

# The Freshmen TOEIC Experience: Reflections of First-Time Test Takers

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**Abstract** — This research investigated the experiences of first-year students who took the TOEIC exam for the first time. It focused on their reflections and insights, capturing a range of emotions from initial nervousness to eventual relief and satisfaction. The study highlighted unique challenges and strategies used by students as they navigated the listening and reading sections of the exam. The findings contributed to understanding of language proficiency assessments and offered insights into effective exam preparation and emotional management strategies for future test-takers.

**Keywords**— TOEIC exam, first-time takers, student reflections, language proficiency, exam experiences, test preparation, emotional resilience

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) serves as a globally significant assessment tool, evaluating individuals' English language proficiency for international workplace communication (ETS, 2021). Among first-year university students, the TOEIC exam represents a crucial milestone impacting their educational paths and career prospects (Choi & Lee, 2019).

This study delved into the experiences of first-time TOEIC takers among first-year students, capturing their diverse reflections and insights regarding the challenges and rewards of preparing for and taking this standardized language proficiency test. Understanding students' perceptions and experiences with the TOEIC exam was vital for educators and policymakers seeking to enhance language education strategies and support systems (Kim, 2020).

Through qualitative analysis of student reflections, this research aimed to reveal emotional responses, preparation strategies, and the perceived impact of the testing environment on performance. By documenting these narratives, the study provided valuable insights into effective test preparation techniques and psychological resilience among young test-takers facing high-stakes assessments (Han & Lee, 2018).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies contributed valuable insights into various aspects of TOEIC testing and language proficiency assessments. Choi and Lee (2019) investigated the diverse preparation behaviors adopted by test-takers specifically for the TOEIC exam, highlighting the effectiveness of different preparation strategies.

Kim (2020) explored the impact of TOEIC scores on Korean university students' employment opportunities, underscoring the significance of language proficiency in enhancing career prospects. Han and Lee (2018) examined the relationship between test preparation methods and performance, particularly focusing on the TOEIC speaking test, and identified effective strategies that contributed to improved outcomes.

Educational Testing Service (ETS, 2021) provided comprehensive information on TOEIC tests, detailing test formats, scoring methodologies, and the broader implications of TOEIC scores for academic and professional purposes. Taylor (2017) discussed how language proficiency tests, including TOEIC, influenced educational policies and student mobility across global academic institutions, emphasizing their role in shaping academic careers.

Together, these studies offered a comprehensive understanding of TOEIC testing, encompassing preparation strategies, performance outcomes, technical aspects of testing, and the broader impacts on students' educational and professional trajectories.

## III. METHODOLOGY

First-year university students enrolled in a college program or course participated in this study. Convenience sampling was used to identify students who had recently taken the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) for the first time. The sample included students who voluntarily shared their reflections and experiences related to the TOEIC exam.

Reflective journals were collected from participants. Each student wrote about their experiences before, during, and after taking the TOEIC exam, covering

emotions, preparation strategies, perceptions of the exam format, challenges faced, and insights gained. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured.

Qualitative content analysis was applied to the reflective journal entries. Codes were generated to identify recurring themes and patterns, which were then organized into broader categories representing key themes from participants' reflections on their TOEIC experiences.

The reliance on self-reported reflective journals and the specific sample size and composition are potential limitations. Despite limitations, qualitative content analysis provides valuable insights into students' diverse experiences and perceptions of the TOEIC exam.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Themes Extracted from Participant Reflections

### *Preparation Strategies and Anxiety*

Many participants expressed feeling nervous and anxious leading up to the TOEIC exam. This theme encompasses discussions about the pressure they felt to perform well, the various strategies they employed to prepare (such as online practice tests and review sessions), and their reflections on the effectiveness of these strategies in managing their anxiety.

### *Test Structure and Format*

Participants discussed their experiences with the structure and format of the TOEIC exam. This theme includes reflections on the different sections (listening and reading), their perceptions of the difficulty level of each section, and their strategies for navigating the time constraints imposed by the exam format.

