AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TOEFL STUDENTS AS EVALUATORS OF ‘WASHBACK TO THE LEARNERS’

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Statement of Authorship

I declare that the materials in this thesis have not been submitted either previously or concurrently in the whole or as part of requirements for a degree to the University of Queensland or any other educational institution.

I also certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original to me, Jessica Reynolds, except as acknowledged in the text. Any aid that I have received during the preparation and completion of this thesis has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all the information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Jessica Reynolds

Date: ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________
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Abstract

While much language testing research has elucidated washback’s meanings for test developers and teachers, no demonstrated method exists for integrating washback’s meanings for high-stakes tests’ seminal stakeholders – the students – into the ongoing examination of the washback phenomenon. Consequently, this study analysed a local instance of ‘washback to the learners’ (Bailey, 1996) from the TOEFL® in three TOEFL preparation classrooms in the U.S.A. from the student perspectives. Through its triangulated description of washback according to the twenty-three participating students, this study can “increase the specification” (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 127) of what constitutes both positive and negative washback for participating students and teachers while providing an initial, mixed-methods format for TOEFL teachers and researchers to investigate washback’s effects from a student standpoint.

The primary data collection instruments were three semi-structured, open-ended group interviews, recorded in each of the three participating classes. A focus-group interview with the three teachers of the TOEFL preparation courses, student surveys and informal observations of the three courses rounded out the data corpus to both directly and contextually interpret students’ responses. The interview responses were transcribed, coded and categorized to provide a detailed but summarized picture of student perspectives on TOEFL’s ‘washback to the learners.’ Interview categories were further interpreted through triangulation with the corresponding student survey, teacher interview and classroom observation data.

The interpretive findings revealed a trajectory in students’ experiences and evaluations of TOEFL’s washback as they became more familiar with the TOEFL preparation process – that is, the more competent students were with English and the TOEFL, the more negative washback they perceived on their learning. The findings also indicated that TOEFL students
were unsure what activities best prepared them for TOEFL and were unclear if preparing for TOEFL and improving English proficiency were competing or complementary. Implications regarding students’ individual investment in learning, the integration of authentic language practice into TOEFL preparation materials and TOEFL teachers’ pedagogy emerged as formative for positive ‘washback to the learners’ from student perspectives.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This introductory chapter describes washback – what it is and where it appears – and discusses washback from high-stakes tests, specifically the high-stakes test which the present research investigated. Next, this study’s motivations, based on a gap in washback research, are outlined. Finally, the research questions, research methods and significance of this project are delineated, providing a précis of the chapters to come.

1.1 Washback background

Examining washback entails studying a metamorphosis, as research continually uncovers the phenomenon’s multifarious effects on individual students and whole countries’ educational systems (e.g. Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis, 2004). Grounded in notions of test accountability and systematic validity (Frederiksen & Collins, 1989), washback has been defined for the field of language testing as

...a concept...[referring] to the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning (Messick, 1996, p. 241).

Similar to the concept of ‘washback’ – the effects of tests on teaching and learning – is the term ‘impact’ – tests’ effects on whole educational systems (McNamara, 2000). While these forces are obviously related, this study’s focus on tests’ effects in test-preparation classrooms for a specific context associates it more closely with washback research (Qi, 2005; Wall, 2000). Specifically, the present study examines a local instance of “washback to the learners” from the Test of English as a Foreign Language™ (TOEFL®) as experienced and evaluated by students (Bailey, 1996, pp. 263-264).
1.2 Washback location and types

Washback appears most clearly in test-preparation classrooms, making these settings its primary observatory (e.g. Alderson & Wall, 1993; Qi, 2007; Read & Hayes, 2004). In these classrooms, washback has been observed to have positive and negative effects, depending on the test’s impact, validity and evaluator – the researcher, test developer, student or teacher (e.g. Duran, Canale, Penfield, Stansfield, & Liskin-Gasparro, 1985; Fox, 2004). Negative washback has been defined as “something that the teacher or learner does not wish to teach or learn” (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 5). Conversely, positive washback can be understood according to Messick’s (1996) definition – the similitude between studying for a test and learning language in an authentic, direct way. Similarly, Bailey (1996) summarizes how a test’s positive and negative washback depends on how well test preparation meets stakeholders’ (teachers, students, test/materials developers) “goals” (p. 269). These ideas suggest that to produce positive washback, tests should cause students and teachers to engage in learning and teaching activities which meet their respective needs.

1.3 Washback from high-stakes tests

Washback from high-stakes tests has proved to be more negative and consequential than washback from courses’ achievement tests, since high-stakes tests notoriously “narrow” course curriculum (Cheng et al., 2004, p. 10) to focus only test constructs, generate more anxiety for stakeholders, have a wider social impact and prohibit individuals from certain positions – that is, the “gatekeeping” function” of high-stakes tests (Spolsky, 1997, p. 242). Expressly, high-stakes tests are tests whose existence and outcomes induce drastic, direct changes in the behaviours of test stakeholders (Madaus, 1988; Spolsky, 1997). Examples of high-stakes tests include the International English Language Testing System™ (IELTS®) and TOEFL, which both assess non-native English speakers’ language proficiency (see http://www.ets.org). To reduce high-stakes tests’ negative washback effects, language
testing experts have debated if positive washback can be created in high-stakes, test-preparation classrooms through intentional innovation in tests’ constructs, to better account for their consequential validity (e.g. Cheng, 1998; Messick, 1996; Wall & Horák, 2008a).

1.4 Washback from TOEFL

The world’s most common high-stakes test is the TOEFL (Hamp-Lyons, 1998; http://www.ets.org/TOEFL®). Originating in 1963, the TOEFL is developed by the National Board on the Testing of English as a Foreign Language, which cooperates with the College Board® and Graduate Record Examinations™ Board (GRE®), and is administered through the Educational Testing Service (ETS), all based in the United States. The ‘Paper Based TOEFL,’ (PBT®) is gradually being replaced by the new ‘Internet Based TOEFL’ (iBT®), which was introduced in 2005-2006. Specifically, the PBT is a 2.5 hour test of students’ reading, listening and writing skills for studying or living in English-speaking countries. It consists of four sections – listening comprehension, structure and written expression, reading comprehension and writing. The iBT is a 4.5 hour test of English students’ reading, listening, speaking and writing skills for university study. It consists of four sections – reading, listening, integrated speaking and integrated writing/listening/reading (Alderson, 2009; www.ets.org). The aim of iBT test developers was to create a test that produced positive washback in TOEFL preparation classrooms through integrated-skills tasks and a speaking test, in the hopes that the “emphasis in classroom teaching will shift and [test preparation] courses will more closely resemble communicatively oriented academic English courses” (Wall & Horák, 2008a, p. 1). This aim derived from research findings demonstrating that, since ETS does not reveal TOEFL’s specifications or provide teacher-training for TOEFL, preparation courses focus solely on test items via practice exercises of TOEFL sections, rather than on test-taking strategies or language use (Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Hughes, 1994). In other words, these practice exercises from commercial textbooks have
become the “de-facto curriculum” of TOEFL preparation classrooms, instead of activities facilitating English communication (Shohamy, 1998, p. 334). With the highness of its stakes, negative effects on ‘English language learning’ (ELL) and deliberate re-design to produce positive washback in test-preparation classrooms, the TOEFL represents an ideal test through which to explore washback’s effects on learners (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996).

1.5 Motivations for this study

Deriving incentive from the complexity of washback’s causes and its heightened occurrence in high-stakes test-preparation classrooms, this exploratory study aims to describe washback from the TOEFL in an ‘English as a second language’ (ESL) context. In particular, it examines TOEFL’s washback from the student perspectives, rather than teacher’s, test developers’ or researchers.’ One reason for collecting student perspectives in particular is that the researcher identified an under-representation of students’ perceptions about washback’s effects in recent washback research, as the literature review will illustrate (e.g. Spratt, 2005, Wall & Horák, 2006, 2008a). While delving into student perspectives is context dependent and longitudinal, making the data analysis and transferability of such research tenuous, all stakeholders’ viewpoints must be accounted for in order to achieve a socially-responsible understanding of TOEFL’s washback effects (Alderson & Wall, 1993; McNamara, 1998).

Another highly practical motivation for conceiving a washback investigation from student perspectives was to develop a method which TOEFL teachers and researchers could use for collecting and interpreting student perspectives on the TOEFL preparation process’s impact on their ELL. Developing such a framework for understanding how to effect positive washback for TOEFL students’ ELL can also provide specific implications for pedagogy and washback research.
1.6 - Development of research questions

To collect TOEFL students’ perceptions about washback on their learning, two research questions were developed based on the aforementioned notions that positive washback involves meeting learners’ needs and making test preparation useful for their English learning experience (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bailey, 1996 Messick, 1996). It is noteworthy that these definitions of positive washback parallel current “integrated approaches” to English language educational theory (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 74). Such approaches put students and their learning needs as the catalysts for what happens and why in language learning classrooms. However, learning for TOEFL (or arguably any high-stakes test) removes the “mixed-focus product and process model” of language teaching and learning and focuses only on the product – the students’ TOEFL scores (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 77; Wall & Horák, 2006, 2008a). Therefore, the research questions educed students’ perceptions of washback to the learners through reflection on the process of TOEFL preparation in light of their ELL, rather than just the products – what they actually learned and their scores.

While these questions may be improved upon by further research, their simplicity and learner-focus elicit students’ perceptions about washback’s effects in comprehensible, evocative language. The two questions are as follows:

- Do students find the TOEFL preparation process useful as an ELL experience?
- Are students’ needs being heard and addressed in their TOEFL preparation courses?

An assumption that this study makes, then, is that assessing the usefulness of the TOEFL preparation process for students’ ELL and the ability this process has to meet learner needs can define ‘washback to the learners’ from student perspectives. This assumption is based on two other assumptions – namely, that washback does influence students’ language
learning process, and understanding this influence will contribute to the multi-faceted comprehension of washback. While few studies have inspected how students characterize washback’s effects on their learning, much research has demonstrated washback’s effects on students’ learning outcomes and validated the examination of washback to the learners as crucial for clarifying washback (e.g. Andrews, Fullilove & Wong, 2002; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1999). So, the present study’s assumptions about what it investigates are validated by previous research so that it can explore how students experience and evaluate TOEFL’s washback.

1.7 Overview of research methods

The data collection methods were mixed (both qualitative and quantitative) and triangulated to include students’, teachers’ and the researcher’s perspectives. After obtaining informed consent from student and teacher participants, the researcher held an open-ended, focus-group interview with the teachers and observed the three participating classes to beware of any mediating variables within the context and to be able to validate what students’ said about washback in their classrooms. Surveys were then distributed to participating students to collect their background and opinions about the TOEFL and its preparation process in light of the research questions. Finally, semi-structured, open-ended group interviews – the core of the data collection – were recorded in each class with students, to provide opportunities to express their perspectives about the TOEFL preparation process freely but with relevance to the research questions.

To analyse the data, the researcher also triangulated her approach to avoid bias and add to the internal generalizability of her project. First, she coded and categorized students’ interview responses to gain a representative presentation of students’ evaluations of washback. Then, using the teacher and observation data, the interview responses were further
interpreted to understand how the TOEFL preparation process influenced students’ ELL and accommodated students’ needs being heard and met.

1.8 Significance of this study

This study’s significance applies, first, to TOEFL students. Due to their relative exclusion as direct subjects of washback research and the importance of the TOEFL tests for their lives, the present study can induce modifications in the TOEFL preparation process to make it more germane for their language learning needs. Also, students’ ability to express their opinions about the washback they experience can afford them satisfaction in being more involved in a process that many have found tyrannous and disenfranchising. This aspect of significance is predicted based on strong desires for more evaluation of and individual attention in TOEFL preparation courses as expressed by participating students in Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ (1996) TOEFL research.

Secondly, this study is significant for both participating and other TOEFL teachers’ pedagogy, in that they can modify their TOEFL teaching methods based on the contextualised understanding this study might provide them about how students are defining positive and negative washback. Moreover, this project can be replicated by TOEFL teachers, giving them a useful tool for defining learner-centred teaching in their contexts.

This study also serves as a potential rubric for washback researchers. That is, its motivations, methods and findings can be used by other washback researchers to investigate how TOEFL students experience and evaluate washback on their ELL in similar test-preparation classrooms. Replicating this study will not only improve its methods but also facilitate the development of fully validated frameworks for understanding TOEFL’s ‘washback to the learners’ from student perspectives.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This literature review outlines issues in English language testing which are foundational for washback research generally and this study specifically. Then, a summary of relevant washback research, with special attention to two studies which closely inform the present one, is given to position this study within previous investigations of washback. Finally, a particular gap in recent research’s examination of “washback to the learners” is identified, followed by a summary of the current study’s focus (Bailey, 1996, pp. 263-64).

2.1 Foundations in English language testing

From audio-lingualism to communicative language teaching, the evolving understanding of English language learning (ELL) guides the philosophy of English language testing (Davies, 1986; McNamara, 2000). Recent conceptions of ELL as a meta-cognitive process grounded in negotiating and communicating contextualized meaning in authentic situations have discouraged traditional psychometric models for language tests, which seek to measure learners’ abilities as isolated, cognitive subjects (McKay, 2002; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Spolsky, 1997). Instead, test developers must responsibly wield language tests as to assess students’ language competency; enhance students’ language use; have a constructive impact on the social and educational realms; and aim for positive washback to teachers and learners (McNamara, 1998; Messick, 1996).

Therefore, language testing experts emphasize the need for test developers to understand how their tests impinge upon teaching and learning in test-preparation classrooms, because “it is not conceivable that test writers intend to cause negative washback” (Watanabe, 2004, p. 21). Early on, though, Alderson (1986) cautioned language test developers to justify tests aimed to effect positive washback by asking, among other things,
student perspectives about the “most appropriate” ways “for their language ability to be assessed” (p. 99). In fact for years, language testing researchers have argued that tests’ usefulness ought to be quantitatively and qualitatively examined, not only from the test developers’ and teachers’ perspectives, but also by “the individuals preparing for the test or operating in the real world” (e.g. Alderson, 1986; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Morrow, 1986, p. 10). Hence, this study understands language tests as socially-responsible assessments of learners’ real-world language abilities, which should aim to generate positive washback and also be validated through mixed-methods investigations of student perspectives on tests’ usefulness.

2.2 Review of relevant literature

Before the 1990s, washback was researched mostly in the field of general education and accounted for through informal observations and generalities (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng et al., 2004; Wall, 2000). Educators discussed the negative effects of tests, whether intended or accidental, on teachers’ methodology, the curriculum and students’ learning, problematizing generally how to develop valid language tests which would have a positive influence (e.g. Davies, 1986; Hughes, 1986; Li, 1990). Popham (1987), a proponent of this ‘measurement-driven instruction,’ argued that if tests reflected ‘useful’ skills, then preparing for tests would be a beneficial activity for teachers and students – in other words, produce positive washback. However, this idea was opposed by Madaus (1988) who insisted that, no matter their validity and communicative constructs, tests inevitably inhibit students’ learning and promote teachers’ narrowing the curriculum, due to tests constructs’ power to determine these activities (e.g. Cheng, 1998). Still, research demonstrating a link between valid tests and positive impact on teaching and learning merely consisted of general experiences of stakeholders, with no systematic investigation of what was actually occurring in classrooms because of tests.
Since the 1990s, researchers began empirically accounting for language tests’ ‘washback’ or ‘impact.’ Washback from high-stakes tests was given special attention since research confirmed these tests’ deleterious effects on stakeholders (Mehrens & Kaminsky, 1989; Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt & Ferman, 1996). Foundational to the emergence of washback research on high-stakes tests were Alderson and Wall’s (1993) washback hypotheses which outlined the types of and conditions under which washback could occur. Additional models for how washback worked were developed, such as Hughes’ (1994) trichotomy – washback to the participants (teachers, learners, test/materials developers), processes (course curriculum, classroom materials and teachers’ methodology) and products (the quality of learners’ learning). Furthermore, Bailey (1996) combined Hughes’s ideas to produce the notions of ‘washback to the learners’ – “the test-derived information provided to the test-takers and having a direct impact on them” – and ‘washback to the program’ – “the results of test-derived information provided to teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, counselors, etc.” (pp. 263-264). Using these frameworks, subsequent washback research has explored the “nature of washback...and the conditions under which it operates” for teaching and learning in high-stakes, test-preparation classrooms (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 116).

Much research on the extent and types of washback from high-stakes tests have considered washback for the participants and processes concurrently because of the interdependence of teachers (participants) using certain preparation processes (changing course content; using certain materials) due to washback’s effects (Bailey, 1999; Spratt, 2005). These studies have identified language teachers as playing pivotal roles in effecting washback because of their pedagogical and ethical decisions about class content and methodology for high-stakes test-preparation courses as opposed to other courses (e.g. Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Read & Hayes, 2004; Watanabe, 1996). Teachers’ pervasiveness as subjects of
washback research arose because of their control in classrooms, coupled with the facts they are easier to communicate with and have less imminent stress on their lives as a result of high-stakes tests (Shohamy et al., 1996; Spratt, 2005). Nevertheless, other washback causes were discovered alongside teachers’ methods – for example, parents, textbooks, the class’s focus, financial stability, the perceived ‘highness’ of a test’s stakes and the timing of the research with the test’s imminence (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Choi, 2008; Read & Hayes, 2004; Shohamy et al., 1996; Watanabe, 1996).

Not only the processes and participants, but also the products of washback have been investigated, especially in recent washback research concerned with ethical language testing. Results distinguished the importance of valid criteria and score reporting, materials chosen for test preparation, specifications of the real-world tasks evaluated, as well as the diversity of high-stakes tests’ impact on individual students and teachers as influencing these tests’ washback on the products (Fox, 2004; Qi, 2005; Saif, 2006; Wall & Horák, 2006, 2008a).

Parallel to assessing washback’s products, another frequently studied washback cause has been the intended effects of newly-developed or changed tests. The idea that designing or modifying a test to be authentic and direct will create positive washback has already been mentioned as popular among language testing experts (e.g. Popham, 1993). Over time, though, research has shown that the link between washback validity – the relationship between the test and teaching/learning practice in classrooms (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Morrow, 1986) – and test innovation is less automatic than supposed and too simplistic an account of washback’s instances (e.g. Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Wall, 2000). Messick (1996) even argued against a causal relationship between washback and validity, because much of what happens in test-preparation classrooms is not caused by washback from the test but by other factors, outside of responsible test design. Any causal relationship between
‘valid’ test innovation and washback, then, must rest on a thorough, longitudinal investigation of the context, participants and intentions of the test developers (Bailey, 1999).

What researchers found about washback’s effects from innovations and new development for high-stakes tests is that these modifications did not always have their intended effects (e.g. Cheng, 1998). In fact, changes were predominantly “indirect,” “unpredictable” and often mediated by other factors such as the teachers’ education, individual learning styles of students, educational context, and the “selecting function” of high-stakes tests (Andrews et al., 2002, p. 221; Bailey, 1999; Cheng 1997; Qi, 2005, p. 163). Another common finding was that teachers were crucial to effecting intended changes for positive washback in test-preparation classrooms, since they subjectively modified the content of their test-preparation classes, but rarely their methodology (Cheng, 1997, Wall, 2000). In other words, innovations for positive washback in high-stakes test-preparation classrooms could influence what teachers taught and learners learned but not how they taught and learned (Cheng, 1998; Messick, 1996).

Hence, while washback studies of high-stakes tests have identified various washback causes, the consensus is that washback is “malleable” and necessitates further investigation of its complexities (Spratt, 2005, p. 23). Despite this, students’ “point[s] of view on their washback-related behaviour before and after tests” (Bailey, 1999, p. 14) have barely been incorporated into recent examinations of washback (Wall, 2000).

