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| Title | Integration of the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing Tests into English Language Courses for Liberal Arts Education |
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| Citation | Hiroshima Studies in Language and Language Education , 24 : 1 - 14 |
| Issue Date | 2021-03-01 |
| DOI | |
| Self DOI | 10.15027/50443 |
| URL | https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00050443 |
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| Relation | |



Integration of the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing Tests into English Language Courses for Liberal Arts Education

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In 2014, Hiroshima University was accredited by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology as one of 13 universities in Japan with the potential to become a world-class university under the “Top Global University Project¹⁾.” Accordingly, the university has decided to focus on improving the English language skills of its students to prepare them for international activities. In April 2016, in response to the project, the Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education (FLaRE) at Hiroshima University established a special English language teaching program titled the Hiroshima Special Program for English Communication (HiSPEC). The TOEIC® Speaking and Writing Institutional Program (IP) tests²⁾ reported in this paper were initially used by our institute to assess the outcomes of the program. Until 2019, even after the HiSPEC program had been cancelled, the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests were still administered annually. This paper looks back at the 2016 to 2018 administration and offers a detailed description of the shifts in 2019.

BACKGROUND

The TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests in this paper are the speaking and writing versions of the internationally standardized TOEIC tests that measure the productive language skills of non-native English speakers for use in everyday life and the workplace. Test takers can take the two tests at the same time and receive two scores, or they can take them separately. The test does not require business English or specific knowledge of a particular industry. Instead, it covers common daily vocabulary, phrases, and key expressions used in the workplace. The formats and structures of the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests are described below, based on the websites of the Educational Testing Service (ETS – the official provider of the TOEIC tests) and the Institute for International Business Communication (IIBC – the administrative organization of the TOEIC Program in Japan).

Figure 1 shows the content and format of the TOEIC® Speaking test. The test consists of 11 questions with six different tasks to measure the speaking proficiency of the test takers. Each type of question is given preparation time, answer time, and clear instructions. The test takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and has a score scale ranging from zero to 200. Figure 2 shows the content and format of the TOEIC® Writing test. It involves eight questions consisting of three different tasks that measure various aspects of writing proficiency. Each type of question is allocated answer time and given clear instructions. The test takes approximately 60 minutes to complete and has a score scale ranging from zero to 200.

| Questions | Task | Answer time | Evaluation criteria |
|-----------|--|--|--|
| 1–2 | Read a text aloud | 45 seconds each (and 45 seconds to prepare) | pronunciation intonation and stress |
| 3 | Describe a picture | 45 seconds (and 45 seconds to prepare) | all of the above, plus grammar vocabulary cohesion |
| 4–6 | Respond to questions | 15 or 30 seconds | all of the above, plus relevance of content completeness of content |
| 7–9 | Respond to questions using information provided | 15 or 30 seconds | all of the above |
| 10 | Propose a solution | 60 seconds (and 45 seconds to prepare) | all of the above |
| 11 | Express an opinion | 60 seconds (and 30 seconds to prepare) | all of the above |

FIGURE 1. Content and Format of the TOEIC® Speaking Test³⁾

| Questions | Task | Answer time | Evaluation criteria |
|-----------|--|---------------------------|---|
| 1–5 | Write a sentence based on a picture | 8 minutes for 5 questions | grammar relevance of the sentences to the picture |
| 6–7 | Respond to a written request | 10 minutes each | quality and variety of your sentences vocabulary organization |
| 8 | Write an opinion essay | 30 minutes | whether your opinion is supported with reasons and/or examples grammar vocabulary organization |

FIGURE 2. Content and Format of the TOEIC® Writing Test⁴⁾

ADMINISTRATION OF THE TESTS IN PREVIOUS YEARS

In 2016, the HiSPEC program was established within the English division of liberal arts education. It was a special program to assist students in developing advanced English language speaking and writing

skills from the beginning of their undergraduate careers. One of the rationales for the program was that smaller classes would allow teachers to better respond to the diverse needs of students. At the time, the English language courses in liberal arts education at Hiroshima University were offered as compulsory courses for first- and second-year students. In 2016, first-year students were required to enroll in Communication IA (speaking), Communication IB (reading), Communication IIA (writing), and Communication IIB (listening) in the first and second semester (see Figure 3, taken from Morita, 2020, p. 124). The HiSPEC program covered a portion of the IA and IIA classes.

