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Abstract

The thesis at hand is a qualitative study that aimed at exploring methods and tasks used by teachers in Ukraine while preparing students to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-based version (TOEFL iBT). The TOEFL test is a standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers who intend to study in an academic environment, especially in the USA. In the thesis, general principles, education and management strategies used for classroom instruction were understood as methods, while classroom activities focused on developing particular skills and abilities were seen as tasks.

The study addressed five research questions: how the teachers prepared students for the TOEFL iBT, why the teachers chose particular methods or tasks, what resources the teachers used for the test preparation and practice, how the students experienced the test preparation and practice, and finally, how the final results (received by the official test centre) corresponded with the teachers'/ students' expectations.

The research was performed as a case study in a Ukrainian language school. The data for the research was collected through the use of qualitative methods, namely interviews with three EFL teachers who were teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course, and four students (one male and one female from two different classes) who were taking the course at the case study school. Additionally, five lesson observations, devoted to different stages of the TOEFL iBT preparation, were conducted in two different classes.

The study showed that the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school was primarily based on communicative language teaching, which was proved by the explicit use of skill-integration tasks, by the close connection of teaching materials to real life, and by frequent student interaction within the group (pair-work prevailing). Communicative language activities and games (vocabulary in particular) were also part of the classroom routine.

The hypothesis that the preparation course at the case study school mostly consisted of teaching geared towards the test was confirmed by the dominant role of skill-based methods and tasks and by the emphasis on the explicit practice of the TOEFL iBT structure and useful strategies to achieve the best possible results on the test.

The teachers chose particular methods and tasks on the grounds of the TOEFL iBT test requirements, the preparation materials that existed on the educational market at the time of the preparation course, the students' language proficiency level, their needs and individual requests, the number of students in the class, and the length of the TOEFL iBT preparation course.

Instead of using one single textbook for preparation, the teachers preferred to use a combination of paper (commercial books) and Internet (TOEFL iBT preparation websites, e-books, TOEFL iBT YouTube channels, and blogs) resources.

The interviewed students expressed their general satisfaction with the TOEFL iBT preparation course. However, they also felt that some aspects of the course could have been changed, for example, the length of the course should have been extended and the number and language ability levels of the students in the class should have been considered more thoroughly when grouping the students.

Generally, the correspondence between the final results received by the official test centre and the teachers' and students' expectations, appeared to be quite high. This could be explained by the fact that, during the preparation course, the teachers followed the TOEFL iBT score requirements and ETS raters' guidelines to correctly determine students' personal strengths and weaknesses.

The thesis has contributed to the knowledge on the methodology and resources used for preparing students for the TOEFL iBT and, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has contributed to a gap in the research in this field.

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List of abbreviations

BICS – Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
CAE – Certificate in Advanced English
CALP – Cognitive/ Academic Language Proficiency
CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CLT – Communicative Language Teaching
CMTEFL – Communicative Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language
COE – Committee of Examiners
CPE – Certificate of Proficiency in English
EFL – English as a Foreign Language
ESL – English as a Second Language
ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETS – Educational Testing Service
GCVR – Grammar, Cloze, Vocabulary, and Reading (one of the MELAB sections)
GRE – Graduate Record Examinations
IELTS – International English Language Testing System
ITA – International Teaching Assistants
MELAB – Michigan English Language Assessment Battery
MIDAS – Multiple Intelligences Development Assessment Scales
SLA – Theories of Second Language Acquisition
TEFLA – Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults
TESOL – Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOEFL CBT – Test of English as a Foreign Language Computer-Based Version
TOEFL iBT – Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-Based Version
TOEFL ITP – Test of English as a Foreign Language Institutional Testing Programme
TOEFL PBT – Test of English as a Foreign Language Paper-Based Version
TOEIC – Test of English for International Communication
TWE – Test of Written English

1. Introduction

1.1. Topic, aims and background of the thesis

The thesis is a qualitative case study of methods and tasks used by teachers while preparing students to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-based version (TOEFL iBT) in the Ukrainian context. In the thesis, general principles, education and management strategies used for classroom instruction are understood as methods, while classroom activities aimed at developing particular skills and abilities are seen as tasks.

The TOEFL test is a standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers who intend to be enrolled in foreign universities. The TOEFL is aimed at evaluating students' ability to study in an academic environment. The TOEFL test is designed primarily for the Northern American English-speaking academic and professional institutions (mainly for universities in Canada and USA). However, the test is also accepted in Europe, Asia, and Australia. Most colleges and universities use TOEFL scores as the only factor in their admission process, often setting a minimum TOEFL iBT score required which, for the majority of universities, is 80 points. The TOEFL iBT is taught and can be taken in more than 160 countries all over the world.