2.3 Two key studies

Two washback studies have especially paved the way for the current one by collecting a small number of students’ perspective on TOEFL’s washback using mixed methods, such as interviews, surveys and observations. First, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ (1996) investigation at a language institute in the US was designed to remedy the lack of verified evidence in ESL contexts that TOEFL created negative washback “on the content of
classroom instruction or the methods teachers use” (p. 282) for TOEFL preparation courses. Therefore, these researchers set out to find how washback influenced teaching and how students felt about instruction in TOEFL preparation classrooms. Because their focus was TOEFL teachers’ methods, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) conducted student interviews only as an “exploratory” means to “help [them] understand the lie of the land and the kinds of questions [they] should be asking,” although they acknowledged that a “full-scale, ethnographic” study would be needed to discover students’ positions on washback in TOEFL preparation courses (p. 284).

Their overall conclusions observed that TOEFL was complex, necessitating further research. A relevant finding for the current study was that teachers defended using TOEFL practice exercises as primary classroom activities, because they said these exercises were what students preferred for TOEFL preparation. Conversely, what the researchers discovered from student interviews (which were not fully analysed) was that students preferred more involvement and attention to their specific learning needs for TOEFL preparation.

Elaborating on Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ conclusions, the present study analyses students’ characterizations of useful, learner-centred TOEFL preparation activities – that is, positive washback to the learners from their perspectives. However, this study’s triangulated data is analysed differently from Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’, because their study relied on student interviews to verify what teachers said; whereas the present study uses teacher interview data to verify what students said about their TOEFL preparation experiences.

Another extension of Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ (1996) study, Wall & Horák’s (2006, 2008a) ongoing reports with ETS about washback in TOEFL preparation courses in Central and Eastern Europe also supplied significant direction to the present investigation. Their ‘TOEFL impact study’ assessed the conditions under which the iBT-TOEFL would be released and then monitored changes in TOEFL preparation classrooms as it was released to
understand how iBT's innovations affected teachers’ teaching and students’ learning (Wall & Horák, 2006, 2008a).

Mirroring Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ (1996) findings, Wall and Horák’s results for Phase 1 (2006) showed that washback affected teachers’ methodology and students’ learning by narrowing TOEFL preparation classrooms’ activities to practicing TOEFL exercises from commercial textbooks. Teachers in Wall and Horák’s study insisted that this activity was the best way to achieve learner-centred TOEFL preparation. While teachers’ interview responses were recounted in great detail, the researchers acknowledged they were unable to procure much information about student perspectives, due to their “limited exposure” to students, which was reflected in the relatively short paragraph presenting students’ opinions about TOEFL’s washback (2006, p. 117). However, this paragraph did report that, while they were complicit with the primacy of TOEFL practice exercises, students’ main concern was passing TOEFL, not participating in the study or speculating about the quality of their learning.

In conclusion, these two studies illustrate both the scarce analysis of student perspectives about washback effects on them and their learning, and the interplay between teacher and student perceptions about what is most applicable for students’ TOEFL preparation needs. Furthermore, these studies were exemplary for the researcher, since this investigation could be described as a more qualitative, learner-focused version of Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ TOEFL study and a localized, truncated version of Wall and Horák’s TOEFL impact report. The key distinction, though, is that the present study examines ‘washback to the learners’ from the student perspectives, rather than the teachers’ (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996) or the test developers’ (Wall & Horák, 2006).

2.4 Gap in the literature

As demonstrated by previous research, then, evidence about high-stakes tests’ washback effects from teachers’ and test developers’ perspectives is rich, but only vague,
under-developed data is available about student perspectives on washback’s meanings, even though students are the primary recipients of washback from high-stakes tests. However, researchers have recognized the importance of collecting and using students’ opinions to understand washback’s causes and effects (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Andrews et al., 2002; Bailey, 1996; Morrow, 1986; Spratt, 2005; Wall & Horák, 2006). For example, Wall (2000) has observed

We know very little about students’ perceptions of tests (as opposed to their teacher’s impressions of their perceptions) and even less about how new tests influence what students know and can do. (p. 506)

Also, Bailey (1999) insisted that

Much more research is needed…to see whether and how these washback effects play out in the attitudes and behaviour of language learners. (p. 13)

Discovering student perspectives about how the test-preparation process affects them, then, is integral but neglected in the ongoing investigation of washback. A reason for the lack of exploration of student perspectives is that such research is associated with the deplored ‘non-empirical’ observations about tests’ impact before the 1990s (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Wall, 2000). Other reasons include the time needed for gathering students’ experiences and evaluations of washback, due to their limited English proficiency, diverse experiences and the “difficulty of getting access to” students, who have little time and much stress (Watanabe, 2004, p. 22). Nonetheless, researchers’ models for and predictions about washback’s effects support methodical investigations of students as evaluators of washback on their learning through their attitudes and activities in classrooms.

### 2.5 Focus of this study

Although specific and exploratory, this study expands upon previous washback researchers’ ‘unfinished business’ in its focus. This focus – students’ experiences and
evaluations of TOEFL’s washback on their ELL – has its genesis in Alderson and Wall’s (1993) call for “increased specification” of high-stakes tests’ washback in test-preparation classrooms to include the “what,” “how,” “rate and sequence” as well as “degree and depth” of students’ learning during test preparation (pp. 120, 127). Secondly, Bailey’s (1996) notion of ‘washback to the learners’ – that test-preparation processes students undergo will lead to either “beneficial or negative washback, depending on whether or not these processes’ use promotes the learners’ actual language development (as opposed to their perceived progress or their test-taking skills alone)” (p. 265) – provided the most cogent guidepost for this study’s concentration. In other words, the crux of the present research on ‘washback to the learners’ inspect how washback can be positive for learners’ language development, not just their test scores.

Methodologically-speaking, this study examined washback to the learners through triangulated data collection, focusing on student perspectives. Particularly, the aforementioned research questions elucidated the data and will be re-stated here:

- Do students find the TOEFL preparation process useful as an ELL experience?
- Are students’ needs being heard and addressed in their TOEFL preparation courses?

These questions gathered students’ experiences and evaluations of their TOEFL preparation process’s affects on their ELL – whether these caused positive or negative washback (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). It is noteworthy that these questions do not assess washback’s products (what they actually learned from TOEFL preparation) but washback on the students’ ELL as they were learning for TOEFL.

In conclusion, this exploratory study coalesces with current understandings of language testing and frameworks for investigating washback along with being securely positioned within relevant literature in its focus. In other words, the present project explores an aspect
of washback with lenses constructed by preceding research. Even so, it diverts from previous research to set forth an initial rubric for examining student perspectives on ‘washback to the learners’ through addressing their thoughts on TOEFL preparation in relation to their ELL.
Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter explains the data collection methods and analysis for this study. Details about the research site, participants and data collection instruments are first given, followed by a description of the data analysis techniques used to both qualitatively and quantitatively interpret the data. The categories which summarized students’ interview responses and guided the description of the findings in light of the research questions are presented as well.

3.1 Research site

The research site was the Center for English as a Second Language (CESL), an English language institute affiliated with the University of Oklahoma (OU), a public university in Norman, Oklahoma, USA. CESL’s director leads a staff of approximately twelve teachers to provide an Intensive English Program with twenty-five hours of “expertly taught language instruction per week” (Million, 2006-2007). CESL features small class sizes – no more than twelve students per class – and experienced teachers. CESL’s sessions are offered six times throughout the year in two consecutive seven-week sessions each spring and fall, and two consecutive six-week sessions each summer. According to the director, students can stay at CESL as long as they like and can afford to pay. In fact, many students attend CESL merely for the experience of studying English in the United States, and have no intention of studying at OU.

In addition to core courses covering academic skills, grammar and communication, CESL offers elective courses in TOEFL preparation for students wanting to study at OU. For the session during which this project was conducted, there were three TOEFL-Track courses offered Monday-Thursday. The first was the Pre-PBT course (1-2 p.m.) for seven students, serving as a booster course for students with relatively low English proficiency but still
desiring to prepare for TOEFL. However, a few students who had the English competence to be in the regular PBT course also attended this course because there was no more room in the regular one. This course was shorter than the other two-hour TOEFL classes because Teacher 1 (see ‘Participants’ section) was also teaching a popular ‘Blog Writing Class’ from 2-3 p.m. The second course was for PBT preparation (1-3 p.m.) and included eleven students and was taught by Teacher 2. The third course was for iBT preparation (1-3 p.m.) and included twelve students and was taught by Teacher 3.

OU requires that for any level of study a student make a 500 on the TOEFL PBT or a 61 on the TOEFL iBT, plus complete two sessions at CESL. A PBT score of 550 or an iBT score of 79 allows students to directly enter the university without attending CESL. According to CESL’s TOEFL teachers, the reason the PBT is still accepted by OU, even though the iBT is a more current, valid version of the TOEFL, is that the university makes more money from students’ taking the PBT test than the iBT (Alderson, 2009; Duran et al., 1985).

3.2 Participants

Participants were students enrolled in the three TOEFL preparation courses and the three teachers of these courses. Twenty-three students participated, out of the thirty preparing for the TOEFL during the CESL session in which the researcher conducted her investigation. Of the 23 participants, there were 11 females and 12 males. Their ages ranged from approximately 19-40, depending on their level of intended study – undergraduate, postgraduate or doctorate. Their nationalities included Saudi Arabian, Libyan, Korean, Colombian, Italian, Kuwaiti, Chinese, Angolan, Czech and Chilean. All participants were studying at CESL with the intention of passing the TOEFL and completing a degree at OU. Consequently, while their fields and levels of study differed, these students were all under pressure to perform well on the TOEFL or lose a scholarship and/or opportunities to study in
the US. Participating students’ language levels ranged from lower to upper intermediate, although the teachers mentioned in their interview that these levels fluctuated from session to session. In fact, teachers recounted that every session there were students preparing for the TOEFL whose English competence levels were too low to improve enough during the TOEFL preparation course to do well on TOEFL. For the session during which this study was conducted, approximately half of the participating students had taken the TOEFL and/or TOEFL preparation courses before.

Although the three TOEFL teachers were not the primary participants, they provided supportive data for this project. A brief description of each teacher and his or her teaching methods based on the teacher interview and informal classroom observations follows. Teacher 1, a middle-aged, energetic mother from the US, was the Pre-PBT course teacher. Having mastered a second language herself and travelled extensively, she exuded confidence in her teaching and in her students. She focused her classes on alerting students to the ‘tricks’ of the test and mastering specific strategies for performing well on the PBT through practice exercises and vocabulary quizzes. Teacher 2, a young Moroccan male, was the PBT course teacher. Having passed the PBT himself and studied at an American university, Teacher 2 held a special rapport with the students, which the other TOEFL teachers did not have (McKay, 2002). His interactive, jocund style of teaching focused on getting students to talk and work together as a class to understand the PBT’s structure, skills and correct answers. Teacher 3, an older, soft-spoken lady from the US, was the instructor for the TOEFL iBT course. She possessed many years of English teaching experience and served as a resource for her colleagues. She conducted disciplined classes during which she gave details about skills required for the iBT, discussed integrated iBT tasks’ correct answers as well as encouraged students to work together to complete practice exercises.
3.3 Data collection methods

Because few studies have thoroughly investigated student perspectives about washback over the past few decades, there were few methodologies to replicate (e.g. Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Wall & Horák, 2006, 2008a). Moreover, data collection methods for language testing research have traditionally been more quantitative, aiming to classify the affects of washback from the teachers’ and test-developers’ perspectives (Lazerton, 1995). Although this study follows the overall aim of existing washback research – that is, to document “the mechanisms by which [washback] works” through “classroom observation and triangulation” (Bailey, 1996, pp. 263, 273) – its methods combine both quantitative and qualitative procedures, to gain an emic perspective on students’ immediate and local meanings for washback (Davis, 1995).

Nonetheless, qualitative research is emerging as a valid practice for investigating washback, with its rationale having been made, beginning with Morrow’s (1986) assertion that qualitative methods in language testing research are useful for “…researching into language testing...to glean insights into the ways in which multi-faceted individuals prepare for tests” (p. 13, emphasis added). Similarly, Alderson and Wall (1993) recommended that some washback studies triangulate stakeholders’ perspectives on washback for an “explanatory,” ethnographic perspective of washback’s variables (p. 127). So then, by incorporating qualitative methods to examine student perspectives, this project can both add explanatory description to the body of washback research and arrive at more contextually-sensitive interpretations of washback to the learners. Nonetheless, this study’s mixed-methods approach must be paralleled in other situations to establish it as reliable means for investigating student perspectives on washback in ESL contexts.

So then, data collection instruments were chosen to provide descriptive information from multiple perspectives of the context’s generalities and specifics to achieve a holistic
picture of students’ experiences and evaluations of TOEFL’s washback (Lynch, 1996; Silverman, 2000). Specifically, group interviews and surveys were the primary instruments through which the researcher gathered student perspectives. The three participating teachers reviewed the interview and survey items prior to their administration for face validity.

3.4 Student interviews

Student interviews comprised the core of the data collection procedure. Qualitative research traditionally uses interviews to collect participants’ emic, contextualised experiences of reality (McKay, 2006; Silverman, 2000). Choosing interviews to collect information about washback is also well-founded (e.g. Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Cheng, 1997; Saif, 2006). Particularly, the researcher conducted semi-standardized, open-ended group interviews in the three TOEFL courses to maximize participants’ abilities to “contribute whatever they felt was interesting and relevant” but also to collect data that would be systematic enough to generate patterns and comparisons across individuals (Wall & Horák, 2008a, p. 11).

To capitalize on CESL students’ camaraderie and to maintain a setting in which students felt comfortable, the researcher conducted interviews during regular class times in students’ everyday TOEFL classrooms. Students were notified at the beginning of their course about the interview time (during the fourth week of class) and location. One week before the interview, the researcher provided students with a detailed explanation of the interview’s purpose and format, plus the interview questions to begin thinking about and planning their answers. Interviews were one-hour each in length for the three classes and were recorded using Audacity® software on the researcher’s personal lap-top. Students sat in their usual places for class during the interview and talked mostly to one another, with the researcher maintaining the group’s focus and probing for more information if responses were unclear. To minimize hesitancy from lack of language proficiency, the researcher clearly
explained at each interview that students could say whatever they wished, no matter the grammatical, syntactical and lexical accuracy. The setting, along with the students’ familiarity with the researcher and her aims, minimized the risk of the observer’s paradox and of power relationships interfering with the data collection (McKay, 2006).

The interview questions were modelled after Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ (1996) and Wall and Horák’s (2006) interview questions for the participating students in their respective studies. This study’s questions elicited students’ attitudes and perceptions about TOEFL preparation methods (for example, using practice tests); the long and short-term impact of TOEFL preparation on students’ ELL; and the extent to which their course was engaging for their learning and meeting their learner needs (Brown, 2001; Shohamy, 1998; see Appendix A). Thus, the interviews functioned as appropriate, well-founded avenues through which to probe the research questions.

3.5 Student surveys

Surveys were used as a supportive data collection instrument to add reliability and background information to student interview responses. Surveys constitute a more structured means to verify students’ face-to-face information (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Since surveys examine more surface information, they also allowed the researcher to collect basic details, such as each student’s familiarity with TOEFL and experience with the TOEFL courses (Dörnyei, 2005).

This study’s survey items were loosely modelled after the surveys in Read and Hayes’ (2004) research which aimed to elicit students’ background, opinions and expectations about IELTS test preparation. Specifically, the items covered students’ feelings about and familiarity with the TOEFL, experiences in the TOEFL preparation process, opinions about CESL’s TOEFL-Track course and learning preferences for TOEFL preparation (see Appendix B). Each of the twenty-one statements on the survey correlated to one of the
research questions, as well as an interview question (see Appendix G). The items were a combination of open-ended questions and five-point Likert scale statements, allowing students both to produce and choose their responses (Brown, 2001). The statements were in English, but graded for simplicity and directness to accommodate the students’ language levels. The survey items’ wording was also edited before being administered by two non-native English teachers as well as the three participating teachers for content validity.

After a thorough, in-class explanation, the surveys were given to students during the second week of their TOEFL preparation course. Students could take as long as they needed to complete the survey, at home or elsewhere, and then return the survey to the researcher.

3.6 Supplementary data

Although the data collection focus was on the students, a partial construction of the setting in which they were operating had to be obtained to verify what students said about CESL’s TOEFL courses (Silverman, 2000). This partial construction was achieved through supplementary data from sources other than the students – namely, the teachers and the researcher. To gather this data, the researcher held one open-ended, focus group interview before courses began with the three teachers of CESL’s TOEFL classes for approximately one hour. Topical notes of responses from this interview were taken to present logistical information about CESL’s TOEFL-Track courses, the teachers’ experiences as TOEFL instructors as well as their observations about TOEFL students (see Appendix C).

Additional supplementary data consisted of the researcher’s informal observations of each TOEFL class. The researcher acted as a “moderate observer,” participating as a student or teacher, as was appropriate, to establish students’ familiarity with the researcher as well as her perspective as an insider (Lynch, 1996, p. 121). The researcher observed the participating courses three times each before she conducted the student interviews. Field notes were taken of “sensitizing concepts” (Lynch, 1996, pp. 123-24) related to the research questions, using a
truncated, topical version of Wall and Horák’s (2006, pp. 170-177) classroom observation schedule (see Appendix D).

3.7 Data analysis overview

As Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) observations about qualitative analyses stress, the process of interpreting this study’s data was lengthy and layered, requiring the researcher to set aside her bias for what she might have wanted to find and focus on identifying the “essential meanings” behind students’ interview responses as verified by the rest of the data collected about their situation (p. 160). Particularly, the data were analysed based on their significance for answering the research questions – first, categorizing the interview responses and then interpreting them further through the supplementary data.

3.8 Analysis of student interviews

The first layer of analysis consisted of transcribing students’ interview responses and using open coding to develop categories that summarized students’ responses. The interview transcription consisted of typing every intelligible word which the participants spoke during the recorded interviews. Following Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) suggestion, the researcher’s comments were not transcribed, unless necessary to follow students’ responses. Neither was a detailed transcription of every linguistic feature for the students’ responses made, since this was not a conversational analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Instead, minimal devices were used to indicate such conversational cues as changes in speaker, overlapping speech and emphasized words (see Appendix E). As such, the transcriptions provided a text corpus which illustrated how participants “organized their speech” to represent their experiences of washback (Silverman, 2000, p. 89).

After this, the researcher used open coding to consolidate and describe the concepts that appeared in the interviews transcriptions (Lynch, 1996). This iterative process involved “extracting concepts from raw data and developing them in terms of their properties and
dimensions” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 159). Properties mean “characteristics that constitute the concepts” and dimensions are the “variations within the properties that give specificity and range to concepts” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 159). Once both the primary and derivative concepts were determined, the researcher further consolidated the data by developing seven “analyst constructed” categories, each of which represented relevant properties and dimensions of students’ responses to the research questions (Lynch, 1996, p. 143). The student interview response categories are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ 1 – Do students find the TOEFL preparation process useful as an ELL experience?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Positive or negative attitudes toward the TOEFL preparation course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Range of TOEFL preparation usefulness for short-term and long-term ELL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Useful course activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Suggested modifications for making the course more useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ 2 – Are students’ learner needs being heard and addressed in their TOEFL courses?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Students’ class involvement affecting their learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with classmates and teacher affecting learner needs being heard and addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Variety of test-preparation activities affecting students’ needs being heard and addressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each category was carefully worded so as to disambiguate and comprehensively represent all students’ interview responses (Lynch, 1996). An imperative element during the category-forming process was for the researcher to set aside her “preconceived notions about what [she expected] to find in the research and [let] the data and interpretation of it guide analysis” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). Still, as representations of student responses, these categories ought to be corroborated in other research settings which collect TOEFL students’ perceptions of washback.
To present the analysed findings, descriptions of the primary and derivative concepts for each category were compiled, according to the research question to which it pertained (see Appendix F). Responses were also separated by class (Pre-PBT, PBT or iBT) to most clearly illustrate students’ responses. The reason for this separation was that, upon analysis, the most significant contrasts in students’ responses appeared depending on the course they were taking. Quotes and summaries of participating students’ expressions were also used to credibly represent the findings. However, pseudonyms were not used to identify student quotes, since voices could not be identified with each participant on the interview recordings. As such, the categorical interpretations of students’ responses to the research questions composed this study’s understanding of students’ experiences and evaluations of TOEFL’s ‘washback to the learners.’

