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The Correlation of the Test of English as a Foreign  
Language, the Michigan Test of English Language  
Proficiency, and the Placement of Students at  
the English Language Center

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The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of placement of students at the English Language Center here at Brigham Young University. The intensive English program began here at BYU seven years ago, yet the organization of the English Language Center is relatively new. The Center began its first semester of operation in September 1980. At that time it was determined that the program would be set up with five levels of instruction. In order to correctly place students on the appropriate level with other students of comparable proficiency, a five-part test battery was developed. This instrument includes a twenty-item oral choice grammar test, two dictation passages, a sixty-item reading comprehension test, and a forty-item listening comprehension test. Placement results are determined by the total score of the five-part test. Since the initial placement exam in the fall of 1980 many, including myself, have wondered how successful we have been in correctly placing students by proficiency levels. Many have also asked at what level it would be expected that a student would pass the Test of English as a Second Language (TOEFL) or the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP).

Both the TOEFL and the MTELP are measurements used by colleges and universities throughout the United States for determining a student's proficiency in English. One of these tests must be taken prior to being accepted at an American university.

The test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) was developed by a team of over thirty organizations in 1963. Through the years responsibility for the exam has fallen under the direction of many different organizations. Since 1973 Educational Testing Service (ETS) has been responsible for its administration, directed by the TOEFL Committee of Examiners. This committee is comprised of six members who are specialists in linguistics, language testing or the teaching of English as a second language (Test and Score Manual, 5-6). As mentioned, the purpose of the TOEFL is to measure English proficiency of students whose native language is not English. It is used for admission purposes by colleges and universities across the United States, academic institutions in Canada and other countries, as well as independent organizations and foreign governments. It is recommended for use by students at the eleventh-grade level or above; the test content is

considered too difficult for younger students.

TOEFL was originally a two-hundred question test consisting of five sections. The test has been modified considerably through the years to its present form of three sections. Section one, listening comprehension, measures the students' ability to understand spoken English. The test problems deal with aspects of vocabulary, grammatical structures, as well as sound and intonation distinctions that have proven difficult for non-native speakers. Section two measures mastery of important structural and grammatical points in standard written English. Section three tests reading comprehension and vocabulary skills.

Table 1 gives average reliabilities of the scaled scores of the three sections and total test. The reliabilities were computed using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20. For section one (listening comprehension) the reliability is .88. Section two (structure and written expression) has a reliability of .84. The reliability for section three (reading comprehension and vocabulary) is .89. Finally, the reliability for the total score is .94. The observed reliabilities indicate that the TOEFL yields consistent results.

The TOEFL also has a strong relationship among the skills tested by the three sections of the test. These intercorrelations among section scores are found in table 2.

Research also indicates that the TOEFL produces valid results; that is, it actually measures what it is intended to measure (Test and Score Manual, 25).

TOEFL has an ongoing research program to maintain additional support of its validity and reliability.

The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, like the TOEFL, was designed to measure English proficiency of non-native speakers of English. MTELP is part of a battery of tests which also includes an impromptu written essay on an assigned topic and a test of aural comprehension. At Brigham Young University we do not use the written essay.

The Michigan Test Service is available through the University of Michigan, English Language Institute, Division of Testing and Certification.

The MTELP is a one-hundred item objectively scored test divided into three sections. Section one is a multiple-choice grammar test. Section two deals with vocabulary. The items in this section test words in the range of the 4,000 to 9,000 most common English words according to the Thorndike-Lorge general word count (MTELP Manual, 9). This range was selected as the minimum working vocabulary for a full-time student in an English university, so that he/she would not be handicapped by the need for excessive dictionary work. Common English idioms are also tested in this section. Section three is based on reading comprehension. There are four passages ranging from 100 to 350 words in length followed by

five multiple-choice questions. The questions require a knowledge of facts, an understanding of argument and drawing conclusions (MTELP Manual, 3).

Test results indicate that the MTELP is sufficiently reliable for discriminating among individual students seeking admission to American colleges and universities. The reliability coefficient computed by Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 was .894. Valid results are achieved from the Michigan (MTELP Manual, 14).

With this introduction to the ELC placement exam, the TOEFL and the MTELP it is hypothesized that the ELC exam correlates significantly with these two highly established, normed exams.

### Method

**Subjects.** All adult subjects involved in this study were enrolled at five levels of instruction in the Brigham Young University English Language Center intensive English program. One hundred and five students from eleven different language backgrounds have taken the TOEFL. Of these one hundred and five, five students were from level one, thirty from level two, twenty-four from level three, twenty-eight from level four and nineteen from level five. Forty students from six different language backgrounds have taken the MTELP. Of these forty, one was from level one, one was from level two, nine from level three, twenty-one from level four, and ten from level five. All students taking either the TOEFL or the MTELP range in proficiency from high beginning to advanced.