Although the test is represented in several formats (internet-based, paper-based versions, junior tests), the most popular variant of the TOEFL at present is the TOEFL iBT. The internet-based TOEFL, which has gained popularity and validity all over the world, is integrated since it encompasses, or integrates, the four main language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. Each skill is evaluated separately as a test section and is scored on a scale of 0-30 points, which at the end of the test adds up to the highest score of 120 points. The test also has a time limit for each section, with a total of about four hours to complete the whole test.

The main tool used for the TOEFL iBT test is a computer with Internet connection. Students' answers are saved (for the speaking section – recorded) and sent automatically to the test centres for grading. The age group for those taking the test varies. However, this test is the most popular among high school leavers who wish to enter a foreign educational institution or university students with a BA degree wishing to continue their education overseas (TOEFL iBT 2015). The results of the TOEFL iBT (as well as the results of any TOEFL test) are valid for two years only, and can be received both by post and electronically.

The present research is based on interviews with three EFL teachers who taught the 12-week TOEFL iBT preparation course in one of the language schools in Kharkiv, Ukraine. Additionally, a sample of four students who took the course were interviewed. In addition to teacher and student interviews, five lesson observations were also used as a data collection method.

The topic for the thesis was chosen because the TOEFL iBT test is winning popularity extremely rapidly in all parts of the world where English is a non-native language. The reason for this is globalization, which in this case is represented by the growing interest of young people in receiving education abroad where English is used as a lingua franca. For instance, the researcher had to take the TOEFL iBT test for enrollment at the University of Stavanger, and despite the fact that the researcher had been an EFL teacher for four years before taking the test, the test itself did not seem to be easy and additional preparation would most likely have improved the overall score. What is more, the researcher's first-hand experience of preparing students for the TOEFL iBT has shown that there are a limited number of guides and limited research devoted to the methodology of the preparation for the TOEFL iBT. Nevertheless, in many countries of the world teachers continue preparing students to take this exam. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to research the experiences of teachers and students involved in the TOEFL iBT preparation process in order to contribute to the somewhat under-researched field of teaching a preparation course for this particular test.

1.2. Research questions and expectations

In order to shed light on the process of preparing students for taking the TOEFL iBT (in the Ukrainian context), the thesis addresses the following research questions:

How do the teachers prepare students for the TOEFL iBT?

Why do the teachers choose particular methods or tasks?

What resources do the teachers use for the test preparation and practice?

How do the students experience the test preparation and practice?

How do the final results (received by the official test centre) correspond with teachers'/ students' expectations?

One of the main expectations is that teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course will be based on communicative language teaching (Brown 2007; Harmer 2001; Howatt 2004; Nunan, 1991) (see section 3.4). Thus, skills-integration, the close connection of teaching materials to real life, and students' interaction, will be the fundamental principles behind all the classroom methods and tasks. Another assumption is that the TOEFL iBT preparation course will mostly consist of teaching that is geared towards practising test strategies and will not aim at increasing students' general language level.

Given that all the tasks in all the sections of the test have set time limits, it would be interesting to learn how the teachers deal with the issue of time limit and what strategies they use to help their students cope with it. Moreover, it would also be interesting to discover what resources the teachers use for the test preparation to find out if, as expected, a single textbook is the prevailing resource.

Another expectation is that both the teachers and the students will pay much attention and time to self-study, and that a good deal of test practice will be carried out at home. In addition, seeing that the TOEFL iBT is completely conducted over the Internet with the help of a computer, it is expected that the preparation course at the case study school will be mostly computerised with the extensive use of Internet resources.

Finally, it is interesting to find out how final results (received by the official test centre) correspond with teachers'/ students' expectations. This would help to understand if the teachers correctly identify students' strengths and weaknesses during the course, and if they take into consideration official TOEFL iBT requirements and score guidelines.

1.3. Methodology

The qualitative methods of data collection used in the study were teacher and student interviews, and lesson observations. The interviews were conducted individually with each teacher during the preparation course to address the teaching process and methods they used. The interviews focused on the teachers' experiences with the TOEFL iBT test format and their personal choices of teaching methods, tasks, resources, and materials. The teachers were also asked about their beliefs and attitudes regarding the TOEFL iBT.

The students were asked about their attitudes to the teaching and learning processes related to each section of the test, their overall opinions about the intensity and effectiveness of

the course, and their views on their own progress. Four students, two male and two female, from two different TOEFL iBT preparation classes taught by the two interviewed teachers, participated in the interviews.

Finally, five non-participant lesson observations were conducted in two classes preparing for the different sections of the test. The observed lessons included preparing for the reading section, listening section, speaking section, writing section, and practising the whole trial version of the test.