3.9 Analysis of student surveys and supplementary data

Another subsequent layer of analysis used students’ survey responses to explain categorized interview responses. The percentage of students who completed a survey represented 40-45% of the participating students in each course – 13 out of the 23 participating students. Using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), the completed surveys were analysed, and the results contained similar patterns to the student interview responses. However, the paucity of students who completed the surveys, along with the large standard deviations found for some items’ responses rendered them unreliable and statistically insignificant for determining students’ opinions. Had all the students completed the surveys, their results could have been shown in tables of descriptive statistics, according to which interview response category the survey item related, as other washback survey analyses have done (e.g. Hayes & Read, 2004; Qi, 2005). This triangulated interpretation would have added richness to the description of students’ interview responses. Nonetheless, due to the largely insignificant results and space constraints for the current
project, the survey results were not included in the findings, except for a few open-ended items about students’ previous TOEFL experience (see Appendix H).

Regarding the supplementary data, because the study’s focus was on student perspectives, a detailed analysis of the teacher interview and classroom observations was not necessary. Instead, as the interview categories were determined, related data from these other sources were used to clarify and inform findings from students.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter describes students’ analysed responses in light of the two research questions, providing discussion as necessary for contextualised meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Students’ categorized interview responses are described, first through an overarching finding from the triangulated data, and after that, according to which research question they pertained by course – that is, Pre-PBT, PBT and iBT. A summary of the responses provides the basis for the following chapter which interpretatively discusses a few indicative trends and patterns within the findings.

4.1 Discriminating factor from the data

Upon examining the triangulated data, the level of students’ competence in English and familiarity with the TOEFL preparation process was a discriminating factor in their answers to the data collection questions. As first identified in the teacher interview and through students’ questions and interactions during classroom observations, Pre-PBT students were the least competent users of English and least experienced with TOEFL preparation out of all the three classes. For instance, the teachers mentioned in their interview that less proficient students would be advised to attend the Pre-PBT course, while the more proficient students would take the PBT or iBT course. Then, during her classroom observations, the researcher noted the difference among the courses in students’ overall English competence and TOEFL experience through the statements they made about their English levels, questions they asked during class along with the confidence and fluency that characterized their English.

This information from the supplementary data was confirmed in the interviews from students’ statements such as, “My English is not good” (Pre-PBT student) or “I took a TOEFL course in my home country” (iBT student). Also, the amount of discussion each
class produced in their respective interview times indicated that PBT and iBT students were able to cover the subject of TOEFL preparation with more nuance and substantiation (Compare interview transcriptions in Appendix E). Furthermore, survey item 6 (see Appendix H) specifically asked students if they had taken a TOEFL preparation course before and what that course was like. All the PBT and iBT students who completed the surveys, except one iBT student, had taken TOEFL preparation courses previously. None of the Pre-PBT students who completed the surveys had taken a TOEFL preparation course before. Although some variation in students’ language competence and TOEFL experience existed within each course, these points of discrepancy between courses became increasingly salient as data description proceeded. Examples of students’ differing answers based on the varying levels of competence and experience among courses will be demonstrated in the following sections.

4.2 Description of students’ responses for RQ 1

The first research question acquired student perspectives on ‘washback to the learners’ by asking how useful students found the TOEFL preparation process for their ELL experience. Relevant categories from students’ interview responses were denoted as follows:

- Positive or negative attitudes toward TOEFL preparation course
- Range of TOEFL preparation usefulness for short and long-term ELL
- Useful course activities
- Suggested modifications for making the course more useful

These categories summarized both the primary and derivative concepts from all three classes’ interview responses for the first research question, to achieve a comprehensive interpretation. Particular features of students’ responses will be delineated through descriptions and quotes from the interviews and supplementary data.
4.2.1 Category 1 responses: Attitudes toward TOEFL preparation courses

The interview questions which elicited students’ responses for this category gauged their comprehensive reactions to the TOEFL preparation process. What the interview analysis revealed was that Pre-PBT students had mostly positive attitudes toward TOEFL preparation, describing their TOEFL preparation process as “positive,” “helpful” and teaching “what I’ll need for TOEFL.” Interview responses for PBT and iBT students, however, revealed more negative attitudes, with some students commenting that the course was “too slow” in its level of instruction, would be better if taken elsewhere or was ruining their life plans. One PBT student commented from his previous experience that for TOEFL preparation “you cannot get all that you need,” which was discouraging for him, despite his enjoying CESL’s PBT preparation course. So then, the factor of previous TOEFL experience surfaced in this first category, with new TOEFL students revealing positive attitudes, while some iBT and PBT students who had taken TOEFL before were frustrated at TOEFL preparation’s necessity, level of instruction and quality.

Several open-ended survey questions about students’ past TOEFL preparation experiences elicited even more negative responses from PBT and iBT students (see items 6 & 7, Appendix H). For instance, a PBT student described her TOEFL previous preparation experience as “not very good because their teachers not native speaker and it was so difficult,” while an iBT student said the TOEFL preparation process was annoying because “you have to do things you think not very useful for what you want to do.” Thus, this survey data validated interview responses that inexperienced TOEFL students held positive attitudes toward TOEFL preparation, while past TOEFL preparation experiences seemed to have developed more negative attitudes in other students.
4.2.2 – Category 2 responses: Range of TOEFL preparation usefulness for short and long-term ELL

Overall for the short-term, students from all three courses saw their time for TOEFL preparation as “useful for taking TOEFL,” through informing them of TOEFL’s structure and timing. If taking TOEFL immediately afterwards, one iBT student was especially adamant that preparation courses could be useful. On the other hand, PBT and iBT students also listed ways TOEFL preparation was not useful for their short-term ELL. For example, a few PBT and iBT students complained that TOEFL practice materials were not relevant for their pending university studies; whereas Pre-PBT students had indicated that they felt readied for university through TOEFL preparation. Specifically, some iBT and PBT students wondered why TOEFL preparation courses could not be made more relevant for increasing their English competence for university study.

These findings were further illuminated by TOEFL teachers’ mentioning in their interview that, because CESL’s TOEFL students often had deficient study skills for university and were also unsure how to prepare for TOEFL, they felt their jobs included both teaching students study skills for university as well as tutoring them for TOEFL. Teachers saw the need for more collaboration with OU to make students’ TOEFL preparation courses less stressful and most beneficial for their ELL.

For the long-term, one Pre-PBT student suggested that his TOEFL preparation experience would be useful for improving vocabulary and speaking, although his classmates argued that TOEFL preparation would not enhance fluent English speaking and most vocabulary words learnt for TOEFL would be forgotten. PBT students pointed out the utility of the reading and writing practice TOEFL preparation afforded, but others in the class observed that TOEFL preparation was “just for the TOEFL,” not for their English use after the course, especially in regards to speaking since speaking is not assessed on the PBT.
Likewise, two iBT students with previous TOEFL experience said they were wasting their time in TOEFL preparation because they were “not studying English.” However, an iBT student whose language level had been low at the course’s commencement insisted that TOEFL preparation was “not wasting my time” since her English level was “improving” and she felt unfamiliar with the iBT, unlike the other students. Overall, some students from each course perceived potentially positive outcomes of TOEFL preparation for their short-term ELL, but responses were more negative for the long-term. Some iBT and PBT students even criticized the TOEFL preparation process as being inauthentic, irrelevant and potentially useless for both their short and long-term ELL.

Another part of this category’s description relates to the utility of TOEFL preparation courses specifically. The interview findings revealed that although TOEFL students were uncertain about the TOEFL preparation process’s usefulness for their ELL, they still wanted to be enrolled in TOEFL preparation courses because, as one PBT student put it, “I think this [the TOEFL preparation course] is the best thing I can get for to prepare for the test.” In other words, students took TOEFL preparation courses as an assured method of success on the test, as preparing for such a high-stakes test was imperative – that is, if students did not pass TOEFL they risked losing scholarships, time and money. Supporting this point, the TOEFL teachers disclosed in their interview that CESL students really wanted TOEFL courses to be taught, because TOEFL was so crucial for their transition from CESL to university. The assumption, then, of stakeholders was that TOEFL courses were helpful to prepare for the TOEFL.

Still, TOEFL students critically evaluated their preparation courses’ effectiveness based on factors related to individual and appropriate instruction. For instance, one iBT student related how a previous TOEFL course
...was so personality classes in focusing our skills. improve only directly. more individual attention. and I think it’s better...and this time, to share the class with another people with different level etc. it’s a little complicate for me.

Likewise, another iBT student related how there were much better facilities and teachers in her home country for studying for TOEFL, and she concluded

...here I don’t know it’s like ten years ago in [her home country] for the English classes.

I think so. it’s so low. and it’s so expensive. and I thought it was gonna be better, but it’s not.

Even though the inevitability of TOEFL preparation courses was in some sense presupposed, then, students still observed a usefulness gradient for these courses according to their relevance for learner needs. Summarily, this category’s responses illustrated the perceived necessity of TOEFL preparation courses within the protocol of test preparation, even though students were generally unsure about the efficacy of the TOEFL preparation process and its courses, for their personal ELL.

4.2.3 Category 3 responses: Useful course activities

Most commonly identified as a useful TOEFL preparation activity were daily practice exercises of TOEFL sections from commercial textbooks. In the interviews, students claimed these exercises afforded familiarity with the test’s format, knowledge of its structure, awareness of “tricks on the TOEFL” and alleviation of boredom. For instance, at the researcher’s pointed question, all PBT students except one confirmed that they felt practice exercises of TOEFL sections should be the main activity in TOEFL courses.

However, these uniform responses could be caused by students’ perceiving that practice exercises must be the best test-preparation activity, since these exercises are ubiquitous in test-preparation classrooms (Dörnyei, 2005; Wall & Horák, 2006). The unreliability of student responses regarding practice exercises was verified by the fact that, in an open-ended
survey item (item 19; see Appendix H), experienced PBT and iBT students wrote primarily about past authentic activities as having been most helpful for TOEFL preparation – for example, listening to the radio, speaking “as much as possible” and asking other students about what helped them prepare for the TOEFL.

Additionally, interviewed students from all three courses identified studying grammar as a useful activity for TOEFL preparation, along with macro-skills practice (reading, writing, speaking and listening) both inside and outside of class. Moreover, iBT students highlighted the interaction they had with each other as a useful, motivating activity for TOEFL preparation. This response was affirmed by some iBT participants several times during their interview as a redeeming aspect in their course evaluation. Despite differing language levels, then, interaction with classmates was still a useful activity from iBT student perspectives.

While Pre-PBT students did not mention any useless preparation activities during their interviews, PBT and iBT students provided a litany. Among them were the excess of information taught. Students emphasized that they only wanted activities that would prepare them for iBT or PBT, not activities for general knowledge or for another test. In addition, a few PBT and iBT students decried practicing certain language skills like grammar and speaking in TOEFL classes as useless because they had “other courses” at CESL focused on these skills. While this finding is context dependent (not every TOEFL student is engaged in a comprehensive study of English along with TOEFL preparation), it offers a noteworthy picture of how students perceived their TOEFL preparation process – as exclusively learning for the TOEFL. Finally, both an iBT and PBT student maintained that practice exercises were useless for TOEFL preparation, while another insisted that, because iBT’s content was not relevant to his academic field, practicing iBT sections was useless in his opinion.
4.2.4 Category 4 responses: Suggested modifications for making course more useful

For modifications to TOEFL preparation courses, CESL students recommended adjusting the time and content to provide additional interactive practice both in and outside of class. First, Pre-PBT students suggested increasing the time for TOEFL class. This request may have stemmed from the fact that the Pre-PBT class met for one hour a day, instead of two like the other courses. Likewise, PBT students repeatedly requested that class time be increased and split between the morning and afternoon. They reasoned this would focus their preparation and make them less tired than they were during the current class time, which was after lunch. iBT students also mentioned timing as a factor to be modified.

For the content, one Pre-PBT student suggested one skill (e.g. listening) be covered per week, instead of one per day, and that more collaboration with his classmates of the same native language be encouraged. Another Pre-PBT student recommended developing English skills, more so than test-taking abilities. Correspondingly, iBT students suggested that courses include discussions and motivational, “enjoyable” activities for all students. Also, because they had different English needs depending on their areas of academic study, a few PBT and iBT students requested to separate TOEFL classes according to students’ proposed fields of study, so that class materials would be more relevant for their future English use. As one iBT student said,

...here we are talking about these unnecessary things...I’m doing engineering. I don’t need to know about meerkats! If I want to know about meerkats, I will buy a book and I will learn about the meerkats!

One of the researcher’s classroom observations happened to be on the day that the iBT class spent an hour discussing an iBT reading task about meerkats. Students also listed watching movies, reading academic essays and books as well as speaking with people in real life as authentic activities outside of class that would be welcome additions to TOEFL preparation
courses. A PBT student recommended attending university classes to practice taking notes and asking questions to the professor. Together, students’ proposals for improving TOEFL courses’ content indicated that students wanted these courses to be more relevant for their specific needs, involving authentic practice inside and outside of class.

Nonetheless, in conjunction with the previous category’s responses, students tempered this expanded view of what TOEFL preparation courses could entail with the specification that activities remain pertinent for TOEFL. As one PBT student put it, “We don’t study because we need to learn. we need to pass the exam. that’s it.” This statement was validated by the teachers, who perceived in their interview that TOEFL students were mostly concerned with TOEFL courses’ teaching something “directly useful for them; even if they felt the TOEFL itself was not useful, they know they have to pass.”

4.3 Students’ responses to RQ2

The second research question explored students’ evaluations of washback by asking if students’ needs were being heard and addressed in their TOEFL preparation courses. The categories reflecting students’ interview responses to this question are as follows:

- Students’ class involvement affecting their learning
- Interaction with classmates and teacher affecting learner needs being heard and addressed
- Variety in activities affecting students’ needs being heard and addressed

These categories represent the both the primary and derivative concepts that emerged from students’ interview responses and are substantiated through correlating supplementary data.

4.3.1 Category 5 responses: Students’ class involvement affecting their learning

Student descriptions of their involvement generated a basic understanding of how they characterized their learner needs being heard and addressed. Students described their
involvement in learning in terms of primary activities in class, speaking during class, attitudes toward TOEFL and the teachers’ pedagogy.

For Pre-PBT and PBT courses, the primary activities were simulating TOEFL practice exercises from textbooks, reviewing/discussing their correct answers and occasionally learning strategies for test-taking. The iBT class time was mostly spent on completing interactive iBT practice exercises involving group and pair work. These facts were confirmed during the researcher’s observations. The interviews also revealed that some students in each course felt they were actively learning through these exercises’ improving their English and “[helping] me take the TOEFL.” For some PBT and Pre-PBT students, though, TOEFL practice exercises induced passive learning, as one Pre-PBT student felt he just “[got] information to give it back out.” Conversely, the iBT class’s preparation activities caused iBT students to characterize their learning as active – for example, “We have pairs and groups. discussions...that is much helpful for us [you get the chance to speak].”

In all three interviews, students related speaking in class to their involvement in learning in class. For instance, when asked about his involvement in TOEFL course activities, one Pre-PBT student replied, “I’m worried about my grade. [laughter] for my TOEFL. () I want to talk but then I think o::: why you would talk now?” Similarly, PBT students commented that they felt involved because they asked questions and discussed with their teacher about correct/incorrect answers for TOEFL items. Finally iBT students mentioned “[talking] a lot” with their classmates kept them motivated and engaged in activities, instead of “wasting time” in class.

Next, students from all three courses made many references to their attitudes and general ‘motivation’ regarding TOEFL as affecting their engaged learning in class. For instance, a PBT student said “if you hate the TOEFL, you are not prepared inside that you want to do this. really, really it has affect on me.” Likewise, an iBT student said, “When you
put in your mind that something will be difficult for you or you don’t like that. that will be
difficult for you.” Additionally, Pre-PBT and iBT students discussed how nervousness about
the TOEFL and shyness about speaking in class shaped their learning. Thus, students
perceived their own agency in learning for TOEFL. The teachers also emphasized this factor
of “student motivation” – a notion similar to Krashen’s (2003) ‘affective filters’ and Peirce’s
(1995) ‘investment’ in language learning – as being crucial to how TOEFL students
performed on the TOEFL and improved their English competence during their CESL courses.
Teachers illustrated how this lack of motivation affected students’ learning, as some students
missed classes, spoke only their native language to their friends and were reluctant to speak
in class.

In turn, though, TOEFL students linked their teachers’ pedagogy to involved learning
in TOEFL courses. Several Pre-PBT students felt involved because they could ask Teacher 1
why answers were correct/incorrect, just as PBT students felt Teacher 2’s discussion of
answers and inclusion of them in choosing class activities facilitated their involvement. On
the other hand, iBT students complained that Teacher 3’s rapid talking and long-winded
explanations inhibited their involvement. Altogether, though, according to students, involved
learning depended on contextual factors beyond the scope of the TOEFL’s constructs –
namely, primary classroom activities, their ability to speak in class, individual ‘investment’
related to TOEFL/ELL and the teacher’s pedagogy.

4.3.2 Category 6 responses: Interaction with classmates and teacher affecting students’
needs being heard and addressed

Specifying the previous category’s notation of teacher’s pedagogy and student speaking
as influencing engaged learning, this category’s responses showed how the dynamic teacher-
student and student-student relationships affected learners’ needs being heard and addressed.
For instance, although they acknowledged that interactions with their classmates and Teacher
were fewer than in their other courses, Pre-PBT students did not articulate that this was inhibiting their learner needs being met, since the practice exercises showed their mistakes and alerted them to the “tricks” of PBT’s questions. Furthermore, these students dismissed the need for more interaction because, as one student quipped, “It’s TOEFL class,” or as another cogently observed, “No speaking on PBT”; so “we don’t speak in this class.” Nonetheless, several students expressed that more discussion and group work would be helpful for meeting learner needs.

Most PBT students indicated satisfaction with the interaction in their PBT class, as opposed to their other classes, because of the debates and discussions they routinely had with their teacher about PBT items. Nonetheless, several other PBT students thought there were fewer interactions in TOEFL class because they spent so much class time completing practice exercises. An important point regarding interaction was brought up by one PBT student who indicated that his learner needs were not being met because he was “too shy” to ask why an answer was wrong. This inhibition for learner needs being heard and addressed was further evidenced by the fact that some PBT students barely spoke during the interview, unless singled out by the researcher.

On the other hand, iBT students affirmed that they interacted with each other more often than in other classes, which was a positive aspect for meeting their needs for TOEFL. Furthermore, interaction was easy because, as one student claimed, “we are friends...we want to talk.” iBT students pointed out that interaction with each other in and outside of class facilitated their abilities to meet each others’ needs as well. For example, as one student said, a student proficient at grammar could help another student struggling with grammar. However, another iBT student felt that TOEFL practice kept him from interacting with his classmates as much as he would like.
While confirming students’ reports about their classroom interactions, the supplementary data also uncovered information about the teachers’ pedagogical styles which provided a richer interpretation of students’ interview responses for this category. For example, Teacher 2 was observed to be laid-back and conversational in his pedagogical style, which would allow for the increased interaction and discussion in his classroom that his students appreciatively recounted. Classroom observations also verified Pre-PBT students’ interactions as being primarily giving the correct answers (for example, A, B, C) to their teacher as she requested them. While iBT students were observed to have extensive opportunities to complete TOEFL exercises in pairs and groups, the researcher noted Teacher 3’s “detailed explanations” of questions which left students less time to ask her questions, supporting students’ interview descriptions. However, Teacher 3 mentioned in her interview that teacher-talk was a way she provided her students with listening practice, although she was unsure if they understood her all the time, due to their varying English competencies. So then, the “cultures of learning” in each classroom, influenced by the teachers’ pedagogical style, shaped dialoguing between teachers and students, which was necessary to address learner needs (McKay, 2002, p. 104).

