
Use of TOEIC Practice Tests and Repetition Practice for Low-level Grammar Review

YURI KUSUYAMA

Abstract

This study looks at the use of practice tests and implementation of repetition practice for low-level TOEIC grammar review. A small-scale study was conducted during a five-day intensive course. Fifteen college-age, low-level learners studied two sets of practice tests and reviewed the questions/answers multiple times through repetition practice. This study specifically investigates the students' performance by comparing the results of a pre-test and a post-test administered during the intensive course. The results show that, although the students' scores on the grammar questions they had reviewed through repetition practice increased 36.7%, their scores on the questions they had not studied increased very little (10.3%). Furthermore, even though the students who have higher reading scores demonstrated better performance on the reviewed questions, no differences were identifiable for the questions they did not study. Thus, for low-level learners, the use of practice tests does not really help their grammar learning even if they review the practice test questions multiple times through repetition practice. Working on practice tests and being exposed to many different grammar points simultaneously is probably too difficult for low-level learners. Curriculum coordinators and course instructors should take these factors into consideration and look at the possibility of using different types of textbooks and/or implementing different level-appropriate ways of grammar instruction and activities for low-level TOEIC preparation courses.

1. Introduction

Since the job-hunting situation for Japanese college graduates remains difficult due to the current economic difficulties in Japan, university students often find it necessary to seek extra "qualifications." The TOEIC acts as one of the most popular qualification examinations in Japan, primarily because companies often refer to it as a means of measuring workers' communication ability in English. As a result, many universities in Japan offer TOEIC preparation courses as part of their English curriculum.

There are many TOEIC preparation books and textbooks, but two popular approaches seem to dominate the market: practice tests and topic-based textbooks. Accordingly, there are two common approaches to teaching or reviewing frequently tested grammar points. Practice tests use either past test questions or similar test-like questions containing mixed grammar points. In this approach students are expected to review various grammar points simultaneously. Topic-oriented textbooks, on the other hand, provide vocabulary and content focusing on a particular topic in each unit. Topic-oriented textbooks usually include a grammar section and deal with one or two grammar points at a time. Each approach obviously has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Studying frequently tested grammar points as part of test preparation is generally considered effective

or necessary when it comes to TOEIC grammar review. Many so called “English study” books and magazines recommend using the official guidebooks consisting of previous tests as the best materials for TOEIC preparation, even though this approach assumes that learners already know basic English grammar and vocabulary. My experience both as a learner and teacher of English tells me that using practice test questions for grammar review works well for advanced learners who need to do more practice to review some grammar points and vocabulary. This approach, however, seems to pose difficulty for low-level learners. Since low-level learners often lack basic grammar knowledge, practice test questions give them the impression that they are exposed to multiple, unrelated grammar points all at once. It places more cognitive demands on the students; they easily get confused and are not able to sort out the various grammar points presented in different questions. Thus, grammar review becomes more difficult for low-level learners when the practice-test approach is taken.

In spite of these concerns, it seems textbooks consisting of practice tests are still very popular even for low-level TOEIC preparation courses. This study thus investigates the low-level learners’ use of practice tests. It particularly examines whether implementation of repetition practice on the practice test questions helps low-level students’ grammar learning. A small-scale, quasi-experimental case study was conducted during a five-day intensive TOEIC grammar and reading review course. This paper reports the results of the students’ performance on the TOEIC Part 5 questions from this intensive course. The main aim of the study, therefore, is to investigate how the use of practice tests and repeated review through repetition practice of the practice-test grammar questions affects low-level learners’ performance on the TOEIC Part5 questions.

2. Literature Review

The importance of explicit grammar instruction is a notorious debate that has been going on among language teachers and researchers for many decades. Different teachers have different teaching philosophies on this issue, which apparently is manifested in the ways they teach TOEIC preparation courses. Some teachers may argue that the overall course objective is to improve students’ general English communication skills instead of learning grammar details. However, as long as there are sections of questions testing the test-takers’ grammar knowledge on the TOEIC (i. e., Parts 5 and 6 of the current TOEIC test), some amount of grammar review becomes inevitable when an instructor teaches a TOEIC preparation course.

Explicit grammar instruction is generally considered important and even necessary for university-level TOEIC preparation courses. Uchibori, Chujo, & Hasegawa (2006) explain that the grammar items taught in high schools textbooks do not match grammar items tested in TOEIC, and they demonstrate the effectiveness of enhanced, explicit grammar instruction for low-level college-age English learners. The authors also suggest the need for more phrase-structure level grammar instruction and specifically recommend (a) “providing students with a clear explanation of phrase structure” and (b) “allowing them to apply this knowledge to many examples” (p. 248). Nishitani (2007) also compares the TOEIC test results of two groups of students: one group taking a TOEIC preparation class and the other taking a communicative grammar class. The TOEIC preparation class reviewed test-taking skills and frequently tested items, and they practiced grammar as well as reading comprehension questions. The communicative grammar course also included explicit grammar instruction, but the students taking this course worked on more communicative practices, such as discussions and role plays, and reading exercises were not included in this class. Nishitani’s (2007) results show that the group taking the TOEIC preparation class did significantly better than the other group on the grammar section of the TOEIC, supporting the effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction and practice.

