

Integrating the TOEIC[®] Speaking Test with Small Group Classes

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With Hiroshima University's change in status to a 'Super Global University', there is an increasing focus on fostering foreign language skills, particularly in English. In this article, we evaluate a new program, HiSPEC (Hiroshima University's Program for English Communication). The program is part of the Super Global University initiative, and involves the creation of small group classes for first-year students with the best English-test results in faculty groupings, and testing through the TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing tests (hereafter TOEIC[®] S&W). Here, we focus on the first half of HiSPEC, which is oriented towards speaking skills and the TOEIC[®] Speaking test.

In this article, we describe the organization and set-up of the course. Then, using a mixed-method approach involving the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, we evaluate the program from the following perspectives: teachers' reflections, students' perceptions, and test results.

BACKGROUND

In English language education in Japan, there has recently been a stronger focus on developing students' productive English abilities, especially speaking, both inside and outside the classroom. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter, MEXT) has undertaken various educational reforms on English language education at educational institutions from the primary through tertiary levels.

In the primary sector, 'foreign language activities' were introduced for the fifth and sixth grades in 2011, and English language instruction has taken place within these courses. From 2020, MEXT has decided to implement full-fledged language teaching from the third grade. In the secondary and tertiary sectors, MEXT has designated chosen institutions as 'Super Global High Schools' and 'Super Global Universities'. A major aim is to nurture students who have 'English ability that can be used', and this necessarily includes the development of students' productive skills. As Okuno (2009) observes, however, this is not easy to achieve quickly.

In 2016, Hiroshima University was one of 13 universities to be given Super Global University status, and the university is undergoing a process of change. HiSPEC is an innovation within this process. The aim is to select the highest-performing first-year students in English within the university's faculties, to organize them into small classes of between 10 to 15 students, and to evaluate their progress. A quantitative evaluation is made through the testing of the students, using TOEIC[®] Speaking and Writing, two international tests which are integral to HiSPEC. Data from the TOEIC[®] Listening and Reading tests (hereafter TOEIC[®] L&R) are also considered.

HiSPEC

HiSPEC is taking place within the administrative structure of English language courses at the university. These courses are provided to first- and second-year students as part of their general education. In the first year of study, students are required to take four English courses, each one emphasizing a particular language skill: Communication IA (speaking), Communication IB (reading), Communication IIA (writing), and Communication IIB (listening). HiSPEC is integrated into this structure, utilizing the two productive skills courses (IA and IIA).

With regard to the general English courses in the first year, students are organized within faculty and shared faculty groups. For example, due to the size of the engineering faculty, its students are streamed on the basis of their university entrance English exam scores, and grouped into 11 classes. With smaller faculties, combined groups of students are streamed and organized into classes. Four of these faculty groupings were chosen for HiSPEC (Engineering, Arts and Sciences, Education, Biological Sciences) and within them, students with the best university entrance examination results in English were selected. Two classes were created for each grouping.

Instructors for the HiSPEC courses were selected from the full-time staff of the Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education, which has a mix of Japanese English teachers and non-Japanese English teachers. For the course, six non-Japanese teachers (A, B, C, D, E, F) were chosen.

TABLE 1. Scheduling

Class	Instructor	Day	Class	Instructor	Day
Engineering 1	A	Fri	Education 1	C	Mon
Engineering 2	B	Mon	Education 2	E	Fri
Arts and Sciences 1	C	Mon	Biological Sciences 1	A	Fri
Arts and Sciences 2	D	Fri	Biological Sciences 2	F	Mon

In the first-year general English classes within the university, there is a large amount of teacher autonomy. Once allocated a class, the individual teacher makes the key decisions regarding the course. For the HiSPEC program, this autonomy was respected, so that teachers could plan, teach, evaluate, and grade in their own way. However, it was suggested that they take some account of the results from the TOEIC[®] Speaking.

HiSPEC Communication IA (speaking) started in April 2016 and ran for 15 weeks, meeting for 90 minutes, once a week. Students took the combined TOEIC[®] S&W test in April. In July, they took a further TOEIC[®] Speaking test, and the results from the two speaking tests were compared. Thus, there were nine or 10 classes between the two speaking tests.

TOEIC[®] Speaking Content

TOEIC[®] Speaking is a computer-based test that takes approximately 20 minutes. It consists of six sections with 11 questions, as shown in Table 2. All the examinee responses are recorded on a computer and scored by multiple evaluators. The scale for each task is converted from 0 to 200.