4.3.3 Category 7 responses: Variety of test-preparation activities affecting students’ needs being heard and addressed

Interview questions creating this category examined if students thought more variety in test-preparation activities would efficiently meet their individual English needs for the short and long-term – that is, for the TOEFL and for their future English use (see Appendix F). To begin, Pre-PBT students saw no need for a variety of activities. While one student said that interaction and group work might reduce his nervousness for TOEFL, other students expressed satisfaction with the practice exercises from commercial textbooks as meeting their needs for TOEFL preparation. In fact, another
student even mentioned that precisely because practice exercises made her nervous they could prepare her for what test-taking would be like. When specifically asked about additional activities besides practice tests, students commented, “We are here and focusing to pass the TOEFL”; “These activities will help me pass the TOEFL” and “…we don’t care if something will help us then” (for long-term English use). Thus, for Pre-PBT students, learner-centred activities were the practice exercises.

Similarly, one PBT student insisted that practice exercises for TOEFL were what the class wanted because

... if it’s not an exercise you don’t want to do it. yah, you want to do something that you can see in TOEFL. that’s it. so you cannot bring in new techniques because the students they are not going to accept this...

However, PBT students proceeded to debate if other activities would be more useful for meeting their needs – for example, whether watching movies in class would be as helpful as doing a practice listening exercise from the PBT. A few PBT student responses even suggested that the TOEFL itself was so far from being learner-centred that preparing for it would necessarily fail to meet students’ learning needs.

Lastly, iBT students welcomed a variety of test-preparation activities, since these would not only better meet their class’s needs but also afford opportunities to collaborate. As one student put it, “They need other things than I need.” The most common alternative activity students suggested was speaking with native speakers in real-life situations. However, an issue that students pointed out again for this category was students’ mixed language levels. Students commented that many activities would be inefficient in a class with different language needs. As one student complained,
…if you’re in a high level, with another people that are better than you, you have to try to be like them. But the teachers in here, they try to teach to the lowest. that is so hard for me because I have good English, but it’s like, I need to be better.

Another issue iBT students pointed out was that English was best improved outside the classroom anyway; so they could obtain additional learner-centred English practice outside of the classroom activities. This mirrored the TOEFL teachers’ solution in their interview – that students should work on individualized language needs “outside of class” since they were too “over-loaded with work” to give students the individual attention they needed. So then, students’ responses for this category reflected previous categories’ discussions, in that Pre-PBT students were satisfied with the TOEFL course activities, while PBT and iBT students deliberated about the negative and positive aspects of more variety in test-preparation activities for their ELL needs.

4.4 Summary of ‘washback to learners’

The preceding findings have given a preliminary outline of students’ experiences and evaluations of washback on to the learner – that is, what TOEFL preparation processes promoted their language development, as opposed to their perceived progress or their test-taking skills alone (Bailey, 1996). As the least experienced and competent of CESL’s TOEFL students, Pre-PBT students characterized ‘washback to the learners’ positively, compared to the other two classes. For example, they did not call into question the TOEFL preparation process’s overall usefulness for their ELL or amount of involvement they had in their course, although a few students requested more interaction and alternative materials to practice exercises. Instead, Pre-PBT students indicated that their course was constructive for their ELL and was preparing them for university studies, even if there was not enough class time. Because they felt actively engaged in learning through completing PBT practice exercises and being taught PBT’s ‘tricks,’ Pre-PBT students expressed that their learner
needs were being met and therefore requested few changes to the PBT preparation process. Altogether, these students’ experiences and evaluations of washback in their TOEFL preparation course could be labelled positive.

Washback to the learners for the more experienced and competent PBT students seemed to mean that TOEFL preparation was useful for the PBT but not for their long-term ELL. Furthermore, some students indicated a desire for more real-world practice of English skills than TOEFL practice exercises provided. One reason for this perceived lack of authenticity in PBT preparation activities is that research suggests the PBT is not an authentic, communicative test, causing the frustration students felt at the lack of authentic language practice which PBT preparation entailed (Alderson, 2009; Duran et al., 1985; Wall & Horák, 2006, 2008a). Nevertheless, PBT students reported that consistent interaction with their teacher, through discussing correct answers and choosing their daily TOEFL preparation activities, generated positive washback for their learning. However, students’ complaints about the course timing and disagreements about the most relevant classroom activities made it unclear whether PBT students’ needs were being heard and met through their course. Finally, PBT students’ observations about the importance of their attitudes toward TOEFL and assertiveness in classroom interaction highlighted students as agents in the TOEFL preparation and testing process.

Similar to the PBT students, iBT students expressed frustration with the TOEFL preparation process uselessness and irrelevant, disengaging activities, but maintained that the focused time to practice for iBT and friendly interactions with classmates were positive washback effects on their ELL. Unlike the other two classes, many iBT students indicated that their needs were not being met and that they were wasting time in their course, but due to factors mostly unrelated to TOEFL’s washback – namely, their teacher’s rapid, effusive talk and their class’s varying language levels inhibiting individual needs from being addressed.
Additionally, iBT students highlighted that their individual ‘investment’ in ELL along with course content relevant to their specific fields of study could effect positive washback on their learning.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion’s derivation

While many observations and patterns could be drawn from the data’s descriptions, the interpretations made in this chapter represent consistent, semiotic indicators of what ‘washback to the learners’ meant for participating students, in light of the research questions and relevant washback literature (Davis, 1995). Three discussions illuminate distinctive findings from the present study, and the other three points have been predicted by previous washback research.

5.2 Pattern in student evaluation of TOEFL’s washback

There were correlations between participating students’ answers and their varying English proficiency levels and familiarity with TOEFL, suggesting that escalated exposure to TOEFL and heightened English competence increased the likelihood of students’ finding the typical TOEFL preparation process unhelpful for their ELL and insufficient for meeting their learner needs. For instance, since Pre-PBT students had much improvement to make in their overall English competency before being ‘ready’ for TOEFL and had no previous preparation experience to motivate/de-motivate them or compare CESL’s preparation process with, they perceived more positive effects on their learning through TOEFL preparation activities.

Conversely, most PBT and iBT students had experienced the whole TOEFL preparation process and therefore could identify negative points about CESL’s courses and about the TOEFL itself. Their familiarity with the test’s format and timing rendered their needs different from those of novice TOEFL-takers. Consequently, PBT and iBT students were frustrated with their courses’ focus on TOEFL’s structure, lack of individual instruction as compared to their previous courses and the inapplicability of classroom activities for their
language level and ELL goals. In conclusion, this interpretation ascertains a trajectory in students’ experiences and evaluations of TOEFL’s ‘washback to the learners’ from positive to negative, depending on the English improvement students needed before taking TOEFL and on prior TOEFL preparation experience.

5.3 Student confusion about useful TOEFL preparation

Participating students consistently recommended both practice exercises and authentic activities as most useful for their TOEFL preparation. Without decrying the practice exercise regimen from TOEFL textbooks as harmful for their learning, the more experienced TOEFL students (PBT and iBT) did indicate that the TOEFL preparation process could include authentic activities to better meet their learner needs. This discrepancy exposed students’ uncertainty about what TOEFL preparation could involve for their ELL. In other words, because washback narrowed the focus, materials and learning strategies of TOEFL courses, students were unclear as to how much TOEFL preparation and communicative ELL could have in common.

This irresolution in students’ responses already surfaced in the scant research on student perspectives on washback. For instance, Wall and Horák (2006) found that TOEFL students named practice exercises as the best preparation for achieving their concentrated goal of passing TOEFL; whereas Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) found that participating TOEFL students recommended interactive, learner-centred TOEFL preparation over pre-determined TOEFL practice exercise routines. While many TOEFL teachers and students ascribe to practice exercises’ merit for TOEFL preparation, research has not proven whether these exercises aid or reduce students’ learning and/or scores, despite several studies’ exposing that high-stakes test-preparation courses could include a variety of more interactive activities than practice exercises without reducing students’ scores (Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Read & Hayes, 2004). Therefore, the positions of practice exercises and authentic activities in
relation to students’ ELL in TOEFL preparation courses must continue to be clarified through research reflecting all stakeholders’ perspectives.

5.4 Student perceptions about meeting their own learner needs

Furthermore, participating students drew particular attention to their agency in effecting washback on their learning. Their repeated emphasis on their motivation, active engagement and assertiveness suggested that these students did not see themselves as passive victims of the powerful TOEFL test. On the contrary, students’ responses revealed that they appropriated a decisive role for themselves, in rendering the test and its preparation useful for their learner needs. Because students’ individual ‘investment’ appeared so consistently in the triangulated data, then, this study’s findings provide evidence that students contribute substantially to ‘washback to learners.’ That is, ‘washback to learners’ can mean washback which learners negotiate through their investment in TOEFL preparation and ELL within their ESL environment. Consequently, even if other causes of washback (e.g. teacher’s education and methodology, test aims, test administration or parental interference) are neutralized, students’ agency must be accounted for in order to facilitate useful TOEFL preparation processes that meet learner needs. The extent and ways in which students’ agency shapes washback on their learning necessitate further investigation.

5.5 Previous research predictions corroborated

Three interpretations of students’ responses matched attested washback research findings. First, this study’s descriptions confirmed the significant role which teachers play in students’ experiences and evaluations of washback in high-stakes, test-preparation classrooms (e.g. Cheng, 1997; Read & Hayes, 2004; Spratt, 2005). A desire for more individualized instruction and interaction with their teacher in TOEFL preparation classes was especially expressed by participating students in Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ (1996) study. Similarly, participating students in the present study reported that teachers could
effect positive washback for students by avoiding excessive teacher-talk, encouraging students to articulate their needs and addressing students’ individual problems regarding TOEFL questions or skills. Overall, then, teachers’ and students’ interactions in TOEFL preparation classrooms are crucial for effecting positive and negative washback to the learners from student perspectives.

Also predicted by similar research, students were not as focused on their ELL needs as on their TOEFL scores (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Andrews et al., 2002; Qi, 2005; Wall & Horák, 2006). Hence, students from all three TOEFL courses characterized their primary need for test preparation to be “something useful for the TOEFL” – that is, for their test scores. This precise focus was caused, in part, because students’ TOEFL scores were of such import to their futures, and many had scholarships and careers hanging in the balance of their TOEFL performance. What is more, the contextual factor of being able to simultaneously take other courses to improve English language skills facilitated students’ adopting this single-minded perspective, as Read and Hayes (2004) found for participating students in their IELTS study.

The final point corroborated by previous research was that participating students’ experiences and evaluations of TOEFL’s washback on their learning were widely varied, often conflicting and dependent on students’ educational and personal biases (Cheng, et al., 2004; Bailey, 1999; Spratt, 2005; Wall & Horák, 2006). Smaller groups of students and additional interviews in future studies may be able to elucidate these contributing factors’ specific effects on student perspectives for TOEFL’s washback. Nonetheless, the present study’s findings reinforce that understanding washback is highly complex for more than even one student at a time.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Overview of this study

To investigate student perspectives on ‘washback to the learners,’ the researcher focused on a small participant group in a specific ESL context, using research questions that explored how useful TOEFL preparation was for students’ ELL and how effective TOEFL courses were at meeting learner needs. Students’ opinions were verified through supplementary data from the TOEFL teachers and researcher’s classroom observations. Findings indicated that TOEFL’s washback on students’ learning left them doubtful as to whether TOEFL preparation and ELL were simultaneous or contradictory processes. The pressure students were under to achieve a certain TOEFL score, their previous TOEFL experience and differing language levels also contributed to their perceptions of positive and negative washback in their TOEFL preparation courses. Moreover, contextual factors, such as TOEFL teachers’ interaction with students, student investment in their learning and student biases functioned as effectors of washback for students in this context.

6.2 Pedagogical implications

As such, this study’s findings provided viable implications for TOEFL teachers’ pedagogy, the first being that TOEFL teachers should avoid excessive explanations, while encouraging students to speak to each other and dialogue with the teacher during classes. Participating students identified ways to facilitate this interaction through the teacher’s involving students in choosing helpful TOEFL preparation activities and promoting discussions about TOEFL answers and questions.

Another pedagogical implication is that TOEFL preparation courses could be structured to include as few students of similar English competencies as possible and to meet
as frequently as possible. This reflects complaints from CESL students that their TOEFL teachers’ pedagogy was ‘too slow’ and that they wanted more intense TOEFL preparation. While the practicality of this implication depends upon capabilities, funds and teachers in a given setting, participating students’ recommendations can be taken into consideration or even partially implemented in structuring TOEFL courses, so as to mediate negative washback to the learners.

Additionally, this study aids TOEFL teachers in understanding how TOEFL preparation courses can better meet learner needs. As in any English teaching situation, this study’s findings highlighted the need for teachers to diligently assess their students’ specific ELL needs and to structure the class content around these. Such an application of this study’s findings can reduce some negative washback TOEFL students experience due to repetitive, pre-set activities common in TOEFL courses. Not only that, but including students’ opinions about preparation activities and addressing their ‘investment’ in ELL/TOEFL directly in class will also facilitate their agency in a process which tends to be arbitrary (McNamara, 1998; Peirce, 1995; Qi, 2005).

Lastly, because of this study’s direct elicitation of students’ evaluations of TOEFL’s washback and TOEFL teachers’ ability to access TOEFL students, TOEFL teachers could use this study’s methods (and abbreviate its analysis techniques) to investigate their own contexts. Replicating this study could give a straightforward gauge of a TOEFL teacher’s effectiveness and what appropriate pedagogy meant according to his or her students.

Nonetheless, there are several qualifications for TOEFL teachers’ using the present study. That is, students’ responses for this and similar studies should be understood with the realization that TOEFL’s washback affects not only what learners learn but also their attitudes toward ELL (Alderson & Wall, 1993). For example, students’ assessment of their classroom activities’ ‘usefulness’ may have been shaped by washback-induced thinking that
‘useful TOEFL preparation’ must mean ‘learning TOEFL skills.’ In other words, because washback from high-stakes tests has led to separate ‘cultures of learning’ for test-preparation courses, students’ perceptions about washback on their learning are often seen through lenses tainted already by washback.

Another limitation for teachers’ applying this study stems from Alderson and Wall’s (1993) washback hypothesis that “tests will have washback effects for some learners…but not for others” (p.121). So, just as this study’s TOEFL students perceived varying levels of washback in the research context, similar studies’ findings may apply to some of the participating students but not to others.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

The baseline research suggestion from this exploratory study is to replicate its systematic collection of student perspectives on TOEFL’s ‘washback to the learners’ in similar scenarios. While findings will certainly vary based on the context and availability of individual TOEFL students, the feasibility and findings from this study’s methods ought to be challenged by washback researchers. Furthermore, such repetitions can lay the groundwork for students’ validated inclusion in the previously under-developed examination of student perspectives on washback (Bailey, 1999; Spratt, 2005; Wall, 2000).

Suggestions for future replications include a more ethnographic, longitudinal approach to data collection – namely, that fewer students be asked to participate in the study; that group interviews of only four or five students be held thrice during the students’ TOEFL course, rather than only once; and that the researcher be a ‘moderate observer’ over several sessions of TOEFL preparation to provide more reliable, contextual and learner-centred information (Lynch, 1996). Regarding the surveys, if a teacher conducts the research, obtaining results will likely be easier than a researcher’s attempt. Still, this data collection instrument should be used only as it provides statistically significant results, depending on
the number of participants. These changes in methodology would add nuance and substantiation to the current findings, validating the study’s understanding of washback to learners.

Based on this study’s findings, washback researchers should also examine what the inclusion of authentic, interactive activities (albeit, still centred on TOEFL constructs), along with TOEFL practice exercises, in textbooks/classroom activities would change, if anything, for ‘washback to products’ (what students learn/learning quality) and ‘washback to learners’ in ESL contexts. This study’s findings would predict that a combination of both types of activities would have a positive effect for students’ ELL and TOEFL scores. According to participating students’ responses, this variety would also alleviate some negative aspects of ‘washback to the learners’ as described by them – such as TOEFL classes’ being “boring,” full of teacher-talk, not interactive and “useless” for their future English use.

6.4 Limitations

To further identify how this study might inform future washback research, its limitations regarding credibility and transferability must be acknowledged. Two data collection instruments and analysis methods will be reviewed to illustrate credibility and transferability. It should be noted that credibility for this study depended not its measuring objective truth but on the representativeness of its in-depth interpretation of the participants’ “realities” (Lynch, 1996, p. 56). Similarly, the methods’ and findings’ transferability depended, not upon the number of institutions and students investigated, but on its internal generalizability (Silverman, 2000).

6.4.1 Credibility

The two primary data collection instruments had weaknesses in terms of credibility. The surveys’ drawbacks sprang from the open-ended amount of time students had to complete the surveys, afforded by the researcher’s desire to avoid pressured responses.
Another issue was literacy – students may have misunderstood an item or felt intimidated by the language, causing them to choose certain answers or to not complete the survey (Dörnyei, 2005; Lynch, 1996). Also, students’ many pressures and constraints on their time may have hampered even the few responses that were given. Difficulties in eliciting reflective, written information for research from students preparing for a high-stakes test has also been a limitation in similar studies (e.g. Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Read & Hayes, 2004; Wall & Horák, 2006).

The interviews had fewer credibility issues than the surveys. One problem, though, was that since students were interviewed with their peers, they may have been influenced to make or refrain from making certain comments, especially regarding their teachers. Also, because interview questions were pre-determined, students may have been unable to express aspects of washback’s effects on them which were not covered by the interview questions (Silverman, 2000).

Due to the variance and amount of interview data, the descriptive categorization of students’ responses risked bias and imprecision. To counter this credibility issue, the researcher thoroughly scrutinized the interview data for those responses which were most supportable and representative of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Likewise, as Lynch (1996) suggested, the choice to analyse students’ responses by course was made only after exploring other options. Had the supplementary data been analysed more fastidiously or the participants’ responses been examined as a whole, the findings may have been different, than with the chosen method of analysis. However, triangulating the present analysis of student interviews with the supplementary data minimized bias from the students’ responses (Lynch 1996).
6.4.2 Transferability

This study’s transferability is debatable, as it describes the complex manifestations of washback according to students’ individually complicated situations in a specific location. The small number of participants necessarily limits its transferability as well, although Wall and Horák’s (2006 and 2008a) TOEFL impact study has set the precedent for qualitatively examining a few participants’ reports of TOEFL’s washback. Still, this study does not claim to have enacted a fireproof methodology for understanding all TOEFL students’ evaluations of washback on their learning, nor can its findings be applied in EFL contexts.

Furthermore, as Wall and Horák (2006) experienced, transferring this study’s methods will be hampered by the present researcher’s having to be “selective” in how she collected and analysed students’ evaluations of washback, to accommodate time and space constraints at the research site and within her own circumstances (p. 21). This limitation depends on the research context, but will inevitably influence replications of this study, as researchers must be flexible and practical with their projects’ designs.

However, this study’s findings can indicate similar trends for other TOEFL preparation classrooms on a case-by-case basis because of its internal generalization (Lynch, 1996; Mason, 1996). Internal generalization was achieved through the triangulated interpretation of the data and careful description given of the context in which the students were operating (Lynch, 1996). The researcher also attempted to provide a scrupulous representation of the research and its interpretations so as to maximize the accuracy of any transfer attempts. Nonetheless, applications of this study’s findings would still depend on a conscientious transfer (Lynch, 1996).

6.5 Concluding remarks

Summarily, this investigation of a local instance of ‘washback to the learners,’ as described by participating students, contributes to the understanding of washback as a
multifaceted, unpredictable phenomenon. Particularly, the present study’s findings regarding TOEFL student perspectives grant it both a pertinent and precursory place within the body of washback research. Nevertheless, TOEFL’s washback effects on students’ learning processes must continue to be investigated from all stakeholder perspectives in order to engender useful TOEFL preparation experiences for students’ ELL.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

Questions for TOEFL Student Interview

Hello! Remember the group interview Jessica talked about a few days ago? These are the questions Jessica will be asking you all as a group on the day of your interview next week. Please read over these questions and begin thinking about what your answers might be before your group interview with Jessica.