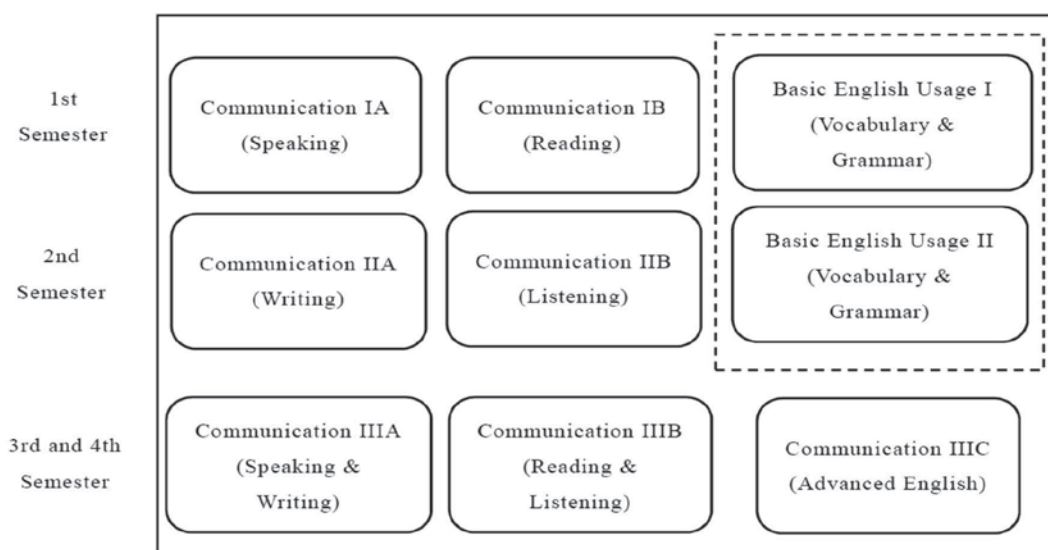


FIGURE 3. English Language Courses for Semester-based Liberal Arts Education⁵⁾

Liberal arts English courses were on a semester system, with 15 90-minute sessions (conducted weekly). All the classes in the HiSPEC program were small and taught by FLaRE teachers who were fluent English speakers and who understood the program aims and requirements. All schools joined the HiSPEC program from the first year.⁶⁾ Small classes for the program were arranged according to the following procedure. Due to scheduling limitations, first-year English courses were grouped into four categories (on the basis of school affiliation): Education, Arts and Social Sciences (a combination of the Schools of Economics, Law, Letters, and Integrated Arts & Sciences), Engineering, and Science and Applied Biological Science. The top two classes in each category were eligible for the HiSPEC program. Based on their English language scores in the entrance examination, HiSPEC students were screened to admit 10 to 15 new students from each school. The teachers agreed to marginally incorporate the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing test results into the grading process, but the details of the instructional activities were not standardized and practices were left to teacher discretion (Uenishi, Sakaue, Lauer, Davies, Fraser, Howell, Selwood, Song, Morita, & Kida, 2017; Uenishi, Sakaue, Fraser, Davies, Lauer, Selwood, Song, Morita, & Kida, 2018).

The 2016 HiSPEC students took both TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests in April 2016 (as a pre-test), the TOEIC® Speaking test in July 2016, and the TOEIC® Writing test in January 2017 (as a post-test).⁷⁾

Unfortunately, due to test scheduling, the teachers were not able to take advantage of the entire semester’s lesson period; there were only nine or ten lessons between the pre- and post-tests. Table 1 summarizes the results based on Uenishi et al. (2017) and Uenishi et al. (2018). Out of 112 HiSPEC students, 99 took the TOEIC® Speaking test in April and July and responded to the related questionnaires. The difference in the mean scores was 3.1. Seventy-eight students took the TOEIC® Writing tests in April and January; all 78 responded to related questionnaires. The difference in the mean score was 10.9, which was a relatively large increase compared to the speaking test. The combined increase in speaking and writing scores was 14 on average.

