

Improvement on TOEFL through reading and without formal instruction: Another look at Isik (2013).

Stephen Krashen (2018, Turkish Online Journal of English Language Teaching 3(1): 24-25.)

Isik (2013) reported on the achievement on the TOEFL examination of two groups in Turkey:

- (1) CURRENT STUDENTS: 122 senior university students in Turkey majoring in electronic and computer science who competed a four-year course in English for Special Purposes (four to six hours per week). This group, the “current students,” scored an average 537.6 (sd = 39.5) on the TOEFL examination.**
- (2) GRADUATES: A group of 57 graduates of the same university who had been working with English on their jobs. Eighty-seven percent had been working between 2 and 5 years. This group, the “graduates,” achieved a mean score of 577.4 (sd = 47.7) on the TOEFL.**

If we assume that the graduates were at the same level of English as the current students when they graduated, they gained about 40 TOEFL since graduation, (577.4 – 538.6), about ten points a year. None of the graduates had had any formal instruction in English while on the job, which supports the hypothesis that language can be acquired without formal instruction, in this case through doing “job-related tasks” that involved English.

Isik also reported that reported frequency of reading in English after graduation while on the job correlated significantly with graduates’ TOEFL scores, but reported frequency of writing, speaking and listening did not. I confirmed this using rank-order correlations, a crude measure that does not consider raw scores but only their rank order, and in this case with only a small number of pairs (n = 7). The correlations were calculated from data in Isik’s tables 1,2,3 and 4. The results are consistent with Isik’s analysis using ANOVA.

Table 1: Rank order correlations between TOEFL scores reported reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Reported activity	rho
Reading	0.96
Writing	-0.29
Speaking	-0.14
Listening	0.32

Again, if we assume that the graduates had scores similar to scores achieved by the current students when the graduates first started working, this result confirms that the amount of reading done and language proficiency, as measured by standardized tests, are related (e.g. Gradman and Hanania, 1991; Mason and Krashen, 2017).

A gain of ten TOEFL points a year without study is encouraging, but it is likely that the graduates could have done even better by engaging in self-selected pleasure reading. Mason (2006) has estimated that reading 40 pages of self-selected books in English will result in about a 1 point gain on the TOEFL for university EFL students in Japan. This predicts that reading a little more than one page of an English book per day over one year would double the graduates' gains.

My analysis assumes that the graduates did no pleasure reading in English outside of their work. It would be interesting to know how much non work-related reading the graduates did.

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References

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