To remind you, this interview will be recorded from beginning to end during your regular class time for purposes of analysis. None of your names or personal information will be disclosed in Jessica’s thesis.

If you have any problems understanding these questions, please email Jessica (Jessica.reynolds1@uqconnect.edu.au) and she will explain further. You will be given another copy of these questions on the day of the interview.

1. Using one word, how do you feel about the course so far (positive, negative, confident, unsure, etc)?

2. What about preparing for the TOEFL is frustrating/helpful for your long-term English language learning process? Please explain.

3. What about preparing for the TOEFL is frustrating/helpful for your short-term English language learning process? Please explain.

4. What are some useful preparation activities that you do in this course for the TOEFL?

5. What suggestions would you give to help this course better prepare students for the TOEFL?

6. What TOEFL preparation activities would you focus on in the TOEFL Track courses if you were the teacher?

7. Are you involved and engaged in TOEFL preparation activities? Please explain.

8. What is your primary activity during your TOEFL course? How do you feel about this activity?

9. How much time do you spend interacting with your classmates and teacher in this course as opposed to your morning courses (more, less, the same)? Why do you think this is so?

10. Do you feel that your involvement in learning during this TOEFL preparation course is active or passive? Why do you feel this way?
11. Would it affect your TOEFL preparation and scores if there were a variety of test-preparation activities used to meet your individual needs?

12. Would it affect your future English use if there were a variety of test-preparation activities used to meet your individual needs?
Appendix B

Student Survey

TOEFL STUDENT SURVEY

*None of this information will be used for any other purpose than that of the research project. All answers will be kept anonymous and confidential. Your name is requested so that your answers may be withdrawn from the data, if you cease participating in this project.

Participant Name: __________________________________________

Instructions:
Put a tick (√) next to the description that most appropriately represents your feelings and experiences. There is NO CORRECT ANSWER to these questions. If you have any problems with meanings of words or the questions themselves, please ask or email Jessica.

Feelings about and Familiarity with TOEFL:

1) I am excited to prepare for the TOEFL.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

2) I am familiar with the TOEFL.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

3) TOEFL preparation courses like the ones offered by the CESL Center are necessary for me to get high marks on the TOEFL exam.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree
4) A high TOEFL score is essential for my future.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

5) Studying for the TOEFL is stressful for me

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

6) Have you previously taken a TOEFL preparation course at the CESL Center or somewhere else?

[ ] Yes
[ ] No

Please list any TOEFL preparation courses you have taken in the space below.
_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________

Experiences in the TOEFL Preparation Process:

7) If you answered “Yes” to Question 6, please provide the following information: I am familiar with how to prepare for the TOEFL.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

Please describe your experience of preparing for the TOEFL in the past:
_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________
8) Most students prepare for the TOEFL by doing practice exercises.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

9) Doing practice exercises from TOEFL textbooks is the best TOEFL preparation strategy.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

10) Students interact more with other students in a TOEFL preparation classroom than in an English conversation class or grammar class.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

11) Students interact more with their teacher in a TOEFL preparation classroom than in an English conversation class or grammar class.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

12) TOEFL preparation is useful for increasing students’ English fluency for English communication at the university.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

13) TOEFL preparation is useful for students’ long-term English language use.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree
Opinions about CESL’s TOEFL Preparation Process:

14) I feel confident this TOEFL course is preparing me for the TOEFL.
   [ ] Strongly disagree
   [ ] Disagree
   [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   [ ] Agree
   [ ] Strongly agree

15) I think that this course is mentally difficult.
   [ ] Strongly disagree
   [ ] Disagree
   [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   [ ] Agree
   [ ] Strongly agree

16) In this course, students discuss with the teacher about how they prefer to prepare for the TOEFL.
   [ ] Strongly disagree
   [ ] Disagree
   [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   [ ] Agree
   [ ] Strongly agree

17) In this course, students can interact with each other in class to complete the material assigned by the teacher.
   [ ] Strongly disagree
   [ ] Disagree
   [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   [ ] Agree
   [ ] Strongly agree

18) Students can talk to the teacher during class about their needs and problems with English learning.
   [ ] Strongly disagree
   [ ] Disagree
   [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   [ ] Agree
   [ ] Strongly agree
Learning Preferences for TOEFL Preparation:

19) I know what activities will help me to prepare best for the TOEFL exam.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

If you know what activities would best prepare you for the TOEFL exam, please list them below:

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

20) I would like for TOEFL preparation activities to reflect my learning needs.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

21) I want to help my teacher choose what activities will be best for preparing our class for the TOEFL exam.

[ ] Strongly disagree
[ ] Disagree
[ ] Neither agree nor disagree
[ ] Agree
[ ] Strongly agree

Please provide any other relevant information or comments, if you wish:
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Teacher Interview Notes

Location: Classroom, CESL Center
Teachers: Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3
Length: One Hour
Date: 1/20/10

Logistical Details

1) Times and Locations and Numbers of Students in Classes
   Teacher 1; Pre-PBT Prep; 1-2 M-R; 7 students
   Teacher 2; PBT; 1-3 M-R; 11 students
   Teacher 3; iBT; 1-3 M-R; 12 students

2) Best Time to Introduce the Project (This Week If Possible); Best Time to Collect Consent Forms
   First week of class for Teacher 3
   Second week of class for Teachers 2 and 1
   Any time for observations

3) Classroom Observations (Best Times/Format and Teachers’ Thoughts)
   Any time for observations
   Each class will be observed during three class periods

4) Recommendations for surveys’ distribution and collection (digital or hard copy; can I leave a box?)
   Hard copy would be better for survey, but can use digital if necessary.
   Yes, leave a box for consent forms and surveys; can also collect them from students individually.
   Email surveys to students who don’t turn them in before researcher leaves

5) Discuss Interview
   Will be in regular classes during the fourth week of class (February – the 17th and 18th)
   Will spend one hour with each class and will distribute the questions the week before the interviews.
   Teachers will take students who are not participating outside of class to do another activity.

6) What would teachers recommend as far as the group interviews?
   Teachers recommend that researcher attempt to ask some questions directly to those who are shy and quiet because these students will not answer unless specifically asked.
   Teachers think interviews should be conducted during class time as more students will be there.
7) Would you be interested in the results of this project? May I send them to you via email?
Yes, all are interested in receiving the results

TOEFL Course Requirements

8) What is the score which students have to make to get into TOEFL courses?
TOEFL students are supposed to have a PBT TOEFL score of 450 but CESL does not always require students to have this score before allowing them in the TOEFL courses.

9) What is the TOEFL score which students have to make to be admitted into the University of Oklahoma?
The University of Oklahoma requires that for any level of study a student make a TOEFL PBT score of 500 or a TOEFL iBT score of 61, plus complete two sessions at CESL. For post-graduate students, a GRE (Graduate Record Examination) and/or GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test) score is often required, depending on the academic field. A TOEFL PBT score of 550 or an iBT score of 79 allows students to directly enter the university without attending CESL.

TOEFL Teachers’ Experiences

10) What are your attitudes and feelings about being TOEFL preparation teachers?
There is lots of pressure for those teaching TOEFL classes – often students will lose their scholarships if they don’t pass TOEFL. Students are sometimes motivated to study for this test, but teachers feel they cannot motivate students if their own attitudes are to be unmotivated.

Teachers say they feel they work for a college-prep institute – to get students ready for studying at OU. That is, they are teaching studying skills, reading and critical thinking along with TOEFL. This is frustrating because teachers cannot both teach for TOEFL and prepare students for university studies.

Teachers are also frustrated that PBT is still being taken over the more communicative, integrated iBT test. Teachers think this is for monetary reasons – OU gets more money from PBT than iBT. They would rather teach for a more communicative, integrated test such as iBT or IELTS.

Teachers feel frustrated with lack of communication between OU and CESL Center. They also feel frustrated because the English classes that these students will take once they enter university (EAP-type courses), instead of native speaker students’ Composition 1, are often a repeat of what they are teaching students at the CESL Center. Teachers wish they could collaborate with English teachers at OU more to help students transition more quickly into their OU experience with maximum benefit to their English proficiency.

Although students are supposed to have a 450 on the TOEFL before enrolling in a TOEFL class, many will want to enrol anyway and teachers feel that they have to
accommodate these students. The problem with this is that teachers teach to these weaker students’ level, making students of a higher level bored sometimes.

11) Do you teach other classes at the CESL Center? How does that affect your teaching TOEFL courses?

   Yes, all of them do, which makes too much focus on their TOEFL classes impossible. On the other hand, students really need/want the TOEFL to be taught because it is crucial to their time at OU. So then, teachers are often overloaded with work, and giving individual attention is difficult. Teachers say it is up to students to do outside work (practice tests; go over correct answers) at home.

   Teacher 1’s class was actually split because there were so many students who wanted to take her writing (blog) class this session, but there was still a need for a third TOEFL course. So she is offering a Pre-PBT class for one hour a day for those students whose English is not quite ready for the regular PBT class. However, some students in this class are ready to prepare for the PBT, but there was not enough room for them in the regular PBT classes, so they are in Teacher 1’s PBT-prep class for one hour.

   Overall, teachers find it difficult to get a clear picture from students of which classes they really want to be in at first. Students are allowed to pick which classes they think would be best for them, with teachers’ advice in mind. So the first month or so of class often sees many fluctuations in class size and faces. Sometimes, students will pick the wrong classes or be unsure of which ones they need.

12) What is/are the typical methodology and materials you use as TOEFL teachers?

   Teachers encourage students to read academic articles outside of class and watch movies and interact with native English speakers to improve their English for TOEFL. Teachers’ focus in class, though, is more strictly on practicing the tests’ components through example exercises. More authentic practice can happen in other classes and outside of class.

   The main skills teachers feel they must help students improve upon are TOEFL vocabulary and listening. Therefore they also focus on teaching active listening. Teachers speak a lot to give students practice listening. However, teachers say when they talk a lot in class they are not sure what some students understand. They try to get students to talk, but often materials (practice exercises) and personalities of students interfere.

Teachers’ Observations about TOEFL Students

13) What are the ages/backgrounds of a typical TOEFL student at the CESL Center?

Most are between 18 and 25 (for undergraduate and masters) but some doctoral students are in their 30s and 40s. Students are from all kinds of countries – Saudi Arabia, Libya, Tunisia, China, Taiwan, Korea, Columbia, Chile, Venezuela, Kuwait, Italy and Czech Republic. Some are shy and others are very gregarious; each class is different and all have different language levels.
14) What are your perceptions about TOEFL students’ attitudes toward preparing for the TOEFL?

Most TOEFL students are under a lot of pressure. That is they will lose scholarships if they don’t pass TOEFL and are spending lots of money to be at CESL. Many have families in home countries that they are hoping to support through their degree at OU. Nonetheless, some students struggle to attend/be on time. Teachers think this may be due to cultural differences or other external factors. While many are motivated, others feel like they are wasting their time because TOEFL material doesn’t relate to their fields. Teachers are not sure if there is a relationship between this discontent and students’ frequent tardiness and absence to TOEFL classes. Also these classes are after lunch; so it is hard to be motivated to come.

In general, CESL students want their classes to teach something directly useful for them, even if they feel the TOEFL itself is not useful. They know they have to pass the exam. Students didn’t like literature class offered by a Master’s student in English Literature from OU because it wasn’t directly useful to them.

Many students also don’t take advantage of using English outside the classroom. They are afraid to or only stay with and interact with people who speak their native language.

15) How would you describe students’ English language level as it relates to the TOEFL?

It is highly varied. Each session is different; some students are very good and ready to move on to OU immediately. Others have almost no English skills and only a few months to get the 500 on the TOEFL that they need. There is a lot of pressure on the teachers to raise scores of these students. Many students do not know how to study for TOEFL either. So a lot of teachers’ work becomes teaching students how to study for TOEFL. For this session, less-proficient students will be placed in the Pre-PBT course while the more proficient students will be encouraged to take the iBT or PBT course, depending on their preferences and needs.

Students are not always as motivated to become fluent in English as one might think; some are highly motivated, others just stay among speakers of their own native languages and rarely speak English outside of the CESL Center. This makes it difficult for teachers to know if they should allow students to speak their native languages to each other in class and if they are communicating with students at all.
Appendix D*

Field Notes from Classroom Observations

Topics from Informal Field Notes 1*

TOEFL Pre-PBT Preparation Course
Teacher 1
1-2 M-R
7 Students – Saudi Arabian, Kuwaiti, Chinese, Libyan and Czech
T = Teacher 1

Teacher’s Teaching Style:
• T explained the ‘tricks’ of the PBT and encouraged students that they could do well on this test.
• T spoke loudly and clearly.
• T stood in front of the class and walked up and down slowly as she talked.

Teacher’s Instructions to Students about PBT:
• T discussed question types on PBT with students explicitly along with their meanings – e.g. What can you infer? What does it imply? What does it mean? What has he assumed?
• T told students to pay attention to the ‘tricks’ of the PBT that she pointed out – synonyms, similar sounding words (e.g. graduation/gradually; add/put in more), and negative-comparative statements (I couldn’t be happier today).
• T emphasized the meaning of words.
• T often explained why answers to the PBT sections were correct from the test developer’s point of view.
• T encouraged students to listen more outside of class.
• T often reminded students to ‘be fast’ in deciding answers on the TOEFL.

Typical Class Structure:
• Each day, the T had students focus on a section from the PBT or gave a vocabulary quiz on words she had identified to students as ‘common’ on the PBT.
• Students would do practice exercises for that section and then review the correct answers.
• As the class was only one hour long, T and students often could not simulate and review a whole practice exercise from the PBT in that amount of time; so rushing often happened at the class’s end.

Teacher’s Explanation to Students of How the Pre-PBT Course Will Be Useful:
• T emphasized that students should use their grammar course in the morning as the time to work out the grammar problem they had, not the Pre-PBT course. She said this course needed to be focused on the test structure, questions and ‘tricks.’
• T emphasized vocabulary as being important for students to succeed on TOEFL.
• T often told students to ask her if they had any questions because this would be how they learned.
• T drew students’ attention to ‘tricks’ of the TOEFL where students might be tempted to choose an incorrect answer. This was a frequent reason behind her explanations of answers.
Teacher-Led Interaction in the Classroom:

- Depending on the time, T asked students to provide the correct answers for the practice exercises.
- If there was not enough time, she called out the correct answers and students checked their own papers as she did so.
- If time allowed, T elicited further explanation of why an answer was correct from students or gave it herself.
- T did not ask specific students to answer, but allowed whoever answered first to call out the correct answer. Hence, only a few students participated in giving correct answers.
- When T asked for examples from students (for example, of a grammar concept), most of the time, she did not wait for students’ to respond but offered the examples herself.

Observations about Pre-PBT Students’ Behaviours in Their Classroom:

- These students did not talk very much
- As Teacher 1 had mentioned, many of them had never taken the TOEFL or studied for it before.
- Students’ interactions typically consisted of offering one-word correct answers (A, B, C, D) and the meaning of words at the T’s request.
- Some students nodded and responded to what T said, but some were neither participating nor looking at their practice test.
- Students rarely talked to each other in this class.
- Students talked more often as the session progressed, and began interacting with the T more, offering answers and responding to T’s promptings.
- Students asked questions about meanings of words, but none of them questioned the correct answer or ask why another answer might have been correct.
- One student did ask about WHY an answer was correct in one class, and T satisfactorily answered.

*Observation schedule derived from Wall and Horák, Appendix J (2006, pp. 170-178)
Topics from Informal Field Notes 2*

TOEFL PBT Preparation Course
Teacher 2
1-3 M-R
11 students – Mostly native Mandarin speakers (from China or Taiwan); Saudi Arabian, Kuwaiti
T = Teacher 2

Teacher’s Teaching Style:
• T was laid back about teaching, allowing interruptions or tangents during class time.
• T was energetic, laughing and joking with the students throughout the class.
• T would always explain at length WHY something was true/correct.

Teacher’s Instructions to Students about PBT:
• T emphasized intuition as a big part of TOEFL.
• T acknowledged often that PBT answers were confusing.
• T asked students if they understood an answer many times before moving on to the next question.
• After completing a practice exercise, T had students read the questions and then provide their answers for discussion.
• T emphasized syntax, definitions of words and pronunciation in corrections of students’ answers.

Typical Class Structure:
• T was not rigorous about silence or structure in the class. Students could talk amongst themselves and move in and out of the classroom as they needed.
• T would ask students what portion of the PBT they would like to practice for that day and would have practice exercises prepared for students to complete.
• Students would simulate the PBT exercise and then the rest of the class time would be spent discussing the correct answers.
• Sometimes, T would provide students with additional instruction about some strategies for doing well on the TOEFL.
• The time of discussion was always a central activity in the class, as students and T wrestled with the questions, their opinions about the right answers and how they could understand the words that constituted the question.

Teacher’s Explanation to Students of How the PBT Course Will Be Useful:
• T emphasized that this class was what students would make of it.
• T emphasized that students had to be focused to succeed on the PBT.
• T emphasized that students must understand WHY answers were wrong or right.
• T reminded students to ask their grammar teacher from their morning class about problems they had with grammar since that was not his area of expertise.
• T shared once his own experience of studying for the TOEFL and passing it in order to study at university.
Teacher-Led Interaction in the Classroom:
- T often told students to stop him anytime they did not understand or agree.
- T asked students’ opinions about correct answers (for example, ‘why do you think this is correct and not this answer?’) and they responded most of the time.
- T sometimes sat down among the students as everyone offered opinions and answers freely about the practice exercise for the day.
- T often asked students to explain the meaning of a sentence they read that seemed difficult for them to pronounce.
- T encouraged quieter students to answer loudly and more often, asking them questions if they were not responding to his questions.
- T explained to students why their wrong answers were wrong.

Observations about PBT Students’ Behaviours in Their Classroom:
- Students read questions and offered answers individually every class. Every student talked at some point during each observed class.
- Some students were more proactive and confident about speaking than others; a few students rarely talked. T was proactive about eliciting interaction from these students.
- When students offered incorrect answers, they were not embarrassed and sometimes argued with T why their answer should be correct.
- Students discussed with one another if they disagreed on a correct answer and often would make comments about how crazy the PBT test developers based on an answer or a question they did not agree with.
- Students nodded and responded to the T most of the time but other times began talking to each other and not listening to the T.
- Student teased each other and their T; there was laughter every observed class.

*Observation schedule derived from Wall and Horák, Appendix J (2006, pp. 170-178)
Topics from Informal Field Notes 3*

TOEFL iBT Preparation Course
Teacher 3
1-3 M-R
12 students – Saudi Arabian, Tunisian, Chilean, Columbian, Chinese, Italian, Angolan
T = Teacher 3

Observation Notes about Teacher’s Style of Teaching:
• T was soft-spoken but firm in her directing of the class.
• T explained thoroughly every activity and correct answer.
• T enforced structure (timeliness and silence while she was speaking) in her classroom.
• T often asked students to reply to her questions in complete sentences.

Teacher’s Teaching Style:
• T gave detailed discussions of the sections from the iBT.
• T encouraged students to create a picture of what they were reading as they read. This would help comprehension and retention, she said.
• T de-emphasized skimming and scanning reading techniques, which were a popular test-preparation activity, because she wanted students to be able to read and understand FIRST, then learn to skim and scan, rather than vice versa.
• T emphasized paraphrasing and summarizing to help students comprehend and retain info as well as picking out the main points for the reading, listening and writing sections.
• T told students that they don’t have to know the meaning of every word, but to look around the word to infer its meaning.
• T emphasized the wording of the writing portions and what words signal a ‘compare and contrast.’
• Speaking sections were practiced by students in pairs which T assigned at the beginning of the course.