TABLE 1. Scores of 2016 HiSPEC Students in the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing Tests

| TOEIC® Speaking | April | July | TOEIC® Writing | April | January |
|--------------------|-------|-------|--------------------|-------|---------|
| Mean | 107.2 | 110.3 | Mean | 134.5 | 145.4 |
| Standard deviation | 21.1 | 19.5 | Standard deviation | 19.0 | 15.1 |
| Maximum | 180.0 | 180.0 | Maximum | 180.0 | 190.0 |
| Minimum | 40.0 | 30.0 | Minimum | 80.0 | 100.0 |

Uenishi et al. (2017) and Uenishi et al. (2018) noted that both students and teachers appreciated small classes, and they enjoyed teaching students with above average proficiency levels. However, the teachers, who were very experienced, found that the content and format of the TOEIC® Speaking test did not fit their view of teaching. This made it difficult to integrate their plans with test preparation activities. In contrast, the TOEIC® Writing test, with its emphasis on email and essay writing, easily aligned with the teaching philosophy of several teachers, who developed and circulated original materials to others involved in HiSPEC classes.

The HiSPEC program continued in 2017. The TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests were administered twice, in October and January of the second semester. Because the second semester Communication IIA was a writing-focused course, students were only prepared for the TOEIC® Writing test. Fifty-seven HiSPEC students took the TOEIC® Writing test and responded to the related questionnaires. The results are presented in Table 2 (Uenishi, Sakaue, Fraser, Davies, Lauer, Selwood, Song, Morita, & Kida, 2019). The mean score differences were –6.5 for speaking and 11.9 for writing. The score-growth for writing was comparable to that in 2016. The combined increase in speaking and writing scores was 5.4 on average.

TABLE 2. Scores of 2017 HiSPEC Students in the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing Tests

| TOEIC® Speaking | October | January | TOEIC® Writing | October | January |
|--------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| Mean | 102.5 | 96.0 | Mean | 132.3 | 144.2 |
| Standard deviation | 20.0 | 17.7 | Standard deviation | 21.1 | 19.5 |
| Maximum | 160.0 | 140.0 | Maximum | 160.0 | 170.0 |
| Minimum | 50.0 | 50.0 | Minimum | 70.0 | 110.0 |

In 2018, there were major institutional changes as part of the university-wide initiative for the Top Global University Project, including the transition of liberal arts English courses from a semester system to a term system (see Figure 4, taken from Morita, 2020, p. 126). Due to an increase in the number of required English credits from six to eight in several schools and departments, the HiSPEC program was discontinued because there were no longer enough teachers to provide small classes. Thereafter, the TOEIC® Speaking and

Writing tests were to be included in the regular classes, with a limited number of targeted schools each year.

| Semester | Term | Course | | |
|---|------|--|--|--|
| 1 | 1 | Communication IA (Speaking & Reading) | Basic English Usage I (Vocabulary & Grammar) | |
| | 2 | Communication IB (Speaking & Reading) | | |
| 2 | 3 | Communication IIA (Writing & Listening) | Basic English Usage II (Vocabulary & Grammar) | |
| | 4 | Communication IIB (Writing & Listening) | | |
| Odd terms or Even terms in the 2nd year | | Communication IIIA (Speaking & Writing) | Communication IIIB (Reading & Listening) | Communication IIIC (Advanced English) |

FIGURE 4. English Language Courses for Quarter-based Liberal Arts Education for Eight-credit Students[®]

Although the HiSPEC program was well received by both teachers and students (Uenishi et al., 2017; Uenishi et al., 2018; Uenishi et al., 2019), it was discontinued because of university-wide reform. Therefore, in contrast to the previous two years, eight-credit students in regular classes (with a class size of about 30 students) took the TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing tests. Eight classes from the schools of Science, Applied Biological Science, and Informatics and Data Science were eligible for the 2018 TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing tests. The class sizes ranged from 26 to 28 students. Mainly due to the timing of budget allocation decisions, as was the case in 2017, the tests were not administered in the first semester. Therefore, the TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing tests were administered twice in the second semester, in October and January. Communication IIA and IIB, which are offered in Terms 3 and 4, are writing-focused courses, so students were only able to prepare effectively for the TOEIC[®] Writing test. They received 11 lessons between the two tests. Out of the 191 students enrolled on the course, 128 students took both the October and January tests and responded to relevant questionnaires. The results are summarized in Table 3, based on Uenishi, Fraser, Takita, Sakaue, Selwood, and Kida (2020). Similar to the results of the HiSPEC students, the mean score differences were -0.3 points for speaking and 15.4 points for writing. The combined increase in speaking and writing was 15.1 on average.