**Measurement.** At the beginning of each semester, all students are administered the BYU/ELC Placement Battery. They are then placed by level and section according to their total score on the five-part battery. Two weeks into the semester, all teachers are asked to rate each student according to his/her performance in class up to that point. The purpose of this rating is to check to see if the students are correctly placed. The rating consists of a five-part scale. Normally about fifty percent of a class will receive a rating of three (the middle group); about twenty-five percent will receive a rating of four (the top group); and about twenty-five percent will receive a rating of two (the low group). The ratings of one and five are for misplaced students. The one rating is for those who should have been placed at a lower level. The five rating is for those who should have been placed at a higher level. Most teachers, then, would not assign any rating of one or five. Students are never moved down a level, but at this point if any student does receive a rating of five, he/she would be moved up to the appropriate level.

At the completion of each semester the TOEFL exam is given. The MTELP is given every month. Any student who desires to take the exam may. These exams are not mandatory for ELC students but are offered as a service to those interested in applying for admissions to the

university. Data for this particular study was calculated from test results from November 1980 to December 1981.

Data Analysis. The level averages for both the TOEFL and the MTELP were determined. The Pearson-Product Moment Correlation coefficients were calculated for each exam also. Simple linear calculations were made with an analysis of variance for each exam.

## Results and Discussion

The level averages for the TOEFL (Table 3) identify the progressive nature of the levels with greater TOEFL scores. It should be noted that the scores received at each level indicate the completion of a given level. Thus it can be hypothesized that at the completion of level five a student would score, on the average, a 522 on the TOEFL. At the completion of level four, a 483, at level 3 a 455, level 2 a 398 and at level 1 a 392. An international students applying for admissions to Brigham Young University must receive a 500 or higher on the TOEFL to be admitted.

Table 4 identifies the level averages for MTELP. As with the TOEFL scores, these scores indicate a student has completed the assigned level. Thus upon completion of level five a student, on the average, would receive a 78 on the MTELP. Level four, a 71, level 3 a 67, level 2 a 70 and level 1 a 45. Students must receive an 85 or higher to be accepted at Brigham Young University. In informal surveys of students who have taken both the TOEFL and the MTELP, most indicate that the MTELP is easier. Yet results of this study indicate that more students are passing the TOEFL.

From the results of the analysis of variance table (table 5) for the TOEFL scores we see that a significant correlation (at the .0005 level) was found between the ELC placement levels and students' TOEFL scores. Likewise, there was a significant correlation (also at the .0005 level), although not as high, between the ELC placement levels and MTELP scores (table 6). Both these findings support the principle hypothesis that there is significant correlation between a student's placement level and results on either the TOEFL or the MTELP.

## Conclusion

Results of this study indicate that the BYU/ELC placement exam is accurately placing students for their study of intensive English. Although many students may complain and recommend that they be moved to a higher level, it is apparent that we can have significant confidence in our placement procedures. Likewise we can have significant confidence that at the completion of level five a student will be able to pass the TOEFL.

This type of analysis and correlation will be an ongoing process. After each TOEFL and MTELP exam, results will be combined with the present data, thus making the sample size continually larger. This will be a key in helping to determine the successful placement of intensive English students.

Table 1  
Reliability of TOEFL

Section	KR-20
1. Listening Comprehension	.68
2. Structure and Written Expression	.84
3. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary	.89
Total Score	.94

Table 2  
Intercorrelations of TOEFL Scores

Section	1	2	3	Total
1. Listening Comprehension	--	.70	.68	.37
2. Structure and Written Expression	.70	--	.77	.92
3. Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary	.68	.77	--	.91
Total Score	.87	.92	.91	--

Table 3  
Level Averages for the TOEFL

Level	N	Mean	St. Dev.
1	5	392.07	52.8
2	30	398.23	33.1
3	24	455.17	30.2
4	28	483.35	42.1
5	19	522.51	34.8

Table 4  
Level Averages for the Michigan English  
Language Proficiency Exam

Level	N	Mean	St. Dev.
1	1	45.00	--
2	1	70.00	--
3	9	67.371	6.97
4	21	70.682	7.78
5	10	77.529	8.56

Table 5  
Pearson Product Moment Correlations

ELC levels with TOEFL	= .778
ELC levels with Michigan	= .547

Table 6

Analysis of Variance Table ELC  
Levels with TOEFL Scores

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Regression	1	215207	215207	157.661	.0005
Residual	103	141627	1365		
Total	104	355834			

Table 7

Analysis of Variance Table ELC  
Levels with Michigan Scores

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Regression	1	1035.87	103.87	16.208	.0005
Residual	38	2428.39	63.91		
Total	39	3464.26			