Typical Class Structure:
• T would explain how each section was administered (timing, note-taking, number of questions, etc) and what types of questions students should expect (compare, list main points, but NOT students’ own opinion).
• Students simulated, with a few ‘helps,’ (for example, the T gave students a transcription of listening section, which they would not have for the actual iBT), practice exercises from the iBT. These simulations were often done in pairs or groups as well.
• T and students spent the rest of class time going over the simulated exercise and discussing the right and wrong answers.
• When class reviewed the correct answers for an exercise, anyone could answer (one or two students tended to dominate).
• T explained correct answers at length.
• Integrated exercises for iBT were the most commonly practiced exercises, although some GMAT and GRE exercises were practiced too.
Teacher’s Explanation to Students of How the iBT Course Will Be Useful:
- T reminded students that iBT does not stress grammar like PBT classes do; so grammar would not be stressed as much in iBT class. But T reminded students that they had a grammar class in the morning which they should use to help them with any grammar issues.
- T promised to bring GRE and GMAT exercises in to the classroom to compliment the TOEFL exercises and prepare students for both tests, since many would take both (this never happened during researcher’s observations).
- T told students that there would be lots of integrated tasks and breaking down of tasks because she wanted to give students a ‘big picture’ of reading, writing and listening skills to students, not just TOEFL skills.

Teacher-Led Interaction in the Classroom:
- The practice exercises for the iBT sections were most often done in pairs or groups with discussion and/or comparing answers afterwards.
- T encouraged students to edit each other in discussions and writing, helping each other with common sentence problems.
- T encouraged students to be listening together actively – talking to each other about meanings – during practice listening exercises.
- T emphasized working together to complete the integrated tasks.
- T asked students ‘why’ certain answers were correct, but did not always wait for students to respond. She did not ask why very often, compared to the other teachers.
- Speaking sections were practiced by students in pairs which T assigned at the beginning of the course.

Observations about iBT Students’ Behaviours in Their Classroom:
- Most of these students indicated in class that they had taken TOEFL iBT or PBT before and interacted confidently and often with the T and other students about past experiences with TOEFL.
- Some students responded to T’s prompts to interact with each other readily and talked for a long time.
- Other students rarely interacted and had to be encouraged to speak; their speech was halting and hard to follow.
- T had to often stop and ask these students if they understood her. The more proficient students sometimes elicited responses from these weaker students in discussions.
- When students performed integrated writing/listening/reading tasks with a partner, they were talkative with one another, helping each other complete the tasks.
- After T had been going over correct answers for a while, some students would begin drawing on their papers and looking out the windows. Only one or two students would usually continue to participate by giving correct answers. The rest just sat and listened or talked quietly amongst themselves.
- While T was explaining or giving instructions, students listened quietly. But sometimes, some students would not pay close attention to what the T was saying and she had to ask for their attention.
- Many students were tardy to this class (it is after lunch), and the T reprimanded tardy student.

*Observation schedule derived from Wall and Horák, Appendix J (2006, pp. 170-178)
Appendix E

Transcriptions of Student Interviews

Transcription of Students’ Responses during Interview with Pre-PBT TOEFL Class*
Duration: 1 hour
Date: 17/2/10
Location: Regular Pre-PBT Classroom at the CESL Center
Number of Interviewees Present: 6
Gender of Interviewees: 3 females; 3 males
Age of Interviewees: Approximately 20-25
Interviewer: Jessica Reynolds
Indicator for Interviewee/Interviewer: IP/I

Question 1: Using one word, how do you feel about the course so far?

IP – Improving. Improving.

IP – Negative.

IP- I feel positive - positive (). Helpful.

Question 2: What about TOEFL preparation is frustrating/helpful for your long-term English language learning process?

IP - Yah, I think. I think because we learn here, uh, new vocabularies and it is good to me to understand more English and speak. uh more fluently and know words in English.

IP - It has helped me a lot. with vocabularies () and to talk with another people. to understand. () I feel like I use the vocabulary I learn here.

IP - I think so. it is helpful.

Question 3: What about TOEFL preparation is frustrating/helpful for your short-term English language learning process?

IP – Yes; because uh, [Teacher 1] (). uh worked to help us to understand what we need for TOEFL. what is in the book. she teaches us and shows us what we have to study this (). why you have to study this subject. now we have to study this subject so that when you go to university you know what to do.

IP - Yah, I think so. the class material helps me understand what I’ll need for TOEFL. the main things in TOEFL.

IP – I agree with them.
Question 4: What are some useful preparation activities that you do in this course for the TOEFL?

IP - Practice tests. yah, I think its uh helpful. because they help me be more familiar with the TOEFL exam. I think to get familiar with the TOEFL test. I never been in TOEFL test before. so maybe, I don’t know exactly but maybe it’s the same so I get the impression of the TOEFL test.

IP - This course provides to me organization and some helping idea of what to do. so I’m not so scared what to do in the TOEFL.

IP - Exercises; in the books; [!!!!] have a lot of good exercises. I think the same mistake usually come in the TOEFL test () and more the same similar. and it reveal it. example exercises from TOEFL in our books that give us an example, the same. see the pattern.

IP – Practice more. the uh skills. that used on the TOEFL.

Question 5: What suggestions would you give to help this course better prepare students for the TOEFL?

IP - Lots of things.

IP - I think it is totally different in China. in China, they don’t take lots of practice test. just they teach, for example, it’s listening. what’s the skill for this, this, uh, this part of the question. and just what’s the skill about another part of the question. focus on different types of questions. and how to deal with this question. here, it’s practice more but the time is less. here I think the time is too short.

IP - Separate the TOEFL test. you have the three parts. the listening, the grammar, and reading. we should work one week step by step just for listening and know all the things about the listening. because the students we do listening step by step until the time is up and then tomorrow we can’t do the listening. next day, wanna do the grammar. I forgot the listening. I wanna do all the weeks just for listening. this help me a lot. then use. this uh, this synonym, this antonym, this this. these can then come together. then these weeks for grammar. just for the grammar. then for reading. and then I want the teacher give me advice for the reading because the part of the reading is hard time for the international student. she or he gave me advice but we don’t have time to read all the passage or essay. just focus on topic or () on this question. and we can’t answer for that questions. we just did part of the task.

IP - I think what I want in class is should taught skills more and practice less. because practice is. I think shouldn’t practice in class. maybe after class I can do it by myself.

I – You mean practice tests?

IP - Yah practice tests. you know practice test and if we has some questions we can ask in class. but if uh in class practice test, I think little bit of waste.

I – What would you rather do in this class?
IP - For example, we can talk about skills – listening skills, what we should do with this question. and just give us two or three example and uh. this is good, I think.

I – Does anyone want nothing to change about how they are being prepared for TOEFL? Anyone else have something they would like changed?

IP - I think this is perfect and uh. () it’s helpful with the new vocabulary. it’s helpful.

I- The vocabulary seems very helpful for you all; how do you learn new vocabulary here?

IP – In China, we have books and memorize the words a lot

IP - First time, I think uh. the teacher gives me essays and I pick out the vocabularies which I don’t know and I try to, to memorize it and know what’s meaning and use it and then [Teacher 1] gives us some vocabularies and how to use it in the sentences and something like that. I don’t remember anything but I try.

IP - This vocabulary – maybe after two years I can’t use it (). TOEFL has words – they love this word, this common word to use ().

Question 6: What TOEFL preparation activities would you focus on in the TOEFL track classes if you were the teacher?

IP - Grammar – because the focus is on the grammar but (). because there is some rule in the grammar but we don’t use it when speak and this TOEFL test they love this. and uh, uh. for example verb or clause. when I study in the book. hahaha, () I see some, some sentence and I try to use it with a native language user and they say, “what do mean”. they say, “o you can’t – remove this word. you can’t. it’s a needless word. you can’t say this.”

IP - Reading essays.

I – What kind of essays?

IP – I don’t know! Haha! Just reading to understand the essays to be prepared for reading part of TOEFL test. and uh, this can improve the grammar too. because if you read a lot, you will find if it is logically or not logically. academic uh, yah academic reading.

IP - Study hard !!!

IP – I think vocabulary is important than other. and reading, reading. I don’t think uh grammar, uh. yah, it is necessary, but not than other.

IP - Watching movie. () watch movie. for listening.

I – What kind of movies?

IP - Movies about life. with lots of talking.
Question 7: Are you involved and engaged in TOEFL preparation activities? Please explain.

[laughter]
IP - I’m worried about my grade. [laughter] for my TOEFL. () I want to talk but then I think o::: why you would talk now?

IP - When I answer correct question and ask question, I feel happy.

Question 8: What is your primary activity during your TOEFL course? How do you feel about this activity?

IP – Exercises. from the books. Yah. and uh learn new vocabularies. listening (). first we have one day listening, then the other grammar and the other is reading. Vocabulary. repeat [!!!].

IP - Reading from the book. () improve the reading. then the grammar. like that. we have chance to answer ourselves and see our mistakes and see why I choose A why you didn’t choose B. () and so like for listening - questions with synonyms (). teacher teaches me why you should be this answer for this question. because they – sometimes. they give you the tricky. lots of the tricky. and you think o::: this is correct but no::: this is correct. and this make me tricky. and [Teacher 1] taught me about this. why you got this correct. why you didn’t choose this. so this book is very helpful.

I – do you do the TOEFL exercises in the same amount of time you would on the TOEFL?

IP - Yah, yah. the same. exactly the same. [!!!!]

I – second part of the question is restated

IP - I think they help me the take TOEFL but not so much. because I’m focused just for the pass the TOEFL. that’s it. so it’s helped me but not so much.

IP - I think it’s helpful for grammar only. but uh. it’s not helpful for speaking for being uh fluently speaking. some vocabulary we use and some vocabulary we will forget.

IP – Yes. these are helpful.

Question 9: How much time do you spend interacting with your classmates and teacher in this course as opposed to your morning courses? Why do you think this is so?

IP - No, it’s not. () it’s less. it’s TOEFL class.

IP – Less. we wishing it is more (). yes, we know uh about the answer and we can compare to each other; sometimes, () I have question and I can’t ask and my- . because I’m shy. yah, and I ask him [points to his classmate and pats him on the back] and I ask the question. I want to speak to him cause we can speak Arabic.

IP - Less time.

I – Why do you think that is?
IP - Cause in the other class, I. uh especially in the writing class. we uh speak a lot. we discuss a lot with my colleagues and the teacher. and here we do exercise and. just practice exercise.

I - Why do you think this is true that you have less interaction in the TOEFL class?

IP - No speaking on PBT, so we don’t speak in this class.

**Question 10: Do you feel that your involvement in learning during this TOEFL preparation course is active or passive? Why do you feel this way?**

IP - Get information to give it back out. Passive. Hahaha.

IP - I feel active, but I don’t trust myself. I don’t know, maybe. in a few weeks or months. I will uh trust myself. in general I feel less confident. before I arrived in Oklahoma, I was fluently speaking. yes but I had uh maybe six years? I didn’t speak English I didn’t use English and when I came here. I forgot most of my English.

IP - Active – ESPECIALLY in this class. uh, my English is not good now, but we, we will try. when I uh. Sorry. we uh do uh reading. when we choose. when I do correct answers, I trust myself. yah, I believe. and I don’t feel scared. especially, ESPECIALLY in class. not as much confidence at home.

**Question 11: Would it affect your TOEFL preparation and scores if there were a variety of test-preparation activities used to meet your individual needs?**

IP - This is a great thing for me, these books.** it’s really, really good. and the teacher gives me uh more skill. and this helps me out uh for the TOEFL, for the TOEFL to make me do well. this week () if we need to ask what is the big problem for you on the TOEFL. why is this a problem? I think it’s reading. the teacher should work with me. together. () with my classmate – this one – he knows about vocabulary and can help me. another’s reading may be very good. another listening; listening without the book. teacher can talk about anything and ask us for what she’s taking. and I’ll know this what she’s talking about this maybe confusing. but when I have to do it for the TOEFL, I am not relaxed and I can’t understand. () listening someone just talk will help my listening relax than just the TOEFL exercises from the book.

IP - I think the exercises in the book is ok. and teach me what TOEFL is like. and we cannot practice without these books, without uh. knowing the way the TOEFL. but I think we study something we don’t have to study.

IP- The exercise makes me uh. Nervous. but um, it’s ok because in TOEFL test I will feel more. it makes me ready for that.

**Question 12: Would it affect your future English use if there were a variety of test-preparation activities used to meet your individual needs?**

IP - Not so much. I don’t think so. [!!!]
IP - Just with the vocabulary.

IP - No, not very much.

IP - We are here and focusing to pass the TOEFL so we don’t care if there is something to help us then. we only focus to pass the TOEFL test. these activities will help me pass the TOEFL. [!!!]

*Key for Transcription Symbols

[] = brackets for overlapping speech
. = full stop for pauses and/or the end of thoughts
Yes::: = colons for the extension of a sound
Word = underlining for an emphasized word
WORD = capitals for a word with increased amplitude
!!! = all students make noise and agree with previous statement
wor- = hyphen for cut-off words
(words) or () = when audio was insufficient to transcribe or words transcribed were uncertain and represent researcher’s best guess
= (word) = one student interrupts another

**The books the student refers to are commercial textbooks which contain the practice TOEFL exercises that the students work through every day of class
Transcription of Student Responses during Interview with TOEFL PTB Class*

Duration: 45 minutes  
Date: 18/2/10  
Location: Regular PBT Classroom at the CESL Centre  
Number of Interviewees Present: 9  
Gender of Interviewees: 3 females; 6 males  
Age of Interviewees: Approximately 20-30  
Interviewer: Jessica Reynolds  
Indicator for Interviewee/Interviewer: IP/I

**Question 1: Using one word, how do you feel about the course so far?**

IP - Well, I’m. I feel comfortable. I se- I find this can course give me all that I need. because on the TOEFL you cannot get all that you need. but I think this is the best thing I can get for to prepare for the test.

IP - Before I take this uh course I was very, very (discouraged) when I did TOEFL test. but after this class I feel more confident because there is practice in listening or-

I – lots of practice

IP – yah.

IP – Happy. I like this course.

I – Because your teacher right?

IP - Yah [!!!]

IP - It’s good, but. . . I promise. hahaha (pause, seems like he doesn’t want to say something negative). TOEFL is hard for me.

**Question 2 – What about TOEFL preparation has been frustrating/helpful for your long-term English language learning process? Please explain**

IP - I think it’s more uh just for the TOEFL. yah, because a lot of things is very specific. also in grammar (). anywhere not really. it has difficult words. it has its own uh grammar. not used outside.

IP - The same for me. it’s just to pass the TOEFL. but it is good. we study, I think. well, I mean I said good because we cannot as I said you cannot get what you want. But. another thing is that it can help us with time. the time for this course. we need to study like five hours at least per day just for the TOEFL. but for the long term, no.

IP - I think it- it’s just for TOEFL. after college, I mean, to go to the college. it’s not useful. lots of time waste () and uh. lot of words that’s not really common in young people speaking. in many ways not useful. for TOEFL we practice grammars, reading and listening. how bout your talking, speaking. not helpful for that, just for TOEFL.

IP - It’s useful, yah. for everything.
Question 3 – What about TOEFL preparation has been frustrating/helpful for your short-term English language learning process? Please explain

IP - No I don’t think it will.

IP - Yah, we agree, uh sorry, I agree. it’s not gonna be helpful. because what we learn here you study just for the TOEFL. just for one thing. when you go to the OU for example, I go for engineering so there is a lot of stuff. I read about it and I have to get the knowledge about them. and I am sure I’m not going to use it. even sometimes I can find vocabularies when I say it no one can understand me because the people don’t use it. in the academic. yesterday we been in a lecture with a professor about English. and we said small things and he was like, what are you saying. he was professor 25 years.

I – He couldn’t understand you

IP – yah, he said no, this things is used in the English language like seven years ago, and we still use it and we have it in the TOEFL. so I think for the academic. for the short term, it’s not that helpful.

IP – It CAN be. it can help me improve the English skills and. somehow we can do more exercise to learn how to read the book in the futures. so.

IP – I don’t think it’s very useful. in short time for the TOEFL, yes.

Question 4: What are some useful preparation activities that you do in this course for the TOEFL?

IP – () Some grammar and listening. it can help us to prepare for the TOEFL test and at some point. uh make us not bored. because actually studying for the TOEFL is very boring.

IP – I think it’s only two points this course has helped me. the first thing, grammar. we need it. especially in this test. but even for the long term, you don’t need to use a lot of this aspect. because the grammar is something basic. the second thing is waking up early (). it’s the second thing.

IP – I can uh. study more knowledge about TOEFL. about the structure.

IP – Maybe the listening part and the reading part. because the listening part the Americans speak the pronunciation is very different from another country. so we need practice listening more and more and getting better. and the vocabulary isn’t very useful. () it’s not helpful for the sentence in the reading. for more practice and get better.

Question 5 – What suggestions would you give to help this course better prepare students for the TOEFL?

IP – I think the vocabulary.

IP – Also read about not just in class, in novels and books. read a lot. outside of class.
IP – The time in class it should not be four days in a week. we need at least five hours, six hours in a day. like, five or six days a week. yah because in this course we study only four days. yah, and only two hours so it’s not that much time because in TOEFL you need to accumulate all the information in a short time. because you can study for it. but when you get the weekend () you lose a lot of stuff.

IP – Just do some more practice. practice exercises from the TOEFL.

IP – And the other thing it’s um, if it’s possible, I don’t know. to go to the OU and be in a really class real classroom to work with the students and work with the professor. because that way it gives you the ability to understand people how they speaking naturally and how to make notes. and how to to get the ideas of the main topics of different subjects of the same lectures. I think it’s gonna be help. because you find yourself in serious situations and you don’t have time.

IP – I think we need more activity. with American students. most helpful. to understand the (voices) on the TOEFL. completely different.

IP – Just study like. study more like.

IP – Reading out of the books. practice for grammar, vocabulary.

**Question 6 – What TOEFL prep activities would you focus on in TOEFL Track courses if you were the teacher?**

IP – The first thing maybe. yah. watching the news. reading the um, the like the scientist magazines. or newspapers talking about something in science and trying to find movies or novels about the history of the American or even the history of the American language. cause probably they use a lot of new vocabularies. so these things gonna help you in reading and the news will help you out with listening really fast with a lot of vocabularies and specific terminologies, it’s really useful.

IP – Yah, similar.

I – What about the practice tests that you all do a lot of? Are they most helpful?

IP – Yah, so far.

IP – These practice tests are helpful.

I – Do all of you think that practice tests are the best thing to do in class to prepare for the TOEFL in class?

(lots of nods; but one student shakes his head in the negative)

IP – We don’t study because we need to learn. to be honest we need to pass the exam. that’s it.

IP – Maybe not. just for TOEFL. it’s enough. for your English, it’s not enough.
Question 7: Are you involved and engaged in the TOEFL preparation activities? Please explain.

IP - Yah, we daydream. [!!!]

IP - Too tired [!!!]

IP - Change the time for that.

IP – Give it one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon [another student repeats this].

IP - But one hours sometimes we cannot finish even one exercise. so we need at least two hours and a half in the morning. two hours in a half in the afternoon=

IP - =One hour in the morning for TOEFL and one hour in the afternoon [!!!]=

IP - =Two hours is not enough.

IP - Maybe listening is more exciting (). but about grammar…

Question 8: What is your primary activity during your TOEFL course? How do you feel about this activity?

IP - Well, every day is different.

IP – Practice exercises; just from TOEFL, we do different exercises. every day [!!!]

Question 9: How much time do you spend interacting with your classmates and teacher in this course as opposed to your morning courses? Why do you think this is so?

IP – More.
IP - More in this class.

IP – More.

I – More interaction with your teacher?

IP - Yah most of the time the teacher is talking with the students saying this is wrong. this is right. how to do this. trying to find something together. sometimes we fight together so. [laugh]

IP - Less than the morning class.

IP – I think in the morning class. because this is TOEFL class we must take more practice. so take more practice and uh the teacher has. uh give us the answer

IP - There are always sometimes some questions you chose the right answers. you do not know whys. and you do not want to ask why.
IP - Like all the times we do this actually, when we have the conversation, we ask why, but it depends on the students.