TABLE 3. Scores of 2018 Students in the TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing Tests

| TOEIC [®] Speaking | October | January | TOEIC [®] Writing | October | January |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|----------------------------|---------|---------|
| Mean | 94.8 | 94.5 | Mean | 118 | 133.4 |
| Standard deviation | 16.6 | 16.4 | Standard deviation | 20.4 | 18.4 |
| Maximum | 130.0 | 130.0 | Maximum | 160.0 | 160.0 |
| Minimum | 50.0 | 50.0 | Minimum | 60.0 | 70.0 |

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS FOR 2019

In 2019, the second-year (Communication III) courses, worth two credits, were eliminated, and students are now required to complete their English language courses for either four or six credits, depending on their school or department. The students in the new six-credit regular-sized classes are eligible to take the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests. In 2019, students from the School of Engineering were selected. Seven teachers taught 10 classes for first-year students. Class sizes ranged from 23 to 30 students. The Speaking course was offered over two terms (April–August 2019) and the Writing course was offered over two terms (October 2019–February 2020); each teacher provided a 90-minute lesson once a week. The tests were administered three times: the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests in late April 2019, the TOEIC® Speaking test in mid-July 2019, and the TOEIC® Writing test in mid-January 2020. After taking the test in April, the students took about 10 speaking lessons before the July test and 12 writing lessons before the January test. As in past years, teachers were aware of the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests, but had the discretion to determine the content and materials of their lessons. They also agreed to include the test results as part of their assessments.

Student Participation for Speaking

There were 275 engineering students enrolled in the seven target classes, but 37 students were unable to take either the April or July TOEIC® Speaking tests; 238 students took both tests. Among them, 21 did not cooperate with the preparation of this report. Therefore, a total of 217 students form the sample of data analysis.

Test Results for Speaking

Table 4 shows the speaking scores of students in the 2019 regular course. In the April test immediately after starting university, they scored an average of 89.86. This represented the lowest average score since the test was implemented, and it was the first time in four years that the scores were in the 80s. After approximately 10 speaking lessons, they scored 101.66 on the July test. This 11.80 score improvement from the April and July tests was the highest speaking score increase in four years. Considering that the 2016 speaking scores declined or stayed about the same (when the average score as of April was about 18 points higher than in 2019) and the 2017 and 2018 students did not have speaking lessons immediately before taking the TOEIC® Speaking test, the 2019 results suggest that 12 speaking lessons had a clear impact on test score improvement for students, with an average score of approximately 90 on the April Test.

TABLE 4. Scores of 2019 Students in the TOEIC® Speaking Test

| Time | April | July | Difference |
|------------------------|-------|--------|------------|
| Number of participants | 217 | 217 | 217 |
| Mean | 89.86 | 101.66 | 11.80 |
| Standard deviation | 20.67 | 15.93 | 19.24 |
| Maximum | 180 | 150 | 100 |
| Median | 90 | 100 | 10 |
| Minimum | 0 | 50 | -90 |

Figure 5 is a histogram showing the distribution of the April speaking test scores for students in the regular 2019 classes. The mode was 90 points, achieved by 52 students (23.04%); 33 students (15.21%) performed poorly, with scores below 60 points. Only 17 students (7.83%) scored over 120 points. Figure 6 is a histogram showing the distribution of the speaking test scores in July 2019. The mode is 100 points, achieved by 57 students (26.27%). The number of students who scored 60 points or lower decreased to just three students (1.38%). The number of students who scored between 70 and 110 points remained almost equal, at 172 students (79.26%). Four students scored 70 points (1.84%), 20 students scored 80 points (9.22%), 48 students scored 90 points (22.12%), and 43 students scored 110 points (19.82%). Notably, the number of students who scored 120 points or higher increased to 42 students (19.35%).