Another issue related to grammar teaching/learning is the effectiveness of repetition and drills. Rep-

etition is a language learning strategy applied in audiolingualism and other language teaching approaches. Even though its effectiveness and importance have been debated by different researchers and language instructors, some still feel that repetition has its place in language instruction and consider it effective particularly in developing oral communication proficiency. For example, Ota (2009) explains that students with higher accuracy rate in sentence repetition tasks are able to recast the meanings in Japanese better showing better comprehension. Yamaoka (2006) also argues that "(l)anguage learning consists of exemplar learning" because it involves "identification of specific form-meaning connections, entrenchment of these connections, and their generalizations" (p. 8). In addition, Uchibori, et al. (2006) suggest allowing students to apply phrase-structure knowledge to many examples, as cited earlier. Therefore, both explicit grammar instruction and repetition practice are considered important for TOEIC preparation grammar review.

Regarding the use of practice tests, Schmidt (2003) explains that test-like practice may be helpful to build "test wiseness" because it may provide short-term effectiveness. However, according to Schmidt (2003),

"short term success with this strategy may blind some learners and instructors to a variety of long term learning strategies with greater potential for eventual proficiency gains, and higher scores on any kind of language test. Little, if any, research points to compelling, long-term advantages for test-like practice" (p. 83).

Robert Woodhead, an ETS representative, confirms this point in an interview (Wood, 2010) and explains that preparation "cannot hurt" because "(s)tudying past forms of the test may help the test takers become more familiar with the test item types, but will not help in actually improving a test score or a test taker's overall proficiency" (Wood, 2010, pp. 41–42).

Students' readiness for TOEIC preparation courses, particularly using practice tests is an important issue. Some researchers do not believe low-level learners are ready for TOEIC preparation courses using practice questions because they are "not yet ready to benefit from direct TOEIC preparation" (Redfield & Kotori, 2002, p. 142). It is explained:

"Traditional TOEIC preparation courses, which focus on 'beating' the test through massive practice using TOEIC type items, are clearly specialized courses for higher level learners ... these courses should be restricted to those learners demonstrating sufficient linguistic ability to profit from TOEIC preparation" (p 144).

This statement sounds intuitively correct, and my own experience confirms it to a large degree, but the issue of implementation of grammar review using practice tests still remains uncertain. In fact, it may be possible to effectively implement TOEIC grammar review by using practice tests if it is implemented with different class activities, such as repetition practice. This study, therefore, attempts to investigate and analyze low-level learners' TOEIC preparation grammar review through the use of practice tests and repetition practice of the practice test questions.

3. Methodology

The data was collected during a five-day intensive TOEIC grammar and reading review session held in February of 2011. The textbook used for this intensive course is *新TOEIC TEST特訓リーディング: Reading Practice for the TOEIC Test* (Essence English School, 2007). This book contains two sets of Parts 5, 6, and 7 practice questions as well as their answers and answer explanations in Japanese. At the begin-

ning of the intensive session, a pre-test was administered, followed by a post-test at the end. This study analyses the results of the Part 5 questions of the pre-test and the post-tests. The analysis here is limited to the Part 5 questions due to the following reasons:

1. Because of the length of the reading sections of TOEIC, most low-level students run out of time and cannot complete all test questions. They often fill out the bubbles on some Part 7 questions without even reading texts or questions; therefore, even though it looks like they have answered all the questions on the surface, the validity of their “reading comprehension” is difficult to measure.
2. Because this intensive course is such a short-term course, assessing the improvement of students’ reading ability over a period of five days seems unrealistic and problematic for research purposes.

Part 5 questions, on the other hand, eliminate these problems because most students answer the Part 5 grammar questions first, and they usually do not “just fill out the bubbles” on this part. The assessment of grammar review is more reliable because the students’ learning of grammar rules and their ability to apply what they have learned is pertinent even in a short-term review course. Therefore, even though the students worked on all three sections of the TOEIC reading parts (Parts 5, 6, and 7) during the intensive course, this study only examines the Part 5 results.

Because this is an intensive course designed to help students who need to earn more credits to keep up with their expected academic progress, the students enrolled in this course tend to be weaker than the average English Communication majors in the Department.¹ Although 27 students were enrolled in the course, only 15 of them participated in all the components necessary for the analysis of this study (i. e., pre-test, review sessions, two timed practice tests, and post-test) due to various reasons (e. g., absences due to job-hunting activities and illness). Therefore, this study looks at the results of the pre-test and the post-test of those 15 students. Familiarity with the test format, what Schmidt (2003) calls “test wiseness,” is not an issue here because all English Communication majors are required to take the IP TOEIC tests twice a year, and all 15 students participating in the study have the experiences of taking TOEIC tests multiple times in the past.

In this study, the term “repetition” is used to refer to repetitive reviewing of the practice test grammar questions. This includes studying and reviewing the same questions multiple times as well as reading and repeating the questions with the correct answers multiple times. The students studied the two practice tests in the following steps.

1. At the beginning of the session, the students worked on 20 questions from Parts 5, 6, and 7 for 15 minutes. Some of the students’ concerns was that they could not complete all 100 grammar and reading questions in 75 minutes. Thus, the 100 questions were divided into 5 portions, and the students were instructed to pay attention to “timing” and to try to complete the 20 questions in 15 minutes. When the 15 minutes was up, those students who completed all questions made a vocabulary list and studied the vocabulary. The students who could not finish the 20 questions in 15 minutes continued to complete all the questions first, then they also worked on vocabulary.
2. Upon completion of all questions and a vocabulary check, the instructor went over each question and explained the answers and grammar points in English, following the curriculum policy of “in-

1 The department name was changed from the “Department of English Communication” to the “Department of International Communication” in 2009. The core curriculum remains the same, and the curriculum content still places its emphasis on English communication. Thus, the term “English Communication majors” is used in this paper to refer to the students enrolled in the intensive course even though some of them technically should be addressed as “International Communication majors.”

struction in the target language only.”