**Question 10: Do you feel that your involvement in learning during this TOEFL preparation course is active or passive? Why do you feel this way?**

IP - Not very active and not passive, actually in the middle. Sometimes we choose what uh we do. [Teacher 2] ask us what we want. Listening or grammar. But um, it’s more active than passive. We choose. If uh someone can have problem with some part of the TOEFL; we can ask about that.

IP - Yah we do this. Because every day before we start the class the teacher says, ok what do you want to study today, listening, reading, and we say what we need. What we need to practice on.

IP - Yah, he will explain uh some uh difficult problems on the board. To explain for us.

IP – This is a really good point. Cause if you hate the TOEFL, you are not prepared inside that you want to do this. Really, really, (attitude) it’s affect on me. I spend five months before I came here without even thinking to go to the TOEFL because I said, what’s the point. I was like preparing myself for a long time to go. Ok, I’m going to TOEFL class. Then I did.

IP – [Another student - I just translate] Uh uh, I think TOEFL has benefits. The benefits is I can improve my vocabulary. And I think this time if I pass and uh I go to university to study. I think it’s not useful.

IP - I think it’s active. Because just for the TOEFL, so, practice, pronunciation. And uh the, the new vocabulary. TOEFL vocabulary. So it’s passive. No it’s active. Learning these things. Just for the TOEFL.

IP - It’s active. Using it. I think it’s. It’s good for me.

**Question 11: Would it affect your TOEFL preparation and scores if there were a variety of test-preparation activities used to meet your individual needs?**

IP - Sure it help

IP - Not helpful for the TOEFL exam.

IP - And also the student when you give him something that is not exercise. Like a listens about the TOEFL, he will not going to study this. It’s an attitude in the student. He will get bored and he will say no I want exercise. I want, just know how what I will see there. I want just exercise that’s it. Because we had like here today, listen about the TOEFL techniques ok. Everyone was boring and they don’t want to do it because it’s not exercise. And this it cannot be in the exam itself. So if it’s not an exercise you don’t want to do it. Yah, you want to do something that you can see in TOEFL. That’s it. So you cannot bring in new techniques because the students they are not going to accept this.

IP – ()Yah all the group activities. Anything is good.
IP - No, the activity in the class. with a, with a small group. I think it’s better. just exercises for the test because uh the TOEFL, eh. is prepare us to do something like the grammar or the reading just.

IP - I think it’s good. understand the persons with others. something like this.

I – What about if I said in TOEFL class, “Ok, today we will watch a movie”

IP – Yes.

IP - Of course no [!!! students disagree; some saying yes or no]

IP - It’s good for listening [!!!]

IP - We are here to prepare for TOEFL test. not watch movie. that would waste time. you can see movie and practice English at home. not in TOEFL. you spend two hours in=

IP - =It’s good for listening=

IP - =I have a good idea for us. remove the TOEFL test. we don’t need it. Remove. IP - In my opinion, I think it’s unfair to make the TOEFL test for non-native speakers like us. and uh, it’s very difficult and very specific science like and uh for native speaker take this test, not pass. yah, because it’s very difficult. because I think these who put these questions, they don’t want us to pass it. think it’s. yah [!!!] yah, they make it very difficult. not something. the time is very short and the question (like medium) and very difficult. like, very new terms. science, geography or um. any kind of um science. and um. it’s very very difficult.

IP - ()We can’t have to come to the () country to develop a future for us. they don’t need to put something uh to drop us. like me I stay here maybe one year at CESL. and I have a scholarship. and after five months it will be DONE. I will go back to my country. I pass my time. I spend more of my time here. I have only one option.

IP - Spend time spend money.

IP - I think a test for all students to know the level for students and uh maybe take some course to improve English. it’s ok. but not make a difficult test [yah, yah] like TOEFL.

**Question 12: Would it affect your future English use if there were a variety of test-preparation activities used to meet your individual needs?**

IP - Variety, yah. ()

IP - All of these are bad. I’m wasting my time.

IP - Why I am here. why I want to study in OU. because for example, I am here for a master program. ask me my major. give me an exam where you can evaluate me in my major. () give me the opportunity to DO something, why you need to evaluate me in my English? They know the non-natives they don’t want to stay here. so they will educate
and go back to their country, give them the thing that they just came for, why they don’t do like a specific TOEFL exam, for each major, each college. [several agree]
Transcription of Student Responses during Interview with TOEFL iBT Class*
Duration: 1 hour
Date: 18/2/10
Location: Regular iBT Classroom at the CESL Center
Number of Interviewees Present: 8
Gender of Interviewees: 4 females; 3 males
Age of Interviewees: Approximately 20-35
Interviewer: Jessica Reynolds
Indicator for Interviewee/Interviewer: IP/I

Question 1: Using one word, how do you feel about the course so far?

IP - I’m positive. I mean I’ve never tried to study for TOEFL since this session. so I’m really motivated right now because I think it’s important for my future life.

IP - Confident; [yah] yah, yah, the difference is because I took the TOEFL one time before.

IP – Helpful.

IP – I think this is too slow – yah, and do more stuff. no need to stop in this class. I thought it was different because in Columbia I took too many classes for my English classes. they were better, __too__ much better than here. I think here it’s easier because you can think and you have to talk all the time and you have to listen to everybody and speak in English. than in Columbia. but the Columbia classes are so much better than here because I don’t know, they I don’t know are not really prepared for teach. like in Columbia. they do better pedagogy; they know better. they come in and teach classes (). I thought it was different here.

Question 2 – What about preparing for the TOEFL is frustrating/helpful for your long-term English language learning process? Please explain

IP - I agree and disagree. for me, I’m not waste my time. I’m __learning__ and I started from __level zero__; so for me it’s very useful. and I couldn’t go to university directly so for me, I mean, for the foreigner students it’s really important this exam. I know that it’s tough but it’s university. I mean, if you come in my country and you started to go to my university and you don’t know any words?. now I know that my level is improving. I mean I can understand pretty much. but I need to work hard; I mean, more than what I’m doing now. I can understand them when they said that for them it’s hard to stay with other people that are low level. I mean I think it’s hard to stay with you too and I think my level is pretty __good__ so because you’ve already taken the test so you know what’s going on. so that’s why. but I don’t feel that I’m wasting my time.

IP - It’s like. I came with zero English too; what I think is like. for me, I didn’t waste my time here. right now, I think that I’m wasting my time, __right now__. not in this class. in
this session. in this session. because the last session was really, really, really helpful for me. this still being helpful for me but it’s not the same. you see like, when you, when you like made the plans to your life, uh, you feel like this time I need to do this and do this. trying to make the TOEFL too much times. and if the TOEFL was like every days you can pay and do the TOEFL, it was better. but you need to wait months and months and months to do the TOEFL. in this session. and pay and wait months and months and months to do the TOEFL. I took the TOEFL once this semester and have to take again. and I think that right now. I, I put away in my mind, “I need to go to OU” and it’s like the classes will start and the people will go to vacations right now in May maybe. and I would like to start making class at summer, you know. and if I didn’t pass the TOEFL I cannot start my classes. so I need to spend more sessions at CESL. [and it costs a lot of money] yah, it costs lots of money. and I’m paying by myself.

IP - I lose my scholarship if I don’t pass. in our case, of course we pay for the TOEFL. [and I’m paying by myself !!!] but I feel that in our case it’s different. () each TOEFL I need to improve. unless on one point, you know?.

IP - I agree with you. you’re right. what made me say this is like I always see my cousin when he has too much homeworks and when he is doing his homeworks he need to be like, how to say, straight to their ideas you know. you cannot write too much. he must be objective. short and objective. if the teacher asks what’s the table – the table is something to put things above. it’s only. you don’t need to write too much; if you write too much, the teacher - everything wrong, zero.

IP – For me, in the questionnaire I put, yah, study for TOEFL is not studying English.

Questions 3: What about preparing for the TOEFL is frustrating/helpful for your short-term English language learning process? Please explain

IP - It is different but for other reasons. it’s different because in Chile I have classes only with other person. we are only two person; that is so was so personality classes in focusing our skills. improve only directly. more individual attention. and I think it’s better. [too much better] and this time to share the class with another people with different level etc. it’s a little complicate for me and you try to go down all the information…

IP - English is very tough here to work with university. it’s like this – I have a friend and his university, there you don’t need to make the TOEFL test. you go to the English school and you will improve your English independently of the grades you get. you will increase in your grades and then when you finish the last grade, you go to the university. they don’t care about TOEFL. what I think is - OU must be like this; because here for a example I know people who speak English and can understand everything I say and here I am spending too much time because we need to pass the TOEFL and the TOEFL is tough. so the problem with the TOEFL is not the impossibility of skills the person has; the problem is the TOEFL itself. for me, for example, I can go to the university and do
whatever the teacher asks me, but for me I think I am spending too much time than necessary here.

IP - What qualifies the TOEFL? The timing is so tough…

**Question 4: What are some useful preparation activities that you do in this course for the TOEFL?**

IP - We are getting more TOEFL practice here. the things that we do in the TOEFL we do here; to be comfortable with that. yah, like we spend more hours to do the listening. if we do the PBT, more time to do the listening for example or the grammar. especially the things we have to do in - the TOEFL. because we do like global things but not helpful things for the TOEFL. it’s helpful to speak with people to have a good structure. it’s good. but you need something very straightforward to prepare for the TOEFL.

I – And do you feel like you are doing those straightforward things in this class?

IP – Not () more outside but it’s half outside and TOEFL half. because we did the listening but not that much.

IP - Last session we had TOEFL class and the focus for our TOEFL class was only PBT TOEFL. this semester it’s like PBT one side, iBT another side. who gonna make another test. someone create ANOTHER CLASS for that people. because we don’t need to learn iBT. we are here for the exact reason of doing TOEFL. and we are not going do the same TOEFL. some gonna do PBT and the other iBT. if I know I’m gonna do the iBT I don’t need to know **nothing** about PBT. I need to focus on the iBT. because I don’t need PBT. I’m never gonna need the PBT. I don’t need to have a general.

I – So you’re wanting to take the iBT?

IP- No, the **PBT**. [yah, PBT. No?] this is my point - I want to take the PBT. but I’m in this class.

IP - Many of us are doing this class for two weeks and then another GRE class for two weeks so it’s too much to prepared. GRE, TOEFL, GRE, TOEFL !!!

IP - For me, I am here to be with the people only. I love this class !!! because I love these people. [yah] we don’t speak the same language and I need to make much effort to understand one another and they need to do the same. [yah] so that’s what I like this class, but **exactly** what I’m doing here, I don’t know. I really don’t know.

IP - I feel the same.

IP - Yes, it’s helpful too with these guys =
IP - Yah, I love these guys. I can improve my English talking with these guys, but that’s complicated. when I’m here to pass the TOEFL.

IP - Yah, in my case, I need more grammar but I have more grammar in other classes. I have class directly focused on grammar. no grammar needs in this class.

**Question 5 – What suggestions would you give to help this course better prepare students for the TOEFL?**

IP - The grammar things help us for the writing.

IP - For example it’s so hard for me. my field is science and I can hear so fast and a nice vocabulary in science. why, why, WHY, the TOEFL test don’t imply our fields specific fields. because our classes is in this field?..

IP - Another thing related to this, when you have a knowledge about some field, like for example, my colleague is an engineer or something. it’s like the class was like exactly what are we going to do. because here we are talking about these unnecessary things. it’s like I’m doing engineering. I don’t need to know about the meerkats; if I want to know about the meerkats I will buy and book and I will learn about the meerkats. [laughter]!!!

and in my opinion, I live with fifteen Angolan guys and all there are juniors and seniors at the university and all them told me the same. English you’re not gonna learn at school. you learn talking with people and share your ideas with the people. that’s where you’re going to learn to speak English. because at the school it’s not the same. that’s why I think the American people have too much problems to write because the way they talk is the way they write. that’s compliCAted. and here at the school we are like trying to improve our grammar and the grammar can someday help us. I’m saying that help us but not so much. like we are not gonna need like too much of grammar at the university. AT LEAST we go to the university and do languages or something like that. because at the university the teacher will be there talking with you and you will do your appointments take your notes and nothing else. you will go home and study; you take your, like uh, pieces of paper, read books; and it’s only =

IP - No, I disagree that because your career is only for do exercises and mathematics stuff and you only going to take some notes. but I’m going for business administration [ok] and I have to write much. I have to study and do the grammar very well.

IP - That’s why I’m talking that we need to like divide [yah, separate]. we have different needs.

IP – Still you need the exercises (.). you need to express your idea in writing and in speaking and for that you need the grammar. so much grammar. in my case it’s the same, in Spanish, in my university. I uh give my students the grammar information. they need to not write like they speak because they generally speak wrong. but for that, for uh to find
out the solution you need to learn grammar; and in my case it’s so important. I need to publish papers and I need to write.

IP - You were talking about grammar and it’s like music. if you don’t have rules then you can’t make music; like the text we read yesterday. so for example in my language, if you don’t have grammar you cannot talk [yah; yah!!!]. and in your language too and in Spanish too it’s the same in your languages.

IP - Yes, in all languages.

IP - So you need to learn grammar in a language first of all. and then I agree with him. because I learned my real English with my friends, talking with my friends. that’s why I can understand you pretty much maybe better than other guy. but that’s where it’s useful.

Question 6: What TOEFL preparation activities would you focus on in the TOEFL Track courses if you were the teacher?

IP – Like last session (). for the. PBT, for example, I would do the listening and the grammar. those things. Practice. and about the time too. cause the timing is very fast. how to manage the time.

IP – () Don’t like practice exercise. because I have friend who pass the TOEFL and he said he still can’t understand professor.

IP - In my opinion, it’s a good practice too. because TOEFL iBT is integrate. so except for the reading, you need to understand too much listening. for do the next way. so it’s very important to have the good listening.

IP - I think that’s very important, listening. for all of us. [yah, yah]

IP - I’m practicing from song right now. not difficult songs. but; the Beatles songs. if you pay attention they are easy to understand.

IP – Bomali [oooo the Jamaican accent is terrible] !!! ()

IP - I will introduce you to a songwriter from Trinidad and Tobago. she is talking but she is singing. you know. in English. and even the American guys when she is talking, anyone can’t understand. everybody is like what is she saying? It’s like she’s saying “I DON’T KNOW WHAT I’M SAYING I’M TALKING ENGLISH”; [HAHA] () !!! The American guys can’t understand her!

IP - The girls is so fast. if you want to have a good understanding, you have to speak with the females. because they talk so fast and swallow their words and you can improve your understanding. but if you want to know the word. you have to speak to the boys. so I you
have to speak with people for TOEFL. and also for the English life - in this life to be able to speak.

I – What about the practice exercises you all do in class?

IP – Yah, it’s important for the practice tests. the practice tests for the time. [yah] and I think to know the structure of the test is so important. you have your mind prepared. for it’s what is next step always. especially in the speaking because I don’t know what (), you only have 45 seconds and one minute. sometimes it’s difficult in your own language.

IP - I think the way [a previous TOEFL teacher] did us last session. it was the best. because during the whole week we make like a preparation for TOEFL. grammar, listening and the last part that you need to write the test and answer the questions about the tests. and they had like during the week until Friday. we still like preparing and after Friday we do a practice. we go to the fourth floor and simulate a real TOEFL. when I was making that I thought that I was ready for the TOEFL. but we went to vacations and I losted all my skills. because we made so many practice in the TOEFL so many weeks.

IP - We have to so many practice. my first time when I took an example test for qualify me for a course in Chile I have 46 this time. but my real first time I achieved a 74. and the next time I have a meeting the day before. and I travel for five hours and when I went to take the TOEFL test, I lower my score to 67. but the last time here, and I don’t have classes for long time but I have two weeks in the United States and I improve my English – 81. it was incredible. so many factors. so many factors. how to improve your English outside of class.

Question 7 – Are you involved and engaged in TOEFL preparation activities? Please explain

IP – Sometimes [laughter !!!]

IP - Yah, sometimes.

IP - It will just depend on my mind. [yah, yah, yah !!! laughter] one day I wake up and half my mind is English and the other Spanish. it’s terrible and I speak Spanish and English at the same time. but another day, it’s very nice. ()

IP – This class is good, but () the teacher is great, very good. but she speak sometime. too much. so when she speaks, because we don’t understand. so she speak and sometime we don’t understand she has to be sometimes short because we don’t speak good English. so sometimes when she speak fast, me, we lost. we lost her [!!!!]. and then my mind. ah, I think about. [!!!] ah, I bother my friend. [laugher]. but she’s very great. yah, yah, and she explains the word, the vocabulary, the structure like that. but she speaks a lot and quickly. and sometimes really I feel sleepy.
IP - That’s my weakness. that’s always I’m over in this corner like this.

IP - And this class is after lunch. [laughter !!! yah, yah] at least it shouldn’t be [!!].

**Question 8 – What is your primary activity during your TOEFL course? How do you feel about this activity?**

IP - Practice tests.

IP – Even Grammar.

I – Drama?

IP – No, no [laughter]. grammar. but acting out things. yah, lots of different things.

IP – In my case, it is so difficult to try to study directly for the TOEFL test. but uh, I am very nice to study for the grammar. especially with the grammar class. so::: nice. and for the first class, on academic skill, I tried to take advantage about the writing. and I think, I, I know how improve my writing uh. I can improve my speaking. reading I don’t have some problems. I read fast and understand well the ideas. but the writing will help me. and another thing is try to speak in the class. try to always speak with the professor and other students because your mind is a magnet. all the ideas at the same time. very nice. very nice. but to be quiet it’s not good.

IP - Yah, we talk here. [yah]

IP - This is something that bother me, you know. when the teacher is saying something and the word is at the board. sometime I know the word and I’m paying attention and I cannot think what is the word.

IP - Yah, because of the grammar and the vocabulary; because you know, when you speak you can understand people and you know grammar and vocabulary even if you’re struggling a little bit, when you put the word where you should put it. people want to know what you want to tell them. but if it’s like for example, the word order is wrong, people want to laugh you and don’t want to know what you want to tell them. they just want to laugh at you.

**Question 9: How much time do you spend interacting with your classmates and teacher in this course as opposed to your morning courses? Why do you think this is so?**

IP – More. [!!!!]

IP - Much more. [yah, yah]

IP - We have pairs and groups. discussions.

IP - We talk a lot.

IP - Yah, we talk a lot here.
IP - And it also helps that we are friends; [!!!]. we want to talk.
IP - That is much helpful for us [you get the chance to speak]. because we all know. to speak.

**Question 10: Do you feel your involvement in learning during this TOEFL preparation course is active or passive? Why do you feel this way?**

IP - I think that she’s passive and I am active in this class.

IP - I would say she is shy. never speak in the class.

IP - Passive in speaking. I always speak Chinese. active in writing.

IP - I think I feel that the last time I was like talking with [someone’s name] and he was talking like. I tell him that we have a TOEFL preparation last session and he was like. you’re still like in the TOEFL. you feel NERVOUS. and she said the TOEFL is more difficult than this. and I said “NO! it’s the same.” but I went to do the TOEFL for real. I lose my mind, you know. [laughter] I was freaking out - each minute. I only wanted to LEAVE that room and nothing more. I was like. uh, at the moment my mind was like stuck to think [bad brain, laughter]. and I was only like this. that some woman making too much noise. [yah, yah] that freaked me out. and I was like. UH. what is she doing?=

IP - =In the TOEFL test this is terrible. you don’t have a private room to answer all the test. there are so many other people inside the room. and when one people is uh when sometime reading when one people is writing or listening and another people is speaking. no headphones. and no separated.

IP – Some people are bothered by other people. it depends ()

IP – But I feel active in this class.

IP - The problem is like you’re still nervous all the time. that’s not good that you’re nervous and you’re trying to pay attention and they are making noise.

IP - Sometimes I feel passive. because () I am unconfident in some reading topics. I have so much information. not confident.

IP – Yah, I’m active here. I talk a lot.