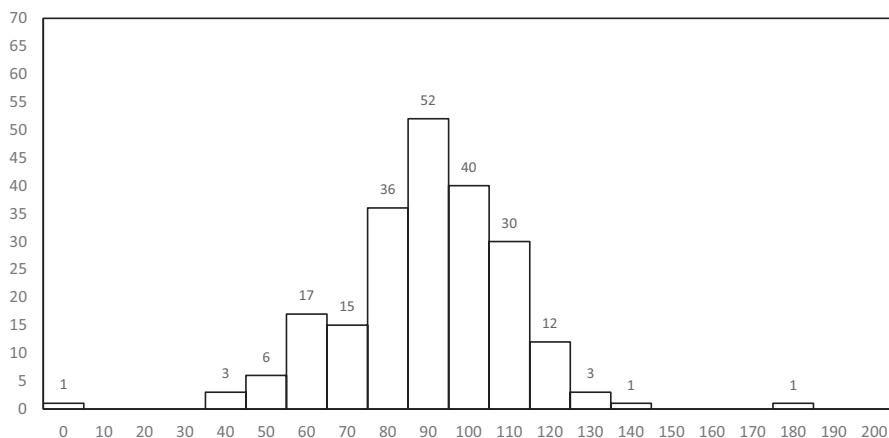


FIGURE 5. Score Distribution for the 2019 Speaking Test in April

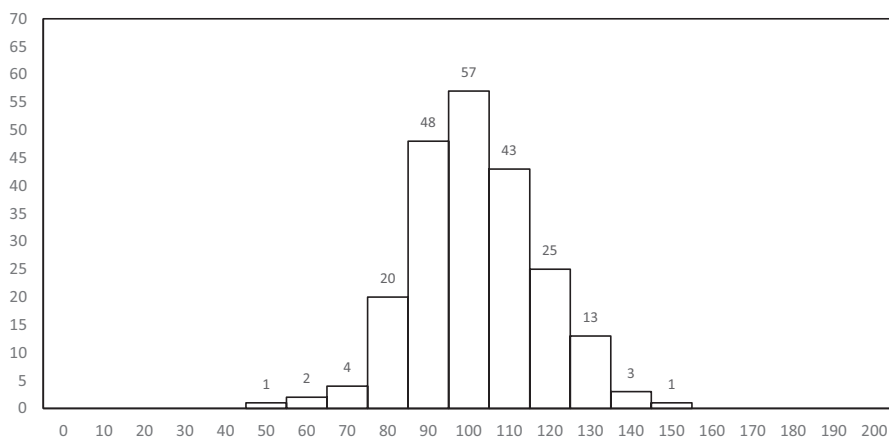


FIGURE 6. Score Distribution for the 2019 Speaking Test in July

Figure 7 is a histogram showing the distribution of score differences in the speaking test between April and July 2019. White bars represent students who had a positive score difference, gray bars represent students who had no score difference, and black bars represent students who had a negative score difference. Forty-

two students, or 19.35% of the total, had no change in their scores. Thirty-four students (15.67%) had a decrease in their scores. However, 141 students (64.98%) improved their scores.