3. For Part 5, the instructor read the questions with the correct answers, and the students repeated and practiced choral reading.
4. The students practiced pair reading of the same questions/answers.
5. Upon completion of all 100 practice test questions (= 20 questions x 5 times) by repeating the above steps 1–4, the students worked on the same 100 questions one more time in a timed practice-test fashion. New copies of the practice test were provided for this task. The students checked their answers and went over the questions and answers using the textbook, which provides grammar explanations in Japanese. The students repeated the same steps 1–5 for the second set of practice tests.

At the beginning of the intensive course, the students took a pre-test, and a post-test was given at the end of the course. The pre-test and the post-test followed the TOEIC reading test format, consisting of 40 Part 5 questions, 12 part 6 questions, and 48 Part 7 questions. In each part, 50% of the test questions came from the textbook used in the course (“repeated questions” hereafter), and the other 50% came from another source (“new questions” hereafter). The repeated questions and the new questions were mixed so that the students would be forced to read the questions more carefully. Due to the time constraint and various other factors of the intensive course, test time was modified to 70 minutes unlike the 75 minutes of the actual TOEIC reading section, and the students were told to complete as many questions as they could in 70 minutes.

The same questions were used for both the pre-test and the post-test. Some listening research takes the position that using the same test does not affect the end result if correct answers are not given to the students at any time and there is a suitable time interval between the initial and later tests (Takahahi, Suzuki, & Takefuta, 2003). Even though the tests used here were not listening tests and the students studied 50% of the test questions in the review sessions, the same questions were used for the post-test for the following reasons:

1. Regarding the repeated questions: After studying the questions in the textbook multiple times in the review sessions, the students had an average 57.2% accuracy rate (Practice Test 1 = 56.9%; Practice Test 2 = 57.4%) on the timed practice tests. Because the accuracy rate of the repeated questions was not high even after the repetitive reviews, recasting the same questions on the post-test seemed to be reasonable for the investigation of how well they could retain the materials and to examine how repetition practice to review grammar points affects their learning.
2. Regarding the new questions: Because the students did not study the new questions during the intensive course, the same questions were recast in the post-test to examine if the students were able to apply their knowledge gained in the review sessions to these questions the second time around.

Thus, the same test was used for both the pre-test and the post-test to investigate both the students’ retention of the reviewed questions and application of grammar rules to new questions.

Additionally, the 15 students’ past TOEIC scores were obtained in order to provide a reference criterion. Their scores came from each student’s three most recent IP TOEIC scores available at the time of data analyses (i. e., the IP TOEICs held in December 2009, June 2010, and December 2010 at NUCB). For those students who took all three tests, their average scores were calculated based on the three test results; for those who only took two out of the three tests, their scores were based on the two test results instead of the three.

No statistical significances are investigated or claimed in this study because of its small sample size.

4. Results and Discussion

In order to examine the students' background information and determine a reference criterion, their TOEIC score averages are first presented here. Following that, the results of the two practice tests and the Part 5 results of the pre-test and post-test are presented.

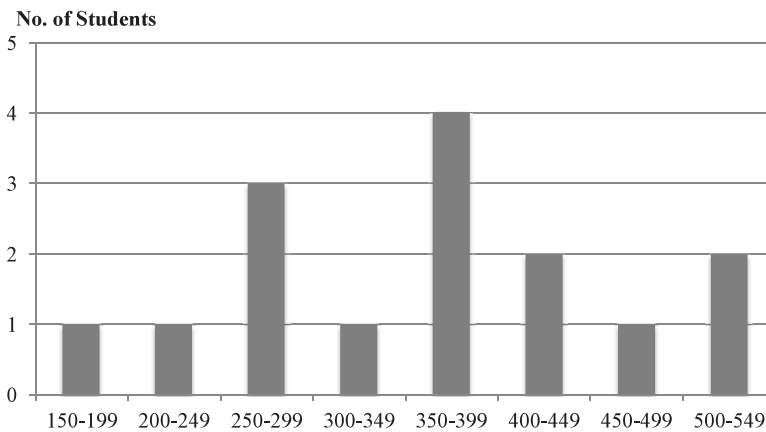
4.1. Students' Past TOIEC Scores

As mentioned in the methodology section, the students taking this intensive course tend to be on the lower end of the scale due to the nature of the course scheduling. The group average of the total TOEIC scores from the past three IP TOEIC tests held prior to this intensive course is 363.1, which is considerably lower than the department average score of 425.² The lowest score from the group is 185, and the highest 540 (STDV = 102.8). The average listening score of the group is 234.1 (Lowest = 107.5, Highest = 347.5, STDV = 67.5; cf., Department Average = 263.3). The average reading score of the group is 129.0 (Lowest = 77.0, Highest = 192.5, STDV = 37.8; cf., Department Average = 161.7). See Table 1. Graph 1 and Graph 2 summarize the distributions of the TOEIC scores of the students taking this intensive course. Graph 1 shows the total scores, and Graph 2 the reading scores.