IP - Sometimes, I am not proactive. (uh makes up stuff). my mind.

IP - What I think is like. it’s the same at school. when you put in your mind that something will be difficult for you or you don’t like that. that will be difficult for you. and what happens is like sometimes the teacher gives us a paper for the tests. and me with the first two paragraphs. and we are like. why are we doing this and everything’s so
complicated you know. and sometimes you feel comfortable with the things that are write
on the paper. and you like that and you try to pay more attention to that. and it’s easier for
you. so how much you like makes a difference

IP – It’s your attitude.

Question 11: Would it affect your TOEFL preparation and scores if there were variety
of test-preparation activities used to meet your individual needs?

IP - Yes, we want more.

IP - I think that’s a great idea. they need other things that I need. so. I don’t know maybe
for me it’s more useful simulating the exams. instead of stay here and hear a lot of stuff. I
mean, they are kind of boring sometimes, especially after lunch. I would like more um
active activities. I would like to use.

IP – Put something to enjoy. like something to enjoy. likes. like to make us like. because
sometimes we are boring. so if you can have some activities like meet students from OU
for example or sometime go to OU class to see how teachers do the courses. something
like this to make us. new. you know. motivation

IP - For example, she says that she’s not confident with the language. but I think she’s
really good at grammar. and I’m not. but I can talk more than her. so we need to like
compensate and collaborate.

IP -Yah, maybe the TOEFL class can be separating [right !!!] into two parts. one part in,
uh. make uh, make the main of the students more faster. much faster. much fluid for the
discussion, etc. and the other part only for the structure of the test. because it’s very nice
for improve the, doing this. I don’t know. think so fast. it’s good for speaking, reading
and speaking another people. and on the other side you need to know how is the structure
and to learn how you need to take advantage of the time and other things like this.

IP- I think it is hardest because. for me especially because I always have to think I have to
give my paper for OU. and they have date especially for international students before the
other ones. and sometimes I think I am losing time here. that uh, because I have to go and
pass the TOEFL. and sometimes I think here I cannot do that. and I can take better classes
in Columbia for the TOEFL. but in here, I am here now but even here we don’t have a
laboratory or something like that. in Columbia we have a laboratory with a, uh headsets.
and you can hear very well or you can better hear. here I don’t know it’s like ten years
ago in Columbia for the English classes. I think so. it’s so LOW. and it’s so expensive.
and I thought it was gonna be better, but it’s not. not really. [no. it’s not] not really.

IP -But the difference is uh. I think. speak. you need to improve your English for the
common life. you need to go to the shop or and how ask something or you need to take
the phone and get the food or speaking with your friends. there is a barrier you need to break. I think this is good. one thing is to learn English, another thing to live English. I just wish we didn’t have to pay for that. and uh you have another possibility is that your visa is a student – and the student visa, you have to be studying.

**Question 12: Would it affect your future English use if there were a variety of test-preparation activities used to meet your individual needs?**

**IP -** Yes it would help. [yah, !!!]

**IP -** Yes, o yes! [!!!!]

**IP -** That’s the reason I came to Oklahoma, because in Columbia everyone speaks Spanish. [yah, !!!]. because especially I have to start think in English, not in Spanish.

**IP -** For me, CESL for example, is only 30% of my English/week [yes]. it’s useful because I’m learning the structure and I’m making friends, but if you are too shy to meet other people, native people [right]. you cannot improve your language. I told you that I’m pretty good at conversation. so for me maybe it’s easier to make friends and learn the grammar that way.

**IP -** And you get to learn the culture that way. because I have some American friend and they invite me to the someday you do the turkey. [Thanksgiving] ya:::::h. and all his cousins, parents. and then I made some friends again. and I was shy to speak in the phone and very nervous to speak on the phone. but then they started calling me and now I’m like. yah! Yah!. confident.

**IP -** TOEFL classes have advantages and disadvantages. the disadvantage we are not focused. and the other way, the advantage is like when I came here last session. [CESL Director] put me in the TOEFL class with the people that was, already. maybe, if we count to 100% they were maybe at 97% in English. and I didn’t spoke anything. I came here and was like uh. that was really helpful for me. I could feel like really shy. because I feel like I don’t know how to speak. everybody speak better than me. and I was like I tried to improve my English to make better. I thought, if he can speak English I can speak English. I will try. and I was like talking to the people and I was improving my English. so that’s why I like to be everybody together. I think this is the only advantage.

**IP -** Yah you’re right. but, but maybe she’s really shy and I think that she is never doing this. so every people not advantage.

**IP-** But I’m talking to her!

**IP -** I think for me in here. it’s so sick in here. maybe feel sick in here. if you’re in a high level, with another people that are better than you. you have to try to be like them. but the
teachers in here, they try to teach to the lowest. that is so hard for me. because I have
good English. but it’s like I need to be better. I don’t want to be at this level. it’s like I
have to be better. but they are so slow. you have to be like in the high level. you have to
try to be at the high level. like [student’s name] now has high level.

IP - It’s up to you. I living with a family so I have to absolutely to learn the language.
because if I don’t know the language I cannot communicate with other people [yah]. so I
know that all of them have to be together (). I agree with you when you say that like me
last session. I was with the high-level but I learned. I learned easier and faster.

IP - But the teachers have to help us with that. they have to say.

Students still continued talking, even though class time was finished and the interview
was over.
Appendix F

Concepts in Student Interview Response Categories

Course Key:
- iBT Student Response
- PBT Student Responses
- Pre-PBT Student Responses

Concept Key:
- Primary Concept
- Derivative Concept

Research Question One - Do students find the TOEFL preparation process useful as an ELL experience?

Positive or negative attitudes toward the TOEFL preparation course

- Positive attitude – never studied for TOEFL and TOEFL is important for her future
- Positive attitude – confident because he has taken a TOEFL preparation course before
- Positive attitude – I’m learning
- Negative attitude – better TOEFL preparation courses in student’s home country
- Negative attitude – TOEFL hindering life plans
- Negative attitude- the timing is so tough on TOEFL
- Negative attitude – teachers move through class material too slowly
- Positive Attitudes – comfortable, confident, happy, good, helpful for future
- Negative Attitude – not helpful for future
- Negative Attitude – TOEFL is too tough to prepare for
- Negative Attitude – wasting time preparing for TOEFL
- Positive Attitudes – improving, helpful
- Negative Attitude - no explanation

Range of TOEFL preparation usefulness for short-term and long-term English language learning (ELL)

Short Term

- Not useful for short-term because other courses have prepared him for the TOEFL better
- Not useful for short-term - there are better ways universities could use that are more helpful for students to learn English rather than wasting time studying to pass the TOEFL
- Not useful for short-term because it’s impossible to simulate test-taking; students will feel more nervous
- Not useful for short-term because studying topics for TOEFL in class that students are not interested in and will not be helpful for their future English use in their fields of study
Useful for the short-term if students take TOEFL immediately after their course but many factors affect even this.

Useful for the short-term because students can understand the structure and timing of TOEFL.

Not useful for short-term because course focuses on just passing TOEFL;

Not useful in short term because it does not prepare them for their specific field of study at university.

Not useful in short term because the TOEFL vocabulary is not very common for their fields.

Useful for the short-term for being familiar with the timing of the TOEFL.

Useful for the short-term because students have time to study the TOEFL and get help from teacher to be prepared for university and for TOEFL.

**Long Term**

Not useful for long-term because studying for the TOEFL puts a hold on all the plans for his future life which he feels he is ready to begin.

Not useful for long-term because of time and money needed to study for TOEFL.

Not useful because studying for TOEFL is not studying English.

Not useful because improving English happens outside of class.

Not useful for long-term because learning English happens best in authentic situations.

Useful for the long-term for lower proficiency student – not wasting her time because she needs to work hard and this course is helping her improve.

Useful for the long-term at one time for student, but once language proficiency and familiarity with TOEFL increased, it was no longer useful for him, but a waste of time.

Not useful long-term after the TOEFL.

Not useful for long-term because vocabulary and grammar is very specific to the TOEFL.

Not useful for speaking.

Useful for everything.

Useful for long-term English skills and reading.

Not useful for speaking fluently.

Not useful because some of the vocabulary student forgets, but some he remembers.

Useful for learning new vocabulary for speaking fluently and understanding people.

Useful for grammar.
Useful course activities

- Practicing skills for iBT just as they appear on the iBT
- Interaction and camaraderie with classmates helps improve their English
- Studying grammar and writing because this will help in their future field of study and because grammar helps with speaking
- Practicing all the macro-skills
- Practicing grammar, vocabulary, speaking; because people have to know what you are saying in order for you to be understood
- Doing practice exercises for the time and structure of the test
- Conducting simulations of TOEFL every week
- Practicing listening, both inside and outside class
- Practicing grammar, listening and alleviating boredom through classroom activities
- Instructing students about the structure and timing of TOEFL
- Doing practice exercises because students can prepare for the TOEFL well that way; even if these don’t help students learn, they help them pass the exam
- Doing practice exercises because then student can be familiar with TOEFL
- Being aware of the test’s organization so that TOEFL will not be a surprise
- Doing practice exercises because they help student identify and handle the tricks of the TOEFL
- Learning new vocabulary for the TOEFL test
- Studying grammar, because there are grammar rules which are tested on the TOEFL which student can learn from the book and practice with native speakers; so speaking with native speakers is the best way to practice grammar? Unclear as to student’s exact meaning

Useless course activities (PBT and iBT only)

- Studying grammar and vocabulary for speaking
- Reading about topics which are not common in students’ fields of study
- Doing practice exercises
- Practicing things that are not directly related to the iBT; even practicing for the PBT is not useful if student wants to take iBT; no need for general knowledge
- Practicing TOEFL vocabulary
- Doing practice exercises because these do not facilitate students’ learning English
Suggested Modifications for Making the Course More Useful

- Take the TOEFL directly after course finishes
- Prepare for TOEFL by speaking with people in real life
- Make TOEFL reflect specific fields of study - divide class by proposed field of study so the students can have their varying needs met
- Arrange TOEFL preparation courses to only include students studying for the same test (e.g., all for PBT) and for one test (e.g., GRE)
- Smaller class size; more individualized attention
- Focus on two things in TOEFL preparation courses – structure and timing of TOEFL and discussions with classmates in which speaking fluently and quickly is practiced
- Include more active activities; activities all would enjoy and be motivated from
- Other reading besides TOEFL reading passages - reading out of books
- More time in class
- More practice exercises
- More practice of skills for the test – vocabulary, grammar
- Interaction with English speakers in authentic situations
- Authentic reading, vocabulary and listening practice outside of class
- Split the class into two segments to provide more practice time and to avoid students becoming drowsy during the afternoon class time
- More time
- Focus on skills needed to answer practice exercise questions, not just on question types
- Spend time on just one section of the TOEFL per week so student can master that skill/section before moving on to another section
- More focus on grammar
- Reading academic essays for comprehension
- Watch movies about life with lots of talking to improve listening
- Work on individual weak areas of competence for students
- Collaboration between weaker and more proficient students
Research Question 2 – Are students’ needs being heard and addressed in their TOEFL preparation courses?

Students’ class involvement affecting their learning

- Sometimes students’ involved, depending on the day and their mental states
- Some students learning actively; others passively; depends on the skill in question too (e.g. speaking vs. writing); ‘active learning’ means talking a lot for students?
- Nervousness affects students’ perceptions of their active/passive learning in class; do they also affect learners’ needs being heard and addressed?
- Attitude closely tied to students’ definition of their active/passive involvement
- Topics covered in classroom activities affect students’ attitudes and therefore their involvement in the tasks
- Teacher’s excessive, rapid talking inhibits students’ involvement and learning; students cease paying attention when she is talking too much
- Students’ involvement depends on where they sit in class and the timing of the class (after lunch)

- Every day students practice different parts of the TOEFL and can ask questions if they have problems with answers – this ability to ask questions makes one student feel more active in learning
- Students can decide what part of TOEFL they want to work on each class and then the teacher will help them practice that; thus, students feel involved because they can choose what skill they practice
- Students daydream and are tired in this class because it is after lunch and too long at one time. Students wish for class to be split into two hours – one in the morning, one and a half in the afternoon
- The task being covered also depends on their level of involvement in learning
- Teacher’s careful explanation of difficult problems helps students feel involved
- Students feel practice exercises allow them to have active roles in class as they prepare for the TOEFL and use the information they learn for the test
- Attitude also closely tied to students’ definition of their active/passive involvement

- Because students spend the majority of class time doing exercises from the books and learning vocabulary, one student’s involvement is satisfactory because these exercises give him more skills for the TOEFL through these activities
- Students say they are worried about their mark on the TOEFL, not about their involvement in class
- Involvement may mean ‘talking’ for these students as well
- Choosing correct answers helps one student feel engaged in learning
- Another student characterizes his involvement in learning as passive – just getting information to give it back out
- Other students feel active as they improve their English for the TOEFL, but still do not trust their language abilities yet, due to individual learner trajectories
- Students can ask teacher for synonyms and why answers are correct/incorrect – helpful for active learning
Interaction with classmates and teacher affecting learner needs being heard and addressed

- More interaction occurs in this class and will help learner needs be met.
- Interaction with classmates enhances students’ learning and motivation.
- Studying for the TOEFL inhibits one student’s interacting as much as he would like with his classmates.
- Interaction with classmates and teacher improves learners’ speaking and grammar.
- Additional interaction with classmates can help learners’ meet each others’ needs – for example, one is good at grammar and can help the other student struggling with grammar.
- Students’ interacting in ESL context outside of class will help improve their fluency (meet long-term needs); this will help them for the TOEFL, even though students have to pay to be in school because of their student visas.

- Some students say there is more interaction with teacher in this class compared to other classes – students and teacher discuss/debate questions’ answers, why they are correct/incorrect, etc – this is helpful for meeting their learner needs for TOEFL.
- Other students say less interaction in TOEFL class because they spend most time completing the practice exercises.
- Student indicates that it would be helpful to know “why” answers are correct but does not want to ask; another student points out that student can ask “why” in this class, but it depends on the boldness of the student if he or she asks or not – interaction with teacher that will meet learner needs depends on affective filters of students.

- Students indicate they spend less time interacting in their TOEFL class, but that is because it is a TOEFL class, and they are mostly completing practice exercises rather than discussing/interacting as they would in other English courses, because this is what learning for TOEFL entails.
- Student observes that because there is no speaking on the PBT there is little interaction in class; she seems to accept this as an obvious fact.
- One student wishes for more interaction, especially with his colleagues with whom he shares a native language. This would help meet his learner needs regarding concepts from TOEFL that he does not understand. Also, he says he is shy. So boldness of student is a factor here too.

Variety of test-preparation activities affecting students’ needs being heard and addressed

- Students indicate that more variety in classroom activities will positively address their short-term learner needs in the class – these activities should be more individual, active, enjoyable, motivating.
• Enjoyable activities for all would be beneficial – practicing English outside of class with native speakers in the university where they want to study; this will be motivating for students

• Students also indicate that a variety of activities would help meet their needs of improved English fluency (long-term needs)

• Student says that class time is only 30% of her English learning anyway; so meeting people and talking with them as a class activity is a great way to meet her long-term learner needs

• Speaking with native speakers and becoming friends with them exposes students to the culture and helps them not be nervous or shy (meets these learner needs)

• Mixed level TOEFL preparation courses can inhibit or prohibit learners’ needs being met no matter the activities (depending on students - if they are lower than average, mixed level-classrooms are positive in terms of learner needs being met; if they are above average, mixed-level classrooms are negative in terms of learner needs being met)

• Similitude of competence among students will aid learner needs being met

• Teachers’ teaching to the most proficient or least proficient students prohibits all learner needs being met

• Individuals also are responsible to meet their own needs by practicing outside class

• Students debate the affects of more variety in their test-preparation activities – some say that more variety in their test-preparation activities (e.g. group work, watching movies, more interaction) would best meet their learner needs because this would help them understand people and improve overall English

• Others strongly disagree, saying that only exercises that will prepare them directly for the TOEFL test should be included in TOEFL course curriculum. Otherwise, they will be wasting time and their learner needs (passing TOEFL) will not be met.

• One student indicates that there will be little motivation for students to do activities if they are not directly related to TOEFL.

• Students debate what they are studying and why. They are confused if the TOEFL or reason for studying for the TOEFL relate to their ultimate needs as English learners. Specifically, students debate whether or not they are should study listening or just listening for the TOEFL. Which type of activity is better for TOEFL preparation?

• Students wonder why they have to pass such a difficult, expensive test which native speakers do not have to take and which inhibits their opportunities to further their studies in their academic fields.

• One student suggests that a TOEFL test for each major/college would better meet students’ needs by evaluating them in English on the subject they will study. Other students feel that removing the TOEFL altogether would best meet their needs.

• Students indicate satisfaction with just practicing exercises from the textbooks. These help students know what TOEFL is like and to be prepared. They are not interested in
a variety of test-preparation activities because they are focused just on passing the TOEFL. Therefore, they only want activities that will help them for the TOEFL.

- However one student also indicated that working together to help each other in their weak areas would be helpful.

- Another student says sometimes the practice exercises make her feel like she is studying what she doesn’t have to study.

- Students mention nervousness as a factor in their thoughts about increased variety of classroom activities – sometimes just practice exercises make them nervous, but this can be good because during the TOEFL test, they will be nervous.
# Appendix G

## Survey Items Corresponding to Interview Response Categories

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<th>Category</th>
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### Totals:

|   | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |

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**Survey Items Supporting Differing Levels of Students’ Experience with TOEFL and TOEFL Courses**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Students’ Familiarity with TOEFL</th>
<th>Students’ Previous TOEFL Courses</th>
<th>Students’ Familiarity with How TOEFL Is Taught</th>
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Appendix H
Open-Ended Survey Item Transcription

Item 6 – Previous TOEFL Preparation Courses
- Embassy CES study class in New York that was where I took my previous TOEFL class and time improved was for 5 months but it still difficult to me to pass the TOEFL exam
- A TOEFL course during 3 month in my home country
- In my country I had a teacher who teached to me about this test
- I took TOEFL preparation courses before in my hometown in Saudi Arabia. The institute’s name “New Horizon” but it was not very good because their teachers not native speaker and it was so difficult. Actually I hate the TOEFL.
- Yes and I got a 440
- New Original in Shanghai, China

Item 7 – Experience Preparing for TOEFL in the Past
- I’m not gonna? I studied hard for the TOEFL because the TOEFL idea is you can’t predict how is the TOEFL - for example the subjects and the old English vocabulary and the time
- I’ve a good teacher. It was so personality preparation (2 students and teacher). Excellent clues and tips gave by teacher. Excellent information how face the test.
- We had a book for TOEFL and sample for the exam. We were read and choose the correct answer and listen to the recorder for listening
- Do more test about grammar. Reading and listen to the radio every day
- Remember many words; do many practises
- Preparing for the toefl is sometimes boring because you feel very annoyed to do things that you think not very useful for what you want to do. And also you feel like you are in primary school.

Item 19 – What Activities Best Prepare You for the TOEFL exam?
- Continue exercise about listening (that is the weak point of all of the foreigners), talk with other classmates about past experience of TOEFL and try to find out a strategy
- Increase the listening, reading and answer the question about that. Study grammar to improve writing. Always to know new vocabulary and speak as much as possible
- grammar is most important and improve speed to reading. Listen to the radio
- Having practice test, learn how to listen and how to pronounce the word, grammar and also teach us about what people really in the TOEFL

Item 21 – Any Relevant Info?
- I don’t know if what I’m going to write now helps or not but its help me. I want to know why they make the exam mechanism so difficult because the time period is too short even though the strategy of the TOEFL is made about you are going to pass it. That is not even about the English language “WHY?”
- Existing differences between learn English and to prepare TOEFL test – it’s necessary both things. The time test TOEFL may be the most important factor of stress and learning and another factor is the topic diversity. It’d be good if you can choice topics regards your field of studies.

- Thank you, Jessica for provide to us to express our feeling about TOEFL.