TABLE 2. TOEIC® Speaking

Task (No. of items)	Response time	General outline of task	Assessment	Scale
I. Read a text aloud (2)	45 secs. per item (Prep time: 45 secs. per item)	Test-taker reads aloud a short text, such as an announcement or advertisement.	Pronunciation, Intonation, and Accent	0-3
II. Describe a picture (1)	45 secs. (Prep time: 30 secs. per item)	Test-taker gives a verbal description of a photograph.	In addition to everything above, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Cohesion	0-3
III. Response to questions (3)	15 or 30 secs. (Prep time: none)	Test-taker responds to questions on a commonplace topic, as if responding in an interview.	In addition to everything above, Content validity and Content completeness	0-3
IV. Response to questions using information provided (3)	15 or 30 secs. (Prep time: none)	Test-taker responds to questions based on written information (such as a schedule of events) that appears on the screen.	Everything above	0-3
V. Propose a solution (1)	60 secs. (Prep time: 30 secs)	Test-taker listens to a voice mail message describing a problem and gives a response. In the response, the test-taker indicates recognition of the problem and proposes a solution.	Everything above	0-5
VI. Express an opinion (1)	60 secs. (Prep time: 15 secs)	Test-taker expresses an opinion about a specific topic and the reasons for that opinion.		0-5

This table was compiled by adapting information from the following sites:

<http://www.toEIC.or.jp/english/speaking/about/tests.html>

<http://www.toEIC.or.jp/sw/about/tests.html>

METHOD

In this paper, we evaluate the first part of the HiSPEC program: Speaking. Our approach is a mixed-method one, involving the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. In it we address the following questions:

- (1) How were teachers affected by HiSPEC?
- (2) How were students affected by HiSPEC?
- (3) How were students' English abilities affected by HiSPEC?

Data Collection and Analysis

In answering the three questions, data were collected in a variety of ways. Teachers produced written feedback by email, reporting on how they had approached the course and their views on it. This feedback was summarized. Students were asked to answer a short questionnaire in Japanese (translated into English in Figure 1). For questions 1-7, answers were collated and given as percentages. For question 8, a qualitative analysis was undertaken, with answers being grouped into categories. In total, 69 comments were collected,

and these were categorized qualitatively based on the content of each comment. When a comment had contents that could be grouped into multiple categories, the comment was categorized in both.

In relation to question 3, a quantitative analysis was undertaken to compare the results of the two TOEIC® Speaking tests, using a t-test. Similarly, a t-test was used to compare the TOEIC® IP Listening and Reading results.

- | |
|--|
| <p>Q1. Please agree or disagree with the following statement: I could improve my foreign language knowledge and skills in this course.</p> <p>Q2. How satisfied are you with the course?</p> <p>Q3. Was the course appropriate in terms of difficulty?</p> <p>Q4. What do you think of participating in small-size speaking classes?</p> <p>Q5. How did you feel about the class size of Communication IA?</p> <p>Q6. Please agree or disagree with the following statement: The course materials helped me improve my communication skills.</p> <p>Q7. Please agree or disagree with the following statement: Participating in HiSPEC has changed my attitude towards learning English.</p> <p>Q8. Please leave any comments you have about HiSPEC.</p> |
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FIGURE 1. Questionnaire Items (Translated from Japanese)

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this section, we integrate an examination of the data with a discussion of the issues that emerge from it. We examine each research question in turn, and consider the links between the questions.

(1) How were teachers affected by the HiSPEC course?

Teaching Content

Six experienced teachers were involved in the HiSPEC course. They followed the same pedagogical approach as their other speaking courses, using the same core syllabuses and content. Depending on the teacher, students studied from textbooks, podcasts, and videos from TED Talks and other sources, and were involved in conversation practice and discussions.

As students were required to take TOEIC® Speaking, the question of whether to orientate teaching towards the test was approached in a variety of ways. Examples from the test highlight some of the challenges for teachers. For instance, with regard to responding to a voicemail message, which is one of the TOEIC® Speaking task types in Table 2, test-takers must indicate recognition of a problem and propose a solution. In a real-life situation, a more likely response would be to leave a message, saying “Thank you for your message. Please call me back.” Consequently, a required answer does not fit well with the practical advice teachers might give their students for dealing with such a problem. Similarly, task VI, thinking about an essay-style question for 15 seconds, and then giving an essay-style answer, is not something students would usually be expected to do.