Even though the overall level of the students taking the intensive course is low, four out of the 15 stu-

Table 1. Comparison of Average TOEIC Scores (Department vs. Group)

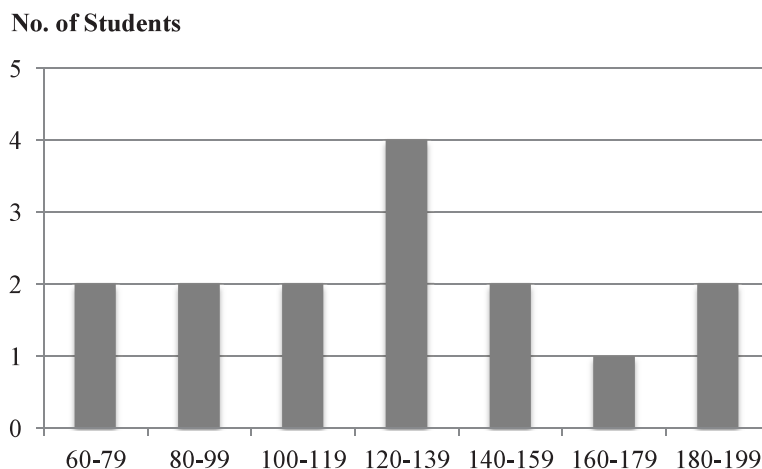
	Department Average	Group Average
Total	425.0	363.1
Listening	263.3	234.1
Reading	161.7	129.0



Graph 1. Distribution of TOEIC Scores

Average = 363.1; Lowest = 185.0; Highest = 540.0; STDV = 102.8 (cf., Department Average = 425.0)

² The majority of the IP TOEIC test takers are English Communication majors, but the scores of the small number of English minors and the students from other faculties are also included in the available data.



Graph 2. Distribution of TOEIC Reading Scores

Average = 129.0; Lowest = 77.0; Highest = 192.5; STDV = 37.8 (cf., Department Average = 161.7)

dents scored above the department average of 425.0 for the total score. For the reading score, three out of the 15 scored above the department average of 161.7. The top three students have both the top three total and reading scores. Individual students' reading scores are used as a reference in the following sections, which examine the students' performances on the timed practice tests, pre-test, and post-test.

4.2. Results of the Two Practice Tests during Review Sessions

After studying the practice test questions (40 Part 5 questions, 12 Part 6 questions, 48 Part 7 questions), the students worked on the same practice test in a timed, test-like fashion. Upon completion of the timed practice test, the students went over the answers, reviewed the questions/answers one more time, and reported their scores to the instructor. They repeated the same procedure for both Practice Test #1 and Practice Test #2. The students' TOEIC reading scores and the Practice Tests scores are shown in Table 2.

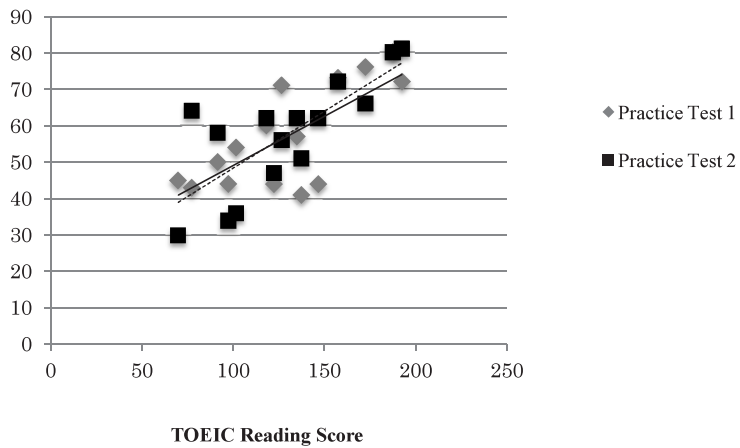
Even though these practice tests were conducted as the fifth step described in the methodology section, the rate of correct answers was still not very high (Practice Test #1 = 56.9%, STDV = 13.98; Practice Test #2 = 57.4%, STDV = 15.51). Because the students only reported the total scores of the practice tests, their scores on each part were not available. However, there seem to be general tendencies that the students with higher TOEIC reading scores have higher accuracy rates when they worked on the practice test questions (Graph 3). The solid line shows the approximation of Practice Test 1 results, and the dotted line the approximation of Practice Test 2.

It is, of course, very possible that the students with higher reading scores did better even before they studied and reviewed the practice test questions. How much better they did on the timed practice tests after the review cannot be determined from these test scores alone; therefore, the following section compares the Part 5 results of the pre-test and the post-test. It investigates the students' performance before and after the grammar review and repetition practices.

Table 2. Individual Students' Timed Practice Test Scores
(TOIEC Reading Score, Practice Test #1 Scores, Practice Test #2 Scores)

ID	Student's TOEIC Reading Scores	Practice Test #1 Scores (100 Questions)	Practice Test #2 Scores (100 Questions)
1	70.00	45	30
2	77.50	43	64
3	91.70	50	58
4	97.50	44	34
5	101.70	54	36
6	118.30	60	62
7	122.50	44	47
8	126.70	71	56
9	135.00	57	62
10	137.50	41	51
11	146.70	44	62
12	157.50	73	72
13	172.50	76	66
14	187.50	80	80
15	192.50	72	81
Average Scores		56.9	57.2
STDV		13.98	15.51