### *Listening Comprehension Challenges*

A recurring theme was the difficulty some participants faced with the listening comprehension section of the TOEIC exam. This includes challenges related to understanding accents, processing spoken information under time pressure, and strategies used to improve listening skills in preparation for the exam.

### *Reading Speed and Comprehension*

Participants reflected on their experiences with the reading comprehension section, particularly regarding the speed at which they needed to read passages and answer questions. This theme explores strategies for improving reading comprehension, coping with lengthy

passages, and managing time effectively during the exam.

### *Emotional Responses and Stress Management*

This theme encompasses participants' emotional responses before, during, and after the TOEIC exam. It includes discussions about stress management techniques employed, emotional fluctuations experienced during the exam (such as relief upon completion), and reflections on the overall emotional impact of the testing experience.

### *Impact on Academic and Career Goals*

Participants discussed the perceived impact of the TOEIC exam on their academic and career aspirations. This theme includes reflections on how TOEIC scores might influence future study abroad opportunities, job prospects, and personal goals related to English language proficiency.

### *Peer and Social Support*

Many participants highlighted the importance of peer and social support during their TOEIC preparation and exam day. This theme includes discussions about study groups, sharing exam tips with friends, and the emotional support received from peers during stressful periods.

## V. CONCLUSION

Participants highlighted significant levels of anxiety and stress leading up to the exam, driven by its perceived importance for assessing their English language skills. This anxiety often prompted proactive preparation strategies, including online practice tests, study groups, and review sessions. Despite these efforts, challenges in both the listening and reading comprehension sections were evident, with varying degrees of difficulty reported among participants.

The emotional journey during the TOEIC exam ranged from initial nervousness to eventual relief upon completion, underscoring the psychological impact of standardized testing. Strategies for managing stress, such as deep breathing and positive self-talk, were commonly employed to navigate these emotional highs and lows.

Moreover, the TOEIC exam was seen as more than just a test of language proficiency; it was perceived as a factor influencing participants' academic and career goals. Many viewed their TOEIC scores as crucial for future opportunities, including study abroad programs

and employment prospects requiring English proficiency.

Peer and social support also played a significant role, with participants benefiting from collaborative study efforts and emotional encouragement from friends during the exam process.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on language assessment by offering firsthand accounts of students' experiences and their implications for educational practices and policies. Future research could further explore the long-term impacts of TOEIC scores on students' academic and professional endeavors, as well as investigate innovative approaches to preparing students for success in language proficiency assessments. Moving forward, educators and policymakers can use these insights to enhance support structures and improve the overall experience of students navigating language proficiency assessments like the TOEIC.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To better support first-year university students preparing for the TOEIC exam, several key recommendations emerge from their reflections and experiences. First and foremost, institutions should enhance preparation support by offering structured study sessions and providing access to online practice materials.

Workshops focusing on effective test-taking strategies and stress management techniques, such as mindfulness and time management, should also be integrated into academic support services to help alleviate test anxiety and enhance performance.

Secondly, it is crucial to improve familiarity with the TOEIC exam format. This can be achieved through mock exams and practice sessions that simulate real testing conditions. By familiarizing students with the types of questions and the pacing required, institutions can boost confidence and readiness on exam day, particularly in challenging sections like listening comprehension and reading speed.

Additionally, peer support networks among students preparing for the TOEIC exam is highly beneficial. Institutions can facilitate collaborative study groups and peer mentoring programs where students can share study tips, discuss difficult concepts, and motivate each other. Peer support not only enhances academic preparation but also provides emotional encouragement throughout the exam preparation process.

Lastly, continuous feedback and reflection opportunities are essential. Encouraging students to maintain reflective journals or participate in feedback sessions with instructors allows for ongoing assessment of progress and adjustment of study strategies.

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