Given that the task-types in the test did not always fit with the syllabuses that teachers wished to use, there were different ways in which teachers dealt with the issue. The first was to trust that students' test scores would improve on the basis of the established syllabus that a teacher believed was in the students' best interest. The second was some form of accommodation, in which about 20 minutes of class time was allocated to TOEIC® Speaking preparation. The third was to prepare students for the test a few weeks prior to it, creating a complete simulation with feedback.

Teaching opinions of the course

All of the instructors had enjoyed the courses. They felt that the small numbers of students in their classes allowed them to give more individual attention. Also, as HiSPEC involved students with the highest university entrance scores within their faculty groupings, they tended to be highly motivated.

There was no consensus of opinion on TOEIC® Speaking, and it was regarded in different ways by different teachers. For some, the test did not really connect with what they were trying to achieve in developing their students' English skills. For others, it was a challenge to be accommodated in the course they were teaching. Views on the effect of the test on students varied: While it could be considered motivating for some students, there was also concern that it might have a negative effect on others.

(2) How were students affected by the HiSPEC course?

Overall student satisfaction was generally high: 86 percent of students were satisfied with the course, 88 percent preferred small classes, and 75 percent felt that it was useful for improving English communication skills.

In relation to qualitative data in the form of comments, these have been examined and categories have been created. One category concerned curriculum (i.e., “*I would like to take the HiSPEC course in the fall semester, but I want to have some option about the date and time slot for the course in order to avoid overlap of other interesting courses*”) and is not considered positive or negative. The number of positive comments was 65, and seven positive categories were created from these in total.

Positive comments

Here, we discuss the categories and illustrate these with comments. The first four categories are highly interrelated, and highlight the ways in which students looked positively on the course. Categories 6 and 7 relate to how the course affected students' perceptions of their English skills, and the final category relates to the TOEIC® S&W.

(1) Motivation

A variety of comments indicated that the course had a motivating effect. For example, one student noted:

I think it is difficult to brush up English competence a lot in the once-a-week course, but this course helped me increase English learning motivation.

(週に一回の授業で英語力の実質的な上達は難しいと思うが、モチベーションの向上にはなった。)

Motivation is linked to many of the other categories. It should also be noted that while individuals are often motivated for positive reasons such as interest, they can also be motivated through negative ones. Here, motivation was due to positive factors.

(2) The advantage of small-size classes

A small-sized class was popular among students. The comment below indicates that the student felt that she/he had the opportunity to listen to peers speaking English, which improved motivation. It expresses the value placed on language as a medium of communication:

Listening to peers speaking English affected my English learning motivation. This is one of the advantages of a small-size course. Also I have learned some real, practical English, such as pronunciation. I am very satisfied with this course.

(同じ教室の人の英語を聞くことはモチベーションになりました。これは少人数制だからこそだと思います。また、Real Englishとして今まででなかった発音などを知ることができ、より実用的な英語を学ぶことができ、非常に満足しています。)

(3) Experienced ‘native speakers’

There were a variety of comments on ‘native-speaker’ English. One student made the following comment:

I did not have opportunities to be exposed to real English when I was in high school, but this course was good because I had an opportunity to listen to a native speaker’s English pronunciation.

(高校までは実際に英語に触れる機会が少なかったのですが、前期に受講してみてネイティブの発音に触れることができてよかった。)

The use of the term ‘native-speaking’ teacher is controversial, and should be treated with some caution. However, it is also a highly-recognized one. The teachers involved in HiSPEC were American and British, and the student interpreted the English spoken by her/his teacher as “real English”, another controversial term. Another way of interpreting ‘native speaker’ for the teachers involved is a teacher whose L1 is English. English was primarily the language of the classroom, and students had the opportunity of listening to L1 pronunciation and intonation. Also, the teachers involved in HiSPEC were very experienced, and knew how to organize and run classrooms, as well as interact with students.

(4) Good course content that was enjoyable

Some students highlighted the importance of the course contents. The following comment by a student illustrates this:

This course is fun and practical, and gave me an opportunity to be exposed to real English a lot. It would be better if we could have this course twice a week (once a week, 90 minutes is not enough).