Practice Test Score



Graph 3. Distributions of Practice Test Scores after Repetitive Review

4.3. Part 5 Results of the Pre-Test and the Post-Test

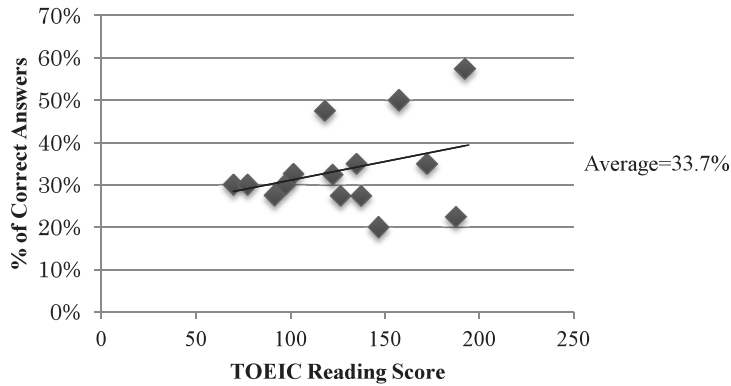
The pre-test included 40 Part 5 grammar questions following the TOEIC format, and the same questions were used in the post-test. As explained earlier, out of the 40 questions, 20 questions are repeated and the other 20 questions are new. Over all, the students' scores increased by 23.5% (= Post-test Average of 57.2% – Pre-test Average of 33.7%) after the review sessions. See Table 3 for individual student' scores of the pre-test and the post-test. The students' TOEIC reading scores are used again as a criterion.

The average rate of the correct answers for the pre-test is 33.7%. Because this pre-test was administered at the very beginning of the intensive course, all 40 questions were new and unfamiliar to the students at that point. The following Graph 4 shows the relation between the students' TOEIC reading scores and the percentages of the Part 5 correct answers in the pre-test. The solid line is an approximation of the results.

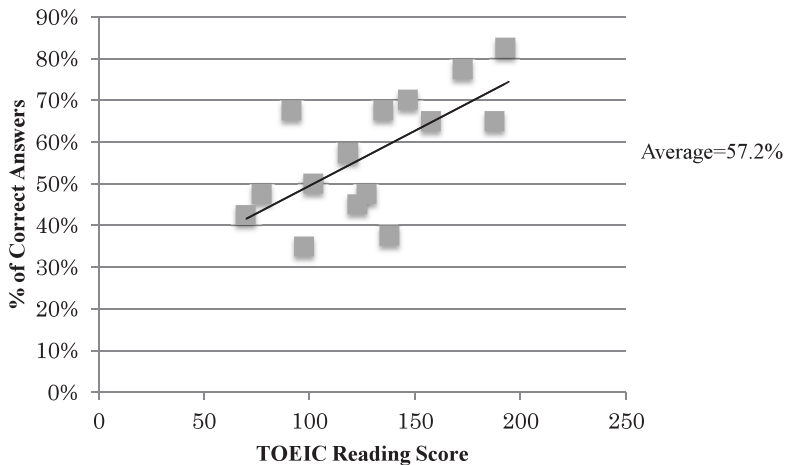
Table 3. Individual Students' Scores (TOEIC Reading, Pre-test, Post-Test)

ID	TOEIC Reading Scores	Pre-Test (40 Questions)		Post-Test (40 Questions)	
		Scores	% of Correct Answers	Scores	% of Correct Answers
1	70.00	12	30.0%	17	42.5%
2	77.50	12	30.0%	19	47.5%
3	91.70	11	27.5%	27	67.5%
4	97.50	12	30.0%	14	35.0%
5	101.70	13	32.5%	20	50.0%
6	118.30	19	47.5%	23	57.5%
7	122.50	13	32.5%	18	45.0%
8	126.70	11	27.5%	19	47.5%
9	135.00	14	35.0%	27	67.5%
10	137.50	11	27.5%	15	37.5%
11	146.70	8	20.0%	28	70.0%
12	157.50	20	50.0%	26	65.0%
13	172.50	14	35.0%	31	77.5%
14	187.50	9	22.5%	26	65.0%
15	192.50	23	57.5%	33	82.5%
Average		13.5	33.7%	22.9	57.2%

The results thus show that, even though there may be a general tendency that the students with higher TOEIC reading scores did slightly better than those with lower scores, over all, students' TOEIC scores seem to have little correlation to how well they did on the pre-test grammar questions. On the other hand, the post-test results indicate a clearer correlation with the students' TOEIC reading scores (Graph 5). The students with higher TOEIC reading scores do much better than those with lower scores.