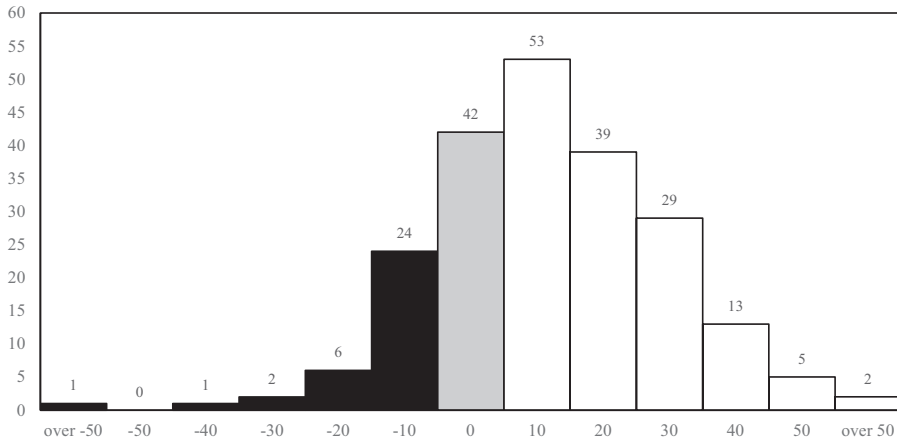


FIGURE 7. Distribution of the Difference in Speaking Test Scores between April and July in 2019

Student Participation for Writing

Although the total number of students enrolled in the target classes was 275, 87 students were unable to take either the April or January test; 188 students took both tests. Many students missed the January test because it coincided with the Coming-of-Age Day ceremony, and they were permitted to attend the ceremony instead. Twenty-two students did not give their consent to cooperate in the preparation of the report. Thus, the total number of participating students eligible for data analysis was 166.

Test Results for Writing

Table 5 shows the writing test scores of the 2019 engineering students. In the April test, immediately after enrollment, they scored 117.41. This average score was not very different from 2018. After taking approximately 12 writing lessons since October, they improved their score to 122.71 in the January test. This 5.30 increase is disappointing in comparison to the prior three years, when scores had increased by more than 10 points: 10.9 in 2016, 11.9 in 2017, and 15.4 in 2018.

TABLE 5. Scores of 2019 Students in the TOEIC® Writing Test

| Time | April | January | Difference |
|------------------------|--------|---------|------------|
| Number of participants | 166 | 166 | 166 |
| Mean | 117.41 | 122.71 | 5.30 |
| Standard deviation | 19.57 | 20.67 | 22.45 |
| Maximum | 160 | 160 | 60 |
| Median | 110 | 120 | 10 |
| Minimum | 70 | 20 | -80 |

Figure 8 is a histogram showing the distribution of the writing test scores in April. The mode was 110 points for 41 students (24.70%). Eleven students (6.63%) scored below 80 points. Nine students scored 90 points (5.42%), 23 students scored 100 points (13.86%), 16 students scored 120 points (9.64%), and 29 students scored 130 points (17.47%). One hundred and eighteen students (71.08%), scored between 90 and 130 points. Thirty-seven students (22.29%) scored higher than 140 points. Figure 9 is a histogram showing the distribution of scores on the writing test in January 2020. The number of students who scored below 80 points decreased to four students (2.41%). Eight students scored 90 points (4.82%), 21 students scored 100 points (12.65%), 26 students scored 110 points (15.66%), and 27 students scored 120 points (16.27%). Therefore, a total of 113 students (68.07%) scored between 90 and 130 points, which was the same as the April test. The number of students who scored 140 points or higher was 49 or 29.52% of the total.