(楽しいし実用的だし、生の英語にたくさんふれられてよかった。週2くらいあれば、もっと良

いと思った。(週1で90分は少ない。)

(5) Improvement of English ability

Some students gave opinions on their English ability:

I think I improved my English speaking skills.

(自分のスピーキングスキルが少し向上したような気がします。)

This is an important area for further investigation because it would be useful to know in what way students felt their abilities had improved. As noted in category 3, for some students, it was the first time to study closely with an American or British teacher, and students may have improved in confidence when they realized they could understand and be understood by their teachers, who were using English as the medium of instruction.

(6) Identifying weaknesses

For a number of students, the course exposed some of their weaknesses, but this was a motivating factor, creating a positive challenge for them:

I would like to make more efforts for learning English because I was not able to speak in English in the class.

(実際にはあまりしゃべることが出来なかったのもっとしゃべることができるように努力したいと思います。)

(7) Opportunity of taking the TOEIC® Speaking test

Some students liked the opportunity to take the TOEIC®. In HiSPEC, the tests are free for the students, and taking a test produced by a body external to the university was seen as a positive challenge:

I was happy to have a chance to take the TOEIC S&W test.

(TOEIC S&Wテストを受けれて良かった。)

Negative comments

There were only eight negative comments (see Appendix), and with such a small number we have not created categories. However, these comments highlight some of the feelings of individual students.

While a number of students looked on the challenges of the course as positive, others had a negative view. For example, one considered the course too difficult, and another was adversely affected by the English abilities of his/her peers and the level at which the teacher spoke English. One student felt that he/she did not get enough class time to express himself/herself. Others wanted more homework.

These comments are fairly representative of the kind of feedback teachers often get from any Communication IIA course. However, some of them point to the fact that not all students were comfortable with being on the course. It should be noted that the course was not voluntary; students were selected for it on the basis of test scores. Given the investment of resources in the course, it raises the question of whether

students should be given the opportunity to select a regular course if they do not wish to take HiSPEC.

(3) How were students' English abilities affected by the HiSPEC course?

TOEIC® Speaking Test results were obtained at the beginning and the end of the semester, and the data were compared using a t-test. There were 99 HiSPEC students out of 112 who took both of the TOEIC® Speaking Tests in April and July. Here, we present the results first and follow them with a discussion.

Test results

Table 3 shows the results of the TOEIC® Speaking Tests. There was no significant difference between the two tests ($t(98) = -1.73, p = 0.09, d = 0.15[-0.02, 0.33]$) and little improvement on the TOEIC® Speaking scores between April and July.

TABLE. 3 Results of TOEIC® Speaking Tests

	Min.	Mean	Max.	SD
April	40.0	107.2	180.0	21.1
July	30.0	110.3	180.0	19.5

TOEIC® L&R

A total of 51 HiSPEC students took the TOEIC® L&R test both in May and July. It was a requirement for all first-year students to take the TOEIC® L&R in May. Regarding the July test, about half of the students were required to take it for a part of their grade in the English Communication IB class, which was not for HiSPEC.

Comparing test scores between the two tests, we can see that students made statistically significant improvements in listening and reading ($t(50) = -7.17, p < .000, d = 0.60 [0.42, 0.78]$). The effect size indicates that the average improvement was 0.60 standard deviations above zero, or medium effect size magnitude according to Cohen (1988). Contrary to TOEIC® Speaking, as shown in the scatter plot (Figure 2), most of the students gained higher scores in July than in May (see Table 4 for the descriptive statistics). It is notable that there were only eight weeks between the two tests.

