Using Tasks to Promote Student-Centered Lessons in TOEIC Preparation Courses

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In a typical TOEIC preparation course, students often complete a lot of practice tests and the teacher explains the correct and incorrect answer choices (Davis, 2005). Although this may help students to get used to the format of tests, it does little to enhance students' language skills and their performance on the actual tests. In addition, this teacher-centered learning environment may have an effect on the students' interest and motivation across a 90-minute lecture.

In order for students to gain practical skills for TOEIC and to participate actively in lessons, the presenter will introduce a task-based approach, designed for TOEIC, based on her experience teaching 2nd-year students majoring in medicine, nursing, and economy in TOEIC preparation courses at a Japanese university. The focus of the task is for the students to create original TOEIC-style tests. Students take their classmates' tests and give feedback to each other. In order to create and provide test items to others, students learn the characteristics of the TOEIC test including how distracters are chosen and used, how information is organized on business letters, and how the content can be predicted from the answer choices. The tasks also support the development of bottom-up skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation necessary to be able to produce test items. Giving tests to others allows students to be responsible for their participation in the tasks, and provides an opportunity for students to learn from each other. The presenter will discuss examples of the activities, students' feedback, and future research considerations.

TOEIC preparation courses tend to be taught as traditional and rigorous lessons, but by looking at the features of the test's required skills from different angles, the lessons can be made to be meaningful and enjoyable.

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