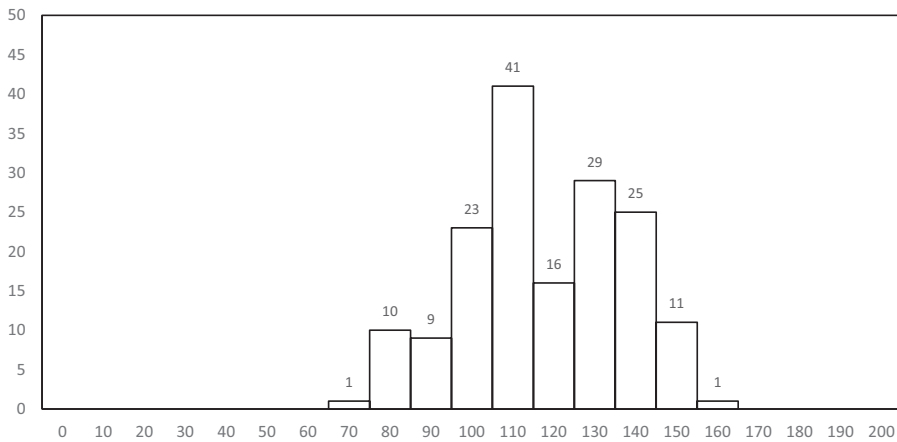


FIGURE 8. Score Distribution for the 2019 Writing Test in October

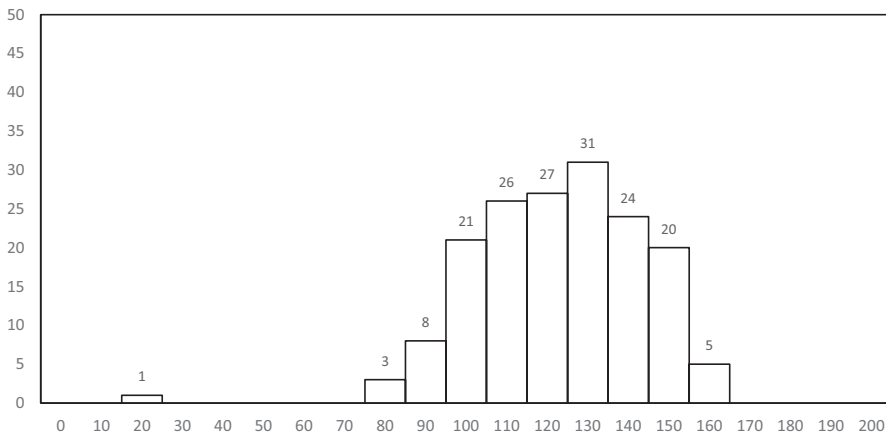


FIGURE 9. Score Distribution for the 2019 Writing Test in January

Figure 10 is a histogram showing the distribution of the writing test score difference between April 2019 and January 2020. White bars represent students who had a positive score difference, gray bars represent

students who had no score difference, and black bars represent students who had a negative score difference. About 25 students (15.06%) did not change their scores, and 54 students (32.53%) decreased their scores. A slim majority, 87 students (52.41%), improved their scores.

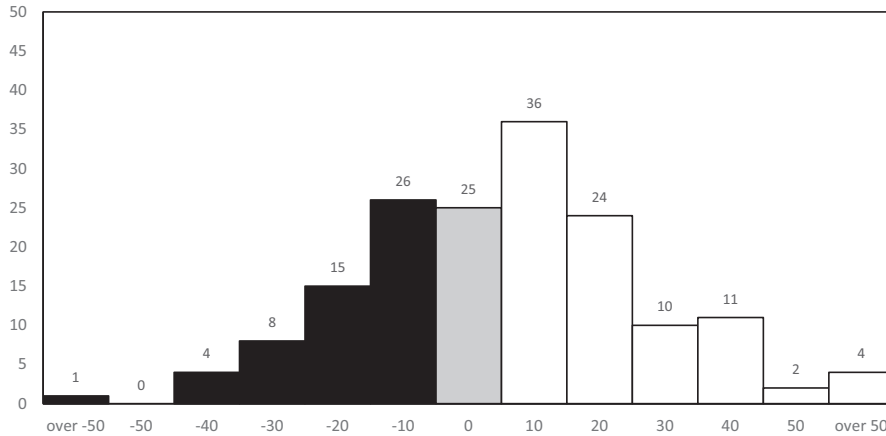


FIGURE 10. Distribution of the Difference in the Writing Test Scores between October in 2019 and January in 2020

Scores increased, as the mode moved from 110 to 130 points. However, in comparison with Figure 7 for speaking, Figure 10 for writing has more black bars; while many students increased their writing scores, some scores decreased. In percentage terms, students who improved their writing scores were about 10 percentage points less than those who improved their speaking scores, and students who lowered their writing scores were about 10 percentage points more than those who lowered their speaking scores.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has reflected on the administration of the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests at our institute over the three-year period from 2016 to 2018, as well as reporting on the 2019 changes in administration and the resulting distribution of test scores. For the 2019 speaking tests, the results show that students improved their scores in a relatively short period of time. The average score increase was 11.80. Approximately 65% of the 2019 students improved their speaking scores overall, and the difference between the pre- and post-test scores was the largest in the four years. For the 2019 writing tests, the difference between the two sets of test scores was positive, but with a smaller increase compared to the prior three years. Approximately 52% of the students improved their scores, and about 30% of the students scored higher than 140 on the second test.