TABLE 4. HiSPEC Students' TOEIC® L&R Scores

	Min.	Mean	Max.	SD
May	370	618.9	925	96.4
July	480	674.4	930	85.3

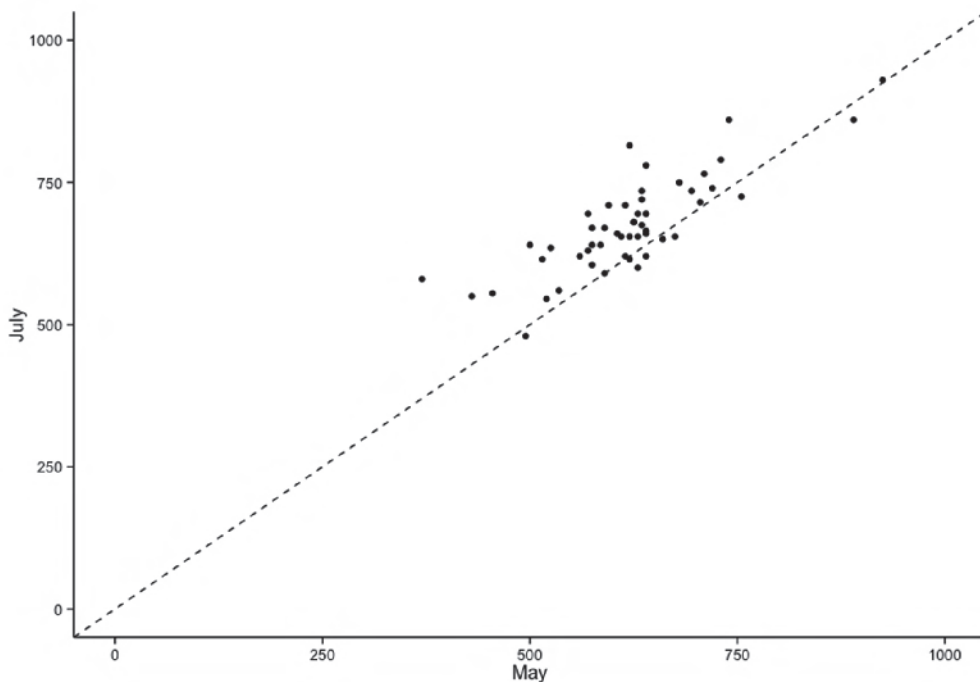


FIGURE 2. HiSPEC Students' TOEIC® L&R Individual Scores

TABLE 5. Non-HiSPEC Students' TOEIC® L&R Scores

	Min.	Mean	Max.	SD
May	385	558.1	810	96.4
July	300	597.7	930	85.3

DISCUSSION

Regarding the tests, the results show no significant difference between the first and second tests in TOEIC® Speaking, but a significant difference between the two TOEIC® Listening and Reading tests. In relation to these results, we consider the following: validity, the newness of the program, and the time frame between the tests.

Test Validity

The two tests of TOEIC® Speaking were used to measure student improvement in speaking English, and a key question is how well the test itself measures students' abilities. For example, in the case of conversation and discussion, interlocutors are turn-taking, listening to messages and responding to them, deploying a variety of communicative strategies such as suggesting, clarifying, and asserting. With discussions, there may be input via receptive skills, perhaps reading about a topic, or watching a DVD clip in preparation. Much of the focus of a speaking class is on interaction. How well does TOEIC® Speaking

address this?

The first point is that the test is taken using a computer, which removes the opportunity to use many of the communication strategies necessary of human interaction, and there is no opportunity for the negotiation of meaning, so that the entire process is more artificial than a test involving two people. However, if recorded classroom tasks that are similar to the test items can be shown to benefit students' productive skills' development, this might encourage instructors to use recorded tasks on the basis of pedagogy. While some researchers have explored such uses (Soresi & Suzuki, 2007; Toyoda, 2009; Matsuda, Ogawa, Sun & Wang, 2010; Uenishi, 2015), research on the TOEIC speaking tasks and recording would be useful.

As noted earlier in this paper, parts V and VI of the test do not connect well with real-life situations. Part VI asks for a short verbal essay, and Part V requires an answer which is unlikely. A case can be made for I, II, III, and IV, not on the basis of real-life tasks, but because they are the kinds of pedagogical task used in classrooms. While it is a given that all tests have limitations, at present the computer testing of oral communicative skills is often seen as narrow compared to the aims of the instructors, who tended to feel that there were more important activities that the students should undertake in the limited time they had for English studies.