1.4. Contribution

The TOEFL iBT is a relatively new, modernised version of the TOEFL test. It exploits the Internet as the main tool for receiving and delivering information, which is why it seems that methods used for preparing students for this test also need to be altered and revised in accordance with the demands of the new format.

Most TOEFL iBT books and surveys provide only an overview of the test, giving some general tips and standard answers. There are also numerous guides and books for students' self-preparation on how to increase vocabulary, and improve grammar and even pronunciation skills on the TOEFL iBT. Many resources, computer-based learning programmes, and even mobile applications, have also been developed. However, all these materials are designed for students' self-study only.

Although the TOEFL iBT test has been used as a proficiency test since 2005, there is still limited research devoted to the methodology of its teaching. The literature review on this topic revealed several relevant studies, mostly published in Asia, for example Ward (1998), Cohen (2011), Lucas et al. (2009), and Amiryousefia and Tavakolib (2011). It therefore seems important to conduct a study in a European environment, with European teachers and students. Given that other research has been conducted in Asian universities or with Asian students (China, Japan, Iran), and given that culture can influence teaching methods, approaches, learning styles and behaviours, the outcomes of the same process may be different in different cultures.

Since there seems to be a lack of TOEFL iBT preparation assisting materials and guidelines for teachers, the thesis aims to contribute to the field by investigating teaching methods that are implemented in the Ukrainian TOEFL iBT preparation classes. The goal is to

describe how various approaches to teaching may benefit or hinder the learning process, how specific the preparation programme is in terms of the TOEFL iBT, and how relevant and appropriate the chosen methods are.

It is also assumed that the present study may trigger further research on the TOEFL iBT preparation methodology, which may be used in the future as a consultative resource in education. Moreover, the thesis might initiate more research on the issue of computerised teaching in general, and TOEFL iBT computerised teaching in particular.

1.5. Outline of the thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters. Following this introduction chapter, Chapter 2 presents an overview of the TOEFL test and focuses on the history of the programme, the structure of the TOEFL tests in general and the TOEFL iBT in particular, and the scoring system used in the test.

Chapter 3 provides theory for the research at hand. Firstly, it discusses the most influential theories of second language acquisition, among which there are Behaviourism, Innatism, Krashen's 'monitor model', Information Processing, Connectionism, and the Interaction Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982; Lightbown and Spada, 1999). These theories are reviewed in the research because they explain the nature of various tasks and instructions used in the TOEFL iBT classroom and provide a foundation for understanding how students may react to them. A particular focus on communicative language teaching in the chapter is a consequence of the communicative approach being based on the idea of skills integration and connection to real life language use, which also applies to the main principles of the TOEFL iBT proficiency test. Therefore, having described the aims and features of communicative language teaching, with reference to Howatt (2004), Brown (2007), Nunan (1999), and Harmer (2001), it is easier to analyse the aims and procedures of the TOEFL iBT preparation class.

The notion of standardized assessment, its advantages and disadvantages, and the validity and reliability of language proficiency tests, are also addressed in Chapter 3. Additionally, the aspects of validity and reliability of the TOEFL iBT and the studies related to the TOEFL iBT preparation are discussed to show how the thesis fits within existing research in the field.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology that has been used to answer the research questions of the thesis. This chapter provides in-depth information regarding the case study and the research methods (namely teacher and student interviews, and lesson observations) used in the thesis. The chapter also addresses validity, reliability, and ethical considerations of the study.

Chapter 5 presents the data collected from the teacher and student interviews, and from the lesson observations. The data presentation of the teacher and student interviews is structured thematically, according to the research questions, while the data collected from the lesson observations is presented chronologically, as the lessons were conducted, in narrative form.

Chapter 6 discusses and interprets the results of the research and links them to the literature on the TOEFL iBT. In this chapter, the researcher also reflects on the implications of the study and makes recommendations about the TOEFL iBT preparation course.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion of the thesis.

2. The TOEFL Test Overview

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the TOEFL test to shed light on the background of the thesis topic. In section 2.2, the history of the TOEFL programme, its developers, and administrative organs is discussed. Section 2.3 provides information about the TOEFL tests structures, namely the TOEFL paper-based test (PBT), and the TOEFL Internet-based test (iBT). This section also explains the scoring system of the TOEFL iBT because this test variant is the focus of the research at hand.

2.2. History of the TOEFL programme

The first TOEFL test was developed in the USA under the auspices of the National Council on the Testing of English as a Foreign Language. The Council consisted of 30 public and private institutions preoccupied with the question of the English language proficiency of non-native speakers, particularly those who apply to study at an educational institution where English is the primary medium of communication. Initially, the testing programme was financed by grants from the Ford and Danforth Foundations, and it was also linked administratively to the Modern Language Association. In 1965, one year after the test inception, the joint responsibility for the testing process was taken by the US-based College Board and the Educational Testing Service (ETS), a private non-profit organisation that designs and administers the TOEFL tests. Later the TOEFL Board was formed by the ETS, the College Board, and the Graduate Record Examinations® (GRE®) Board in recognition of the fact that many TOEFL takers are potential graduate students (TOEFL Program History 2011).