Graph 4. TOEIC Reading Scores and Pre-test Results

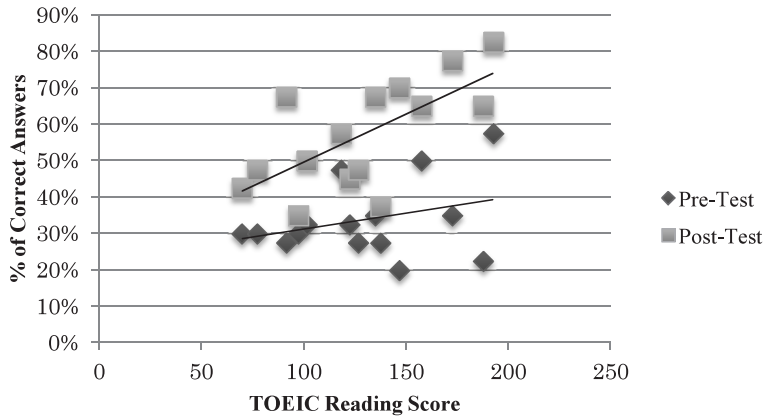


Graph 5. TOEIC Reading Scores and Post-test Results

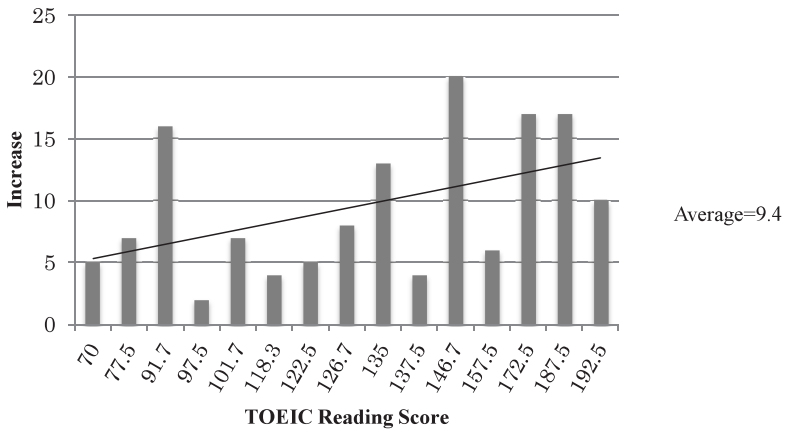
When we compare the results of the two tests, the differences between the pre-test and the post-test as well as the correlation with the students' TOEIC reading scores become clear. The ones with higher TOEIC reading scores clearly demonstrate higher accuracy rates in the post-test, suggesting that they perform better after working on practice tests and reviewing the practice test questions (Graph 6).

Out of the 40 Part 5 questions, the increase in the number of correct answers from the pre-test to the post-test is 9.4 on average. Graphs 7 and 8 show each student's increase in the number of correct answers. The students with higher TOEIC reading scores had a greater increase in the number of correct answers than those with lower scores.

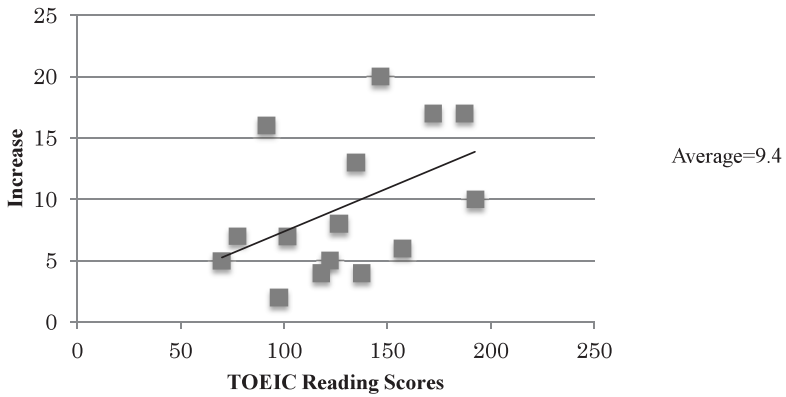
Because the Part 5 questions consist of both the repeated questions and the new questions, this next section looks at the results of the repeated and new questions separately. For the 20 repeated questions, the students increased the number of correct answers on the post-test by 7.3. The analysis of the repeated questions indicates that the students with higher TOEIC reading scores tend to obtain a higher number of correct answers (Graph 9). For the 20 new questions, the students' increase in the number of correct answers is only 1.9. No differences are observable between the students with higher TOEIC reading scores



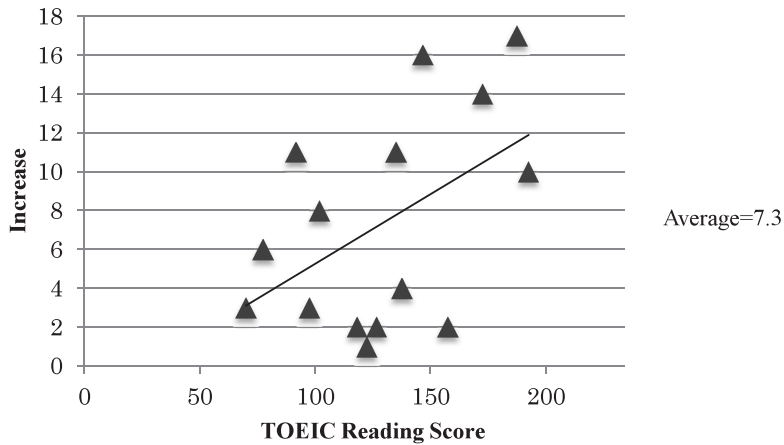
Graph 6. TOEIC Reading Scores and Pre-test vs. Post-test Results



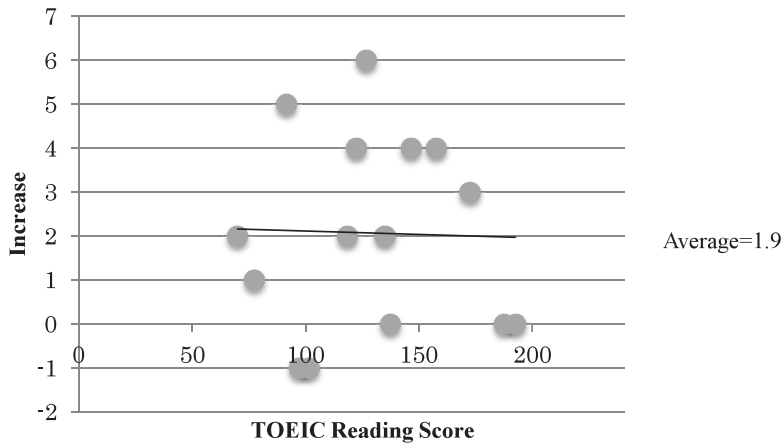
Graph 7. Increase in the Number of Correct Answers (1)



