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Challenges of New Styles of the TOEFL Exam. IBT Style

Nowadays it is difficult to overestimate the leading role and unfeigned significance of the TOEFL exam. The TOEFL exam as the one to assess the level of knowledge of the American-British language as a foreign language turned up in the 1960s and since then it has been the acme among all language testing systems. Today the TOEFL exam is held by 470 TOEFL centers in 170 world countries. It is caused by more than 2400 best American and Canadian colleges and universities asking for the TOEFL certificate from any applicant who wants to gain admission.

What also makes the TOEFL exam so popular and essential is the TOEFL Test Certificate which is the requirement forced by the diversity of business schools and colleges (MBA programs), exchange programs, intern and probation activities. At the same time, the TOEFL exam is used as the tool of encouraging employees to master the English language and thus have some fringe benefits or privileges coming from this testing procedure. In case of successful passing through the TOEFL exam an employee can enjoy a pay rise. For some people getting through the TOEFL exam successfully is the condition of being hired to work.

The question which AUCA can pose today is not whether to teach the TOEFL exam or not but how to teach it more effectively and beneficially by using new methods of teaching, new methodologies, and modern teaching tools. This question requires special investigation and can be considered a conceptual one especially if we want to keep pace with the rest of other reputable colleges and universities.

Presently the whole world is provided with three styles of the TOEFL exam: PBT (Paper-Based TOEFL), CBT (Computer-Based TOEFL), and IBT (Internet-Based TOEFL). The IBT style is a recent version of the TOEFL exam which was introduced in the USA in 2005 and has taken over the computer-based test (CBT).

It is so pleasing to establish the fact that through the years of its successful being AUCA professors instructors gained relatively high results in teaching students the concepts and practical usage of the TOEFL exam. The dominating style of AUCA TOEFL instruction is PBT style which has proved to be quite efficient in teaching students the “ins and outs” of the TOEFL exam. But, as all are interested mostly in the “final product” – in students’ showing higher level of knowledge and higher score, it is obvious to predict that the overall result of instructors’ teaching effort could be more vivid if they used newer styles of TOEFL as some supplementary material.

The factor, which imposes some additional informational, structural as well as instructional values on newer styles of TOEFL – CBT and IBT – is their deeper penetration into the English language which is strengthened by using more practical approaches, critical thinking, more advanced material, and new types of questions.

CBT and IBT styles of the TOEFL exam are “high-tech” versions, so they require new non-traditional approaches in teaching the foundations and the advances of the test. As for

the teaching materials concerning different styles of the TOEFL exam, it will not take any trouble for a teacher to find PBT style resources; CBT style material is also available, though major advanced assignments and questions are not even mentioned in CBT TOEFL kits. As for IBT style as the latest version, its teaching resources are either not available or are underway. Though some Internet TOEFL sites have some elements of IBT style material being offered to a wide range of TOEFL applicants, it is of little practical use due to its minor size and lower level of the English level presented in it. There is one basic lack concerning all TOEFL kits: as their strongest point, TOEFL instructors may enjoy superb TOEFL material, brilliantly organized and structured. But what is really weak about them is absence of methodological instructions. So, with reference to this, all TOEFL instructors have a free hand and can fully express both their creative character and innovative technologies in teaching the TOEFL exam.

It is worth saying that teaching TOEFL can not simply be a traditional copy covering of the material from the TOEFL kit, but a very captivating "journey" into those "parts" of the TOEFL exam which it comprises. For instance, the TOEFL exam is so much concentrated on British-American realities, including history, arts, business, literature, modern life, flora and fauna, etc. This material is in gross in the Internet. The only thing a TOEFL instructor needs in this situation is simply access to the Internet. One more factor which can serve as a generator of the TOEFL teaching diversification is TOEFL test relevance to different sciences. Again addressing students to those sites will provide them not only with theoretical, but also with practical scientific material plus exercises to consolidate it. It will undoubtedly do students a lot of good in Listening and Reading Sections of the TOEFL exam and stand them in good stead.

