Integrating the TOEIC into the University English Curriculum

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The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) has been rapidly gaining popularity in Japan, due to its adoption by many companies and organizations as one of the most important criterion for selecting new recruits from the numerous job applications. The growing importance of TOEIC in the workplace has also led to its increased prominence in the university English curriculum. For example, many universities in Japan are now offering students English credits if they attain a certain score on the TOEIC. Other universities have gone further, and have explicitly included a minimum TOEIC score as a requirement for graduation.

Despite the growing prominence of the TOEIC, there is still much debate on what role it should take in the English classroom. Some have argued that 'teaching for a test' does little service to university students, who in many cases have been studying English for entrance examinations for over six years. On the other hand, there is evidence to show that teaching the TOEIC can be motivating for students, particularly in an environment where English has little meaning in day to day life, and at a time when recognized qualifications are being increasingly sought after to secure a job offer.

In this paper, I will first give a short overview of the TOEIC, explaining its rational, structure and the language skills it tests. I will then show to what degree the TOEIC has been adopted in the workplace, and the effect this has had on the position of the TOEIC in the university English curriculum. The main focus of the paper, however, will be to describe a number of courses that I have been involved with, which incorporate a TOEIC element. Each course has had radically different overall goals, which in turn have had a strong impact of the manner in which the TOEIC has been adopted. An overview of each course will first be given, and then the advantages and disadvantages of each will be discussed. Finally, I will present a novel approach to integrating the TOEIC into a standard English language syllabus, which overcomes the problems of 'teaching for a test', but also leads to increased student motivation, improved TOEIC scores, and most importantly, a better understanding of the English language.