It is interesting to note that a significant difference was found in the TOEIC[®] L&R scores. Although it is unlikely that the gain in these scores was solely the result of HiSPEC class instruction, it is probable that the course made a contribution to the gain. One possible reason for this is that non-Japanese teachers teach predominantly in English, exposing the students to a great deal of input, including instructions, anecdotes, and general classroom interaction. With small classes, in which students were all near to the teacher, uptake may have been much better than in regular Communication IA classes, so aiding listening skills. In considering this, we examined the gain of TOEIC[®] L&R scores from those students who did not take HiSPEC instruction in Communication IA but took the same instruction with HiSPEC students in Communication IB. Those non-HiSPEC students also gained significantly higher scores in July than May ($t(102)=-5.93, p < .000, d = 0.50 [0.32, 0.68]$; see Table 5 for the descriptive statistics). Comparing HiSPEC and non-HiSPEC students, although both gained much higher scores in July than May, it may be the case that HiSPEC students performed better than non-HiSPEC students because HiSPEC students had much higher scores in May than non-HiSPEC students; it is usually the case that with a high starting score, it is much more difficult to get a significant increase in score for the later test because TOEIC uses score equating rather than raw totals of the numbers of correct answers.

The Newness of the Program

Another factor in the test results relates to the newness of HISPEC. As noted above, the test itself does not fit easily with some aspects of communicative language teaching, and teachers had no prior experience of teaching a course involving a TOEIC[®] Speaking test and little time to adjust their courses. From the narrow perspective of raising scores, identifying the best way of achieving this is a process that takes time and experimentation, and is unlikely to be achieved in the very first course of its kind. By the end of the course, however, teachers had a much better understanding of the challenges. Two attended a seminar on TOEIC[®] S&W, and were able to advise on the test and marking procedures in detail.

The Time Frame Between Tests

An additional factor was the time frame between the two tests. The first was given in April and the second in July, meaning that there was a maximum of only ten classes between the two tests, which is a relatively small amount of class time. As TOEIC® Speaking is not a multiple-choice test, and requires a new set of test-taking skills, this will almost certainly have affected the results.

Implications for Teaching

The main implication for the HiSPEC course is the potential tension between the broad language aims of the English language teachers involved in HiSPEC and the narrow focus of the TOEIC® Speaking test. As we have noted, this was dealt with in at least three different ways by teachers. A key issue revolves around how students, developing oral communicative skills in their courses, need to adjust to the demands of a computer-based speaking test. Given that TOEIC® Speaking is a short test, one practical option would be to organize test simulations and guidance the week before students actually take the second test.

Other, more minor, considerations revolve around giving greater space to the tests, and student selection. Students could be required to take the first test right at the beginning of the semester, for example, which would give a better indication of the effect of HiSPEC on test scores. Additionally, students could be allowed to opt out of HiSPEC if they wish to take regular classes, and motivated students with slightly lower university entrance examination scores could be allowed to apply for the program.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have used a mixed-method approach to evaluating HiSPEC. In analyzing the data, we have made several key points. These concern teacher satisfaction, student satisfaction, and testing.

In relation to teacher satisfaction and student satisfaction, the results of the course are very positive. Both groups enjoyed the experience of small-size classes. In general, students were motivated. Teachers were able to get to know their students better, and provide much more advice and encouragement to individuals in the classroom, than in classes of a larger size. Such aspects of a course, which are not easily quantified, can lead to long-term improvements in students' language skills as they develop intrinsic motivation for using and exploring language.

Regarding TOEIC® Speaking, there was no significant difference between the two sets of test results. We have considered three reasons for this. First, TOEIC® Speaking is a computer-based test, focused on a narrow skill-set, which does not fit easily with the broader aims of English language teachers who are trying to build up skills for communicative exchanges between people. Second, with such a new course, orienting students towards a test which does not connect well with many of the aims of language teachers takes time. The third reason was the compounding effect of the short period between the two tests. We have also commented that the course could have had an impact on TOEIC® L&R results, as it is in reality difficult to separate English language learning into the four separate skills areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Finally, we should note that this article is concerned with the first half of the HiSPEC program only. At the time of writing, the second part of the program is underway, with a focus on writing skills. This course will be analyzed in a second article, which will build on the first, using feedback from both teachers and

students, as well as test data, in order to assess the appropriateness of TOEIC® Writing as an indicator of student writing ability.