Developing new styles of TOEFL exam (CBT and IBT) and introducing them into TOEFL teaching in AUCA can undoubtedly have a lot of advantages towards rising its income. For instance, AUCA can start providing teaching TOEFL not only for "internal" needs but to organize special courses for those desiring to sit for the TOEFL exam at the TOEFL Center (CBT or IBT style is required, not PBT one due to their substantial differences).

IBT style of the TOEFL Exam.

IBT style of TOEFL sustains some merits in comparison with PBT style:

- Firstly, it is based on Internet advanced technologies and, therefore, is presented at a higher technical level (It is crucial to mention here that high-tech versions of TOEFL can afford to use a lot of pictorial information including tables and charts. This, in its turn, aids an exam-taker by making test information more vivid, understandable, and perceptive).
- Secondly, the whole process of TOEFL testing is controlled by the computer. It excludes accidental faults most of which are evoked by the human element.
- Thirdly, IBT style fully supports the format and protocol of the TOEFL exam avoiding any disorders or chronological violations.
- Fourthly, IBT style as well as CBT style of the TOEFL exam can be considered the most democratic form of testing thanks to its non-concerned nature.

IBT TOEFL exam focuses entirely on four fundamental skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. Students are tested on each skill independently and as part of integrated exercises where two or more skills are tested concurrently. Thus, IBT TOEFL differs considerably from its predecessors since it includes the speaking section which measures the applicant's speaking ability as well as the talent of taking notes. Parallely with this, the TOEFL test evaluates the applicant's critical

thinking level through the context and training situations. By introducing a new speaking section into the IBT format of the TOEFL exam, the compilers of it maximally approached the TOEFL exam to the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) one which has exactly the same set of sections as the current version of the IBT style of the TOEFL exam (TOEFL and IELTS can differ now only from the point of view of a number of tasks in each section as well as the time limits to fulfill the tasks).

Furthermore, TOEFL, recently being the tool of measuring knowledge about the English language, has turned into the tool of measuring practical command of the English language. Now the TOEFL test investigates how well the applicant knows the language in order to study in the country where people speak this language, to organize verbal communication with teachers and other students, to take notes of lectures, to be able to develop this or that topic and to oppose the speaker.

The electronic format of IBT TOEFL exam diversifies somehow from the traditional one. What really matters concerning this question is the changing number of questions in each section and the time limit to answer them. If PBT TOEFL exam was a unified version for all types of applicants, irrespective of their level of preparation for the exam as well as their mastering in the English language, then electronic format of IBT TOEFL exam is more individual. After a couple of questions or more the system itself chooses all the consequent questions by weighting their level of complexity with the results of your previous answers.

This is a summing-up Table of IBT Format of the TOEFL exam, indicating the total number of sections, time limits and the number of tasks (1):

Section	Time Limit	Number of Tasks
Reading	60–100 minutes	36–70
Listening	60–90 minutes	34–51
Break	10 minutes	–
Speaking	20 minutes	6
Writing	50 minutes	2

This is a summing-up of the total number of changes having taken place in a new format of the test:

The occurrence of a new section – Speaking Section – has taken place in a new version of the TOEFL exam – IBT style. It evaluates speaking skills of an applicant. Test takers are expected to convey information, explain ideas, and defend opinions clearly, coherently, and accurately.

Here are some external features of **the Speaking Section** of IBT TOEFL exam (3):

- Two independent tasks about familiar topics: test takers state, explain, and support their response using personal knowledge and experience.
- Two tasks based on Reading and Listening material: tasks include a short reading passage and a short talk. (These are shorter than those in the Reading and Listening Sections).
- Questions require test takers to combine information from both the reading and the listening material in their response.
- One task is based on a campus-related situation, and the other is based on academic classroom material.
- Two tasks based on Listening material, including a short lecture or conversation.
- Questions require test takers to summarize key ideas from the talks in the responses
- One task is based on a campus-related situation, and the other is based on academic classroom material.

- Test takers can take notes and use them to respond.

Trained raters evaluate test takers' ability in:

- Topic development – show they understand, can make connections, and convey relevant information;
- Delivery – use clear, smooth, sustained speech for overall intelligibility;
- Language use – demonstrate control of grammar and word choice, and respond coherently.