Graph 8. Increase in the Number of Correct Answers (2)



Graph 9. Increase in the Number of Correct Answers (Repeated Questions)

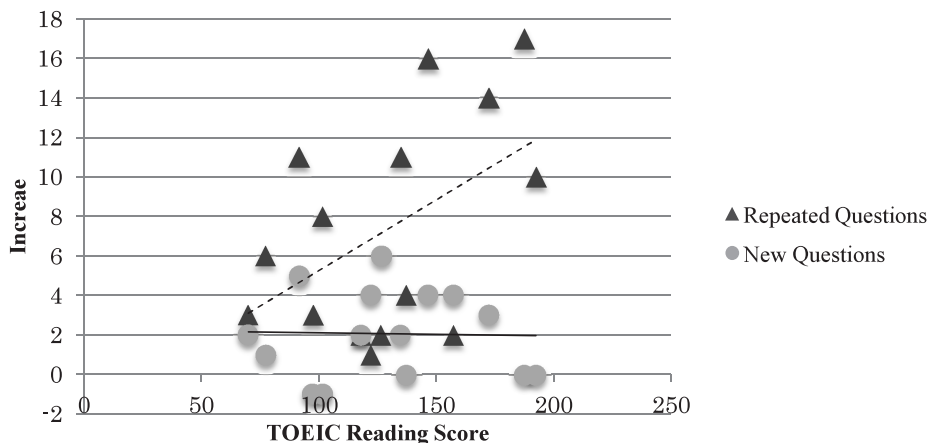


Graph 10. Increase in the Number of Correct Answers (New Questions)

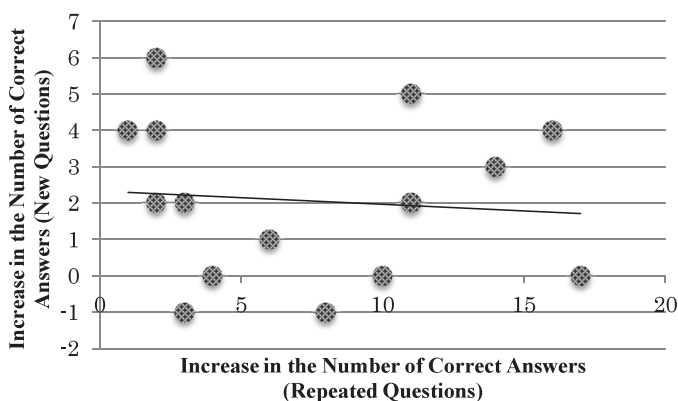
and those with lower scores (Graph 10.) In fact, the two students with the highest TOEIC reading scores in the group (192.5 and 187.5, both of which are higher than the department average) demonstrated zero increase for the new questions. Two students with lower TOEIC reading scores (97.5 and 101.7) showed negative gains on the new questions. No obvious contributing factors, therefore, are identifiable for the increase/decrease in the number of correct answers.

Graph 11 below combines Graph 9 and Graph 10, showing the students' TOEIC reading scores and the differences of the results for the repeated questions and for the new questions.

Additionally, the increases in the number of correct answers for the repeated questions and for the new questions are compared in Graph 12. There seems no correlation between the two, and those who had a greater increase on the repeated questions did not do any better on the new questions. Therefore, for the new questions no apparent differences are identifiable between the students with lower TOEIC reading scores and those with higher scores in spite of the fact that the students with higher TOEIC reading scores



Graph 11. Increase in the Number of Correct Answers (Repeated vs. New)



Graph 12. Correlation of the Increase (Repeated and New)

clearly perform better on the repeated questions.

According to the results shown above, TOEIC grammar review using practice test questions does not look to be very effective or helpful for low-level learners even with the implementation of repetitive reviews of the questions and answers. The students with higher TOEIC reading scores may do better in understanding and retaining the information presented in the practice test questions; however, this does not necessarily mean they learn grammar better because in the post-test they were not able to apply grammar rules to the new questions. Reviewing mixed grammar points in practice tests is difficult for these learners even with repetitive review and practice. The use of practice tests should be reevaluated when it comes to teaching low-level TOEIC preparatory classes.

5. Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

The results of this study should be interpreted carefully because the number of the students participat-

ing in the study is very small due to the constraints of the intensive course. It is obvious that larger samples are necessary to verify the results. However, even with its limitations, this study still brings some important issues to our attention.

As Redfield & Kotori (2002) explain, TOEIC preparation courses using practice test questions are not a very effective approach for low-level learners. Regardless of the implementation of repetitive review of the practice test questions, working on practice tests containing mixed grammar points does not reinforce their learning of grammar points. The students are still unable to apply grammar rules to other questions, and working on practice tests and learning many different grammar points simultaneously is difficult for these students even after their exposure to a few years of English-only instruction at the university. It is probably because such an approach is cognitively demanding for low-level learners, and they feel there are too many unrelated grammar points to learn all at once. The presentation of target grammar points in a sequential and organized fashion seems to be an important factor for teaching TOEIC grammar to low-level learners. In this sense, the topic-oriented approach may be better for low-level TOEIC preparation courses because such textbooks usually review one or two grammar points in each unit. This can scaffold low-level students' grammar learning more appropriately.