In contrast to the trends in the prior three years, the 2019 speaking scores improved considerably more than writing. This was the first time that the average increase in writing scores was less than 10 points. This result was surprising because both teachers and students were more positive towards the content and format of the TOEIC® Writing test than the TOEIC® Speaking test (Uenishi et al., 2018). However, it was the first time in four years that the average speaking score increased by more than 10 points; it was also the first time

in four years that the average score of both speaking and writing improved by more than five points. The combined increase in 2019 speaking and writing scores was 17.1, the best in four years.

Because of the high cost and demanding work required to establish a testing system, it is difficult to administer university-wide TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests. Thus, it is necessary to administer the tests to a limited number of schools each year. Currently, the timing of the next testing at our institute is unclear due to the coronavirus pandemic, but we would like to offer the test-taking opportunity to students in the other schools and departments in the future.

NOTES

- 1) The “Top Global University Project” by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is a 2014–2023 initiative that aims to improve the international competitiveness of Japanese higher education by reforming the university system and proactively collaborating with universities abroad.
- 2) All the results reported in this paper are from the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing IP tests, herein shortened to the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing tests.
- 3) Based on the information on the ETS (n.d.) and IIBC (n.d.) websites, this figure was prepared by the first author.
- 4) Based on the information on the ETS (n.d.) and IIBC (n.d.) websites, this figure was prepared by the first author.
- 5) Each course corresponds to one credit. Basic English Usages I and II, shown in the dotted line, are required in several schools and faculties. With Communication III, students were required to take two courses out of A, B, and C.
- 6) Uenishi et al. (2019) reported that Education, Engineering, Integrated Arts and Sciences, and Applied Biological Science schools were targeted in the first year. Uenishi et al. (2020) reported that Letters, Science, Law, and Economics were added the following year. This information has been found to be erroneous and is hereby corrected.
- 7) Students in the liberal arts English courses follow an academic year that begins in April and ends in March of the following year.
- 8) Each course corresponds to one credit. Basic English Usages I and II, shown in the dotted line, are required in several schools and faculties. Communication III was discontinued in 2019.

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ABSTRACT

Integration of the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing Tests into English Language Courses for Liberal Arts Education

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This paper reports the results of the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing IP test administered by the Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education at Hiroshima University. In response to Hiroshima University's accreditation by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology as one of the 13 universities involved in the "Top Global University Project" in 2014, the administration of the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing IP test was initiated at our institute to evaluate the outcomes of a small-scale English language accelerator program launched in 2016. The program was discontinued after two years, but the TOEIC® Speaking and Writing IP test continued to be administered for four consecutive years, until 2019. This paper reviews the program from 2016 to 2017 and describes its integration into the mainstream curriculum in 2018 and 2019. When looking at the overall results for speaking and writing, 2019 was the most accomplished year. The results showed that students were able to improve their scores in a relatively short period of time. However, the improvement in writing scores was smaller than those in the previous three years.

要 約

教養教育英語科目における TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing の導入

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本論文では、広島大学外国語教育研究センターで実施した TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing IP テストの結果を報告する。広島大学が2014年に文部科学省の「スーパーグローバル大学創成支援タイプ A：トップ型」を受ける13大学の一つとして認定されたことを受け、本センターでは2016年に小規模編成型英語授業プログラム、HiSPEC プログラムを開始した。本論文で実施報告をする TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing IP テストは、このプログラムの成果を評価するために導入されることとなったものである。HiSPEC プログラムは2年後に中止となったが、TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing IP テストはその後通常カリキュラムの下で2019年まで4年連続で実施された。本論文では、2016年から2017年までの HiSPEC プログラムの下での TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing IP テスト実施を振り返り、2018年と2019年の通常カリキュラムの下での実施への移行について、2019年のスコア報告を中心として述べる。スピーキングとライティングの総合的なスコアを見ると、2019年が四年間で最も成果をあげた年であり、比較的短期間で学生のスコアを向上させることができた。しかし、ライティングのみのスコアの向上は、過去3年間の成績に比べて小さいものであった。