As the assignments are mainly an integrated type, they cohere to measure your ability to communicate in the realm of the English language, because one can observe a conceptual break – through alteration in choosing the material and types of assignments for the new style – IBT one. The latter are so constructed as we, use genuine English. Obviously as IBT style poses commonly used questions and widely-spread assignments answering these questions and doing these assignments will indicate more precisely how applicants use real English language. ETS service has been granted a tool to gain a more realistic assessment of how well an applicant will be able to communicate in an academic mode.

The Structure (Grammar) Section has been abolished. Today all grammar skills and abilities are integrated into all the sections of IBT TOEFL exam.

As for **the Listening Section**, it includes longer talks and conversations, but with some difference – in a new format of IBT TOEFL exam applicants are allowed to take notes of what they listen to.

Here are some external features of **the Listening Section** of IBT TOEFL exam (3):

- Two to three conversations that include two or more speakers in each.
- Four to six lectures which include classroom dialogue.
- Opportunity to take notes while listening.
- Familiar question types from the computer-based TOEFL test.
- New question types that measure test takers' ability to understand a speaker's attitude or meaning.

The Reading Section embraces new types of assignments founded on accumulating and classifying information, filling in a table and writing a short summary. An applicant can be offered from three to five academic reading passages followed by comprehension questions that measure the ability to understand and analyse the meaning of the passages.

Here are some external features of **the Reading Section** of IBT TOEFL exam (3):

- Familiar question types from the computer-based TOEFL test.
- New question types in which test takers demonstrate they have learned what they have read, either by filling out a table or completing a narrative summary.
- Choose a correct paraphrase of a reading.
- New features that make the testing experience easier for test takers, including a glossary and review feature.

What crucially changes your approaches in **writing an essay** is that since IBT TOEFL exam is an internet version, you will need to be able to type an essay, which requires some additional training versus CBT style where one can either type an essay or write it on a sheet of paper according to the applicant's choice.

Here are some external features of **the Writing Section** of IBT TOEFL exam (3):

- One task requires test takers to defend a position relative to a specified general topic.

- In the other task, a reading passage and a lecture are presented, and test takers must answer a question relating to main points of both the passage and the lecture.

The total amount of time released for the exam is about four hours, including the break time. IBT TOEFL exam can be passed through only if one sits for all the four sections at once.

“...The operational standard for admission to a college or a university is a score of at least 213 on the computer based TOEFL (550 on the paper based TOEFL) or 6.5 on the IELTS; individual programs may have higher TOEFL or IELTS requirements. The TOEFL or IELTS is required of all international applicants whose native language is not English...”. 1

The way how applicants perceive IBT TOEFL exam is not so unclouded as it may seem at first glance (2).

- Applicants complain about IBT TOEFL Exam procedure, mainly because of the high noise level during the speaking section: everyone is responding orally to six questions at the same time. In addition, the number of seats available is limited (usually filled four months before deadline date).
- The demand for test seats remains very high even after almost a year after the introduction of the test: candidates have to wait for months since short-term test dates are fully booked. The four-hour test consists of four sections, each measuring mainly one of the basic language skills (although some tasks may require multiple skills) and focusing on the language used in an academic, higher-education environment.

In order to make TOEFL teaching more efficient at AUCA, it is advisable to introduce some supplementary material – high-tech versions of the TOEFL exam – to the dominated PBT style. This perspective may open new ways in improving the current TOEFL teaching process, introducing new high-tech methods, working out modern methodologies, guaranteeing more profound means of instruction and rising AUCA's annual income.

References:

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О компетентности преподавателя вуза

Как подняться на уровень профессиональной компетентности, что является ее основой, на что обратить внимание в своей деятельности в первую очередь, какие параметры могут служить ориентиром при формировании компетентности – вопросы, на которые хотят найти ответы многие педагоги, опираясь на свою собственную практику и педагогическую теорию.

Именно с ответами на эти вопросы связаны прежде всего поиски возможностей повышения эффективности обучения.