I must reiterate, however, that the results of this study do not suggest that repetition practice in grammar review itself is not helpful to low-level learners. This study simply indicates that the use of practice test questions accompanied by repetition practice is not effective for low-level learners: repetition practice itself may still be very useful if it is implemented differently and properly. When it comes to imitation and repetition practices, what Yamaoka (2006) suggests as "cognitive pattern practice" (p. 8) seems to be an important concept. According to Yamaoka (2006), traditional pattern practice should be "reconceptualized" (p. 1, p. 8), and exemplar learning through imitation, repetition, and generalization, should be fostered because it leads to establishment of form-meaning connections of the target language and eventually to acquisition of procedural (subconscious/implicit) language knowledge. Yamaoka (2006, p. 8) suggests cognitive-pattern practice should include characteristics such as:

1. Cognitive rather than mechanical methods
2. Learners' attention to both to form and meaning rather than cues alone
3. Learners imitation and repetition of examples at their own pace
4. Imitation and repetition as receptive and productive methodologies

The students practiced sentence-level repetition reviews in the intensive course, but grammar review and repetition practice at the phrase-structure level was not implemented. The students were not exposed to other examples. Therefore, more explicit instruction and application of phrase-structure to more examples seem to be necessary in order for grammar review to be really effective (e. g., Uchibori, et al., 2006).

Another concern for further research regards the effectiveness of grammar instruction in the target language for low-level TOEIC grammar review. Because our curriculum policy demands the instructor use the target language as the medium of instruction, all grammar explanation was given in English in the intensive course. This could be a very important contributing factor. The textbook selected for the intensive course provided answer explanations in Japanese; therefore, grammar explanation in Japanese was available to the students in a written form, and the students were encouraged to utilize this in the process of review. However, had they been given grammar explanation in Japanese in class, would they have learned better? This is a question I am personally interested in yet was not allowed to pursue in this particular course due to the curriculum guidelines. It certainly remains a pedagogical concern as well as a further research area.

Additionally, a longer-term study is necessary because the effectiveness of semester-long practice is

not the same as that of the short-term intensive course used in this study. If students use practice tests and apply the repetition practice for one or more semesters, they might be able to sort out different grammar points and learn basic grammar better. A longer-term study is necessary to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the use of practice tests accompanied by repetition practice.

In conclusion, this study raises a concern for the use of practice-tests for low-level learners whose English grammar knowledge is limited. TOEIC preparation is still useful and could be an effective way of improving learners' listening/reading skills and their grammar knowledge, but the materials and approach used for grammar instruction definitely make a difference. Reviewing the same grammar questions using practice tests is not very effective for low-level learners even when they review the questions and answers multiple times accompanied by sentence-level repetition exercises. It is something teachers and curriculum coordinators should reconsider when they choose textbooks and design TOEIC preparation courses. Separate grammar review should be incorporated if practice-tests are used. Or, maybe using topic-based textbooks is a better choice for low-level TOEIC preparation courses. More explicitly, sequential grammar review and phrase-level practice through ample examples may also be vital for those learners. Curriculum coordinators and course instructors should take these factors into consideration and look at the possibility of using different types of textbooks and implementing different ways of grammar instruction and activities for different levels of TOEIC preparation courses within a curriculum.

References

- Essence English School. (2007). *新TOEIC TEST特訓リーディング; Reading Practice for the TOEIC TEST*. Tokyo: Goken.
- Nishitani, A. (2007). Is test preparation instruction effective in improving scores of the grammar section of the TOEIC? *Kyoto Sangyo University Essays, Humanities Series*, 36(3), 93-104.
- Ota, E. (2009). The process of sentence repetition by Japanese EFL learners. *学校教育学教育研究論集*, 20, 55-71.
- Redfield, M. & Kotori, C. (2002). Are our students ready for the TOEIC: Using a practice TOEIC to measure Japanese university student levels. *Osaka Keidai Ronshu*, 52(6), 137-146.
- Robb, N. T. & Ercanbrack J. (1999). A study of the effect of direct test preparation on the TOEIC scores of Japanese university students. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, 3(4).
- Schmidt, K. (2003). Preparing for the TOEIC: Research and implications. *Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University, Policy Management Studies*, 3, 73-95.
- Takahahi, H., Suzuki H., & Takefuta, Y. (2003). CALL kyouzai ni yoru jikogakushuu to jyugyuookatadoo o yuugosasete daigakusei eigo chookairyoku no yusei [An integration of CALL self-study and classroom activities for improving Japanese college learners' English listening skills]. *Nihon Kyouiku Kou Gakkai Ronbunsi*, 27(3), 305-314.
- Uchibori, A., Chujo, K., & Hasegawa, S. (2006). Toward better grammar instruction: Bridging the gap between high school textbooks and TOEIC. *The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly*, 8(2), 228-253.
- Wood J. D. (2010). TOEIC materials and preparation questions: Interview with an ETS representative. *The Language Teacher*, 34(6), 41-45.
- Yamaoka, T. (2006). On the importance of imitation and repetition in foreign language learning. *Annual Review of English Language Education in Japan (ARELE)*, 17, 1-10.