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APPENDIX: The Eight Negative Comments on HiSPEC

- *This could be a better course if the course gave us more opportunities for the presentation using students' own ideas.*
(もっと自分で文章を考えて発表する機会があると良いと思いました。)
- *I wanted to have more opportunities to speak in English because this is a valuable small-size class by a native speaker of English. Also, more homework is desirable in order to prevent decrease of our English ability.*
(せっかく外国人の先生で少人数クラスなのでもっと英語で話す機会が欲しかった。宿題もしっかり出してくれた方が英語力の低下を防げると思う。)
- *This course was good because this is a small-size class and students could make good relationships because of the warm-up activity at the beginning of the class. But it may be better if we could have more homework.*
(少人数のクラスであり、最初のウォーミングアップなどでクラス全体の仲が良くなりとても充実したクラスで良かった。もう少し宿題が出てもいいと思う。)
- *Personally, I feel this course was too difficult for me.*
(個人的に、少し難しすぎる。)
- *I have not had opportunities so far to speak in English so that this course was difficult to follow.*
(今まで英語で話すことはなく、突然そのような授業を受けても、ついていくことが難しかった。)
- *Sometimes I was not able to understand what the teacher said, and I was anxious about this course because other students were good at English.*
(先生が言っていることが聞き取れないことがあったし、周りがみんなできる人なので不安でした。)
- *It was hard for me to discuss difficult topics in English, but I think I have brought off the task by writing my opinions beforehand in homework. It is important to think about and discuss these topics, but it is not useful for daily English conversation.*
(難しい話題について英語で討論するのは大変だったが事前に宿題や授業で意見を書き出しておくと、一応形のあるディベートはできたと思う。このような話題について考え、議論するのは大切なことだけれど、専門的な用語が出てくるのは日常的な英語の使用にはあまり役立たないと思う。)
- *This course inspires me because other students were good. But I got a little bored with the course because the pattern of the course is always the same.*
(周りがハイレベルだったので、いい刺激になりました。授業パターンが毎回変わらなかったため、少し飽きが来ていたという面もあります。)

ABSTRACT

Integrating the TOEIC Speaking Test with Small Group Classes

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This article describes the organization, set-up, and evaluation of an exciting new program which is attempting to help first-year university students improve their English speaking and writing skills. Known as Hiroshima University's Program for English Communication (HiSPEC), the program is part of the "Super Global University" initiative, which attempts to create Japanese leaders who have excellent English communication abilities. Here, we focus on the first half of HiSPEC, which is oriented towards speaking skills and the TOEIC[®] Speaking test.

Students with the highest English entrance exam scores from some faculties were identified and grouped into "small classes," with about 15 students in each. Those non-English majors received instruction from native English-speaking instructors for 90 minutes one day per week during a semester, and took the TOEIC Speaking Test near the beginning of the semester and about 10 weeks later.

Results showed that the students' TOEIC Speaking Test scores generally improved, but the improvements were not statistically significant. In questionnaires, students overwhelmingly stated that they enjoyed the courses and, thanks to the program, they had become even more motivated to improve their English conversation skills in the future. The instructors, meanwhile, reported that even though the test scores did not significantly improve, the small class sizes had positive effects on students' English speaking abilities and motivations. Yet, some teachers questioned the validity of using the TOEIC Speaking Test to motivate students, and also expressed concern that there was not enough instruction time between the two test administrations for significant improvement to be expected. The implications are described here.

要 約

TOEIC スピーキングテストと少人数クラスとの統合

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この論文は、大学1年生の英語スピーキング力及びライティング力向上に向けた新しいプログラムの組織や評価等について述べたものである。そのプログラムは、英語コミュニケーションのための広大プログラム（通称 HiSPEC）と呼ばれ、優れた英語コミュニケーション能力を有する日本のリーダーを創生する、「スーパー・グローバル大学」の一環である。ここでは、HiSPECの前半、つまりスピーキング力を中心とした内容と TOEIC スピーキングテストに焦点を当てている。

入学試験時で各学部の最も英語力の高い学生約 15 人を 1 クラスに充当した。これら非英語専攻の学生は、前期 Semester に週 1 回外国人講師の指導を受けた。TOEIC スピーキングテストは、前期始め近くとその 10 週間後に受けている。

その結果、学生の TOEIC スピーキングテストにおける英語力は、全体的に 2 つのテスト間では向上していたが、統計上の有意差はなかった。アンケートを見てみると、授業は楽しく、そのおかげで英会話力を向上しようという動機づけになった、と学生は強く述べている。また外国人講師は、テスト結果では意義深いほどの向上は見られなかったが、少人数クラスは学生の英語スピーキング力とその動機づけに良い効果をもたらしたと報告している。しかし、TOEIC スピーキングテストを使用する妥当性に疑問を投げかけ、十分なスピーキング力の向上を見るには指導期間が短いという懸念を示す講師もいた。