive TOEIC preparation books that involved all aspects of test preparation, students also used materials that focused on single aspects of TOEIC, e.g., TOEIC vocabulary or TOEIC grammar. Seven of the twelve students used TOEIC materials, and the total number of times they used them during the four week period was 36.

*Non-TOEIC materials for TOEIC preparation purposes* consisted of materials not specifically designed for TOEIC preparation but used by the students to prepare for it. These materials included books (on grammar, everyday conversations, and effective ways to learn English), dictionaries, newspapers, and websites. Six students used them for a total of 14 times. Half of them used materials teaching grammar. Books on conversations and learning strategies each were used by only one student.

Table 15. Journal Sheet Results – Use of Materials

	No of students	No of times	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
TOEIC materials	7	36					3	4	10	4	12	1		2
Non-TOEIC materials for TOEIC preparation	6	14					1	4		5	1	2		1
Non-TOEIC materials for TOEIC preparation and other purposes	1	1												1
Non-TOEIC materials for other purposes	5	32	10				6			1		7	8	
Non-TOEIC materials for General English	3	40		15	12	13								
Unclear purposes	1	5					5							
Proficiency level			Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University			University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information

*Non-TOEIC materials for other purposes* were materials not specifically designed for TOEIC preparation and used by students to learn English without a test preparation purpose in mind. Five of the students used the materials to improve their specialized knowledge (Hoang, Thanh) and their communicative ability (Nga, Huynh), to learn for another English test (Thien) or just to relax and pick up whatever language items that they could (Huynh, Hoang). These materials usually included specialized texts, newspapers (Hoang), websites for English songs, TOEFL preparation materials (Thien), and conversation books.

*Non-TOEIC materials for General English purposes* were used by a group of three students from University A who had not been involved in direct test preparation yet usually due to their low English abilities. At the time of the research, these students only aimed at improving their general English ability, and they hoped that what they were learning would also be useful for TOEIC later. Thus, both the materials and the purpose of their use had no immediate relationship with the TOEIC test. The three students mentioned this category 40 times in their 12 journal sheets. Apart from the university's textbook, which was frequently used for class work, there were a variety of materials. These included English learning materials such as books, videos, websites, or computer software which focused on a certain language aspect such as grammar, listening, or conversation. They also involved materials of real language use such as movies, newspapers, and short stories. These authentic materials were used to learn vocabulary, grammar, and for entertainment.

### **1.2.3 Achievement.**

The students' records of their specific improvements during the four week period generally supported what they said in the interviews about their achievement. Almost all of them noticed improvements every week. Only one student said he could not assess his own achievement, and two students each mentioned no improvement once.

Table 16. Journal Sheet Results - Achievement

	No of students	No of times	Hoang	Cuc	Khoi	Mai	Thien	Huyen	Toan	Thanh	Ngoc	Nga	Huynh	Luong
Listening	10	31		4	1	1	6	4	3	4	4	3		1
Grammar	9	21		1	4	2	1	3	5		2	2		1
Vocabulary	9	18	4	1		1	2	3	2	1	1	3		
Reading	4	6			3		1		1		1			
Test scores	3	4					1	1	2					
Speaking	3	3	1			1				1				
Pronunciation	2	2		1						1				
Writing	1	1	1											
Other	4	8	4	2				1		1				
“I can’t say” or no information	2	5				1							4	
No improvements	2	2										2		1
Unclear	3	3				1	1		1					
Proficiency level			Top		Bottom		Top	NI		Bottom	Top		Bottom	
University			University A				University B				University C			

Note. NI = No information



Table 16 shows the number of students who saw improvements in each language area and the number of times they mentioned them. The area most improved was *listening* with students mentioning it 31 times. The second most improved area was *grammar* with 8 students mentioning it 21 times. *Vocabulary* follows closely after grammar. Nine students stated their vocabulary improvement 18 times. Three students mentioned improvement in speaking. Only one and two students perceived improvement in *writing* and *pronunciation*, respectively. Three students reported their *improved test scores*.

It is not surprising to see that far fewer students mentioned improvement in *reading* compared to listening because time spent on listening doubled the time spent on reading. However, it seems unusual when fewer students perceived improved reading than grammar and vocabulary. Only six students said their reading had been better during the week, and they made only a total of nine comments about this. Probably, this is due to the fact that reading improvements take longer to be noticed than vocabulary and grammar improvements do.