Nowadays, the ETS is the only official testing service that provides an opportunity to take the TOEFL test; however, the TOEFL Board advises ETS on policies and rules under which to administer the test. There are three standing committees in the board: the Committee of Examiners (COE), the Finance Committee, and the Grants and Awards Committee. Each committee is responsible for a specific direction of the programme activity. For instance, the COE is in charge of guidance, research and development related to the TOEFL testing, and it also has the power to advise the TOEFL Board on test redesign and policy changes. The Finance

Committee is responsible for the financial oversight of the organisation, such as budgeting and financial planning, financial reporting, and other relevant issues. The Grants and Awards Committee's main function is to supervise 14 awards and grants provided by the TOEFL board annually to those with outstanding results in the field of English language teaching, international education, testing, and research (TOEFL Program History 2011). The TOEFL grants and awards include English-language Researcher/Practitioner Grant, Small Grants for Doctoral Research in Second or Foreign Language Assessment, TOEFL Committee of Examiners Research Grant, TOEFL Committee of Examiners Grant Recipients, Research Grants, Research Grants for Graduate Students, Jacqueline Ross TOEFL Dissertation Award, Samuel J. Messick Memorial Lecture Award, TOEFL Outstanding Young Scholar Award, and TOEFL Award for International Participation at TESOL (TOEFL Grants 2016).

Since its introduction in 1964, the TOEFL test has changed its format several times: it started as a paper-based test (TOEFL PBT), then evolved into the computer-based format (TOEFL CBT) and, finally, in 2005, it transformed into the Internet-based version (TOEFL iBT). In addition, the ETS offers two more test formats. These are the TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program), created by institutions for internal use only to identify the proficiency level of their students (TOEFL ITP® 2015), and the TOEFL Junior test, an assessment of middle school-level English-language proficiency intended for 11-14 year-old students (TOEFL Junior® Tests 2015).

The switch from the TOEFL paper-based test, or computer-based test, to the Internet-based variant is explained by the changes in the theory of language proficiency and by the extensive popularity of computers with Internet access as a means of education and interaction all over the world. As a result, the TOEFL CBT is not used any more, and the TOEFL PBT is now offered only in relatively few countries where there is limited Internet access, for example, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, and Zimbabwe. In other countries, the TOEFL iBT is likely to be the only test-taking option today (The TOEFL iBT and How It's Different from the PBT 2014).

2.3. The structure of the TOEFL tests

2.3.1. The TOEFL PBT structure

The TOEFL PBT is administered in a paper-based format, and therefore has its own specificity. The test has three main sections: Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. In addition, there is an obligatory section referred as the Test of Written English (TWE). The reason why the writing section is separated from the three main sections is because its score is represented on a different scale.

The section on Listening Comprehension measures students' ability to comprehend spoken English. It consists of 50 questions and takes about 30 to 40 minutes to complete. The Structure and Written Expression section is somewhat shorter (approximately 25 minutes long) with 40 questions. It measures students' ability to recognize and analyse language, mostly grammar-related, that is appropriate for standard written English. Lasting 55 minutes and having 50 questions to answer, the Reading section is the longest on the TOEFL PBT. It measures the ability to understand non-technical reading texts within a given time limit. An additional mandatory writing section (TWE) is aimed at evaluating students' writing skills. It consists of one task, namely an essay on a given topic written in 30 minutes (TOEFL® PBT Test Content and Structure 2015).

The final TOEFL PBT score ranges between 310 and 677 and is formed by the three subscores: Listening Comprehension (31–68 points), Structure and Written Expression (31–68 points), and Reading (31–67 points). The score for the Writing component (TWE) is not included in the final score; instead, it is reported separately on a scale of 0–6 points (TOEFL® PBT Test Scores 2016).

In terms of length, the TOEFL PBT test takes about three and a half hours to complete. It is important that at least one question in each section is answered and that one essay is written to earn a score. The score, which test takers receive on the main sections of the test (Listening, Structure and Reading sections), does not consist of the percentage of correct answers; rather, the overall score is converted by statistical means to a number on what is called the TOEFL test scale. Such score calculation was developed to take into consideration the fact that some tests are more difficult than others. Therefore, it is believed that the converted score, compared to a specific scheme score, is a more accurate reflection of the test taker's ability than the raw score is. The ETS always points out that there is no passing or failing score; score requirements are

established by certain institutions and agencies and, as any other TOEFL tests, the results of the TOEFL PBT are valid for two years.

2.3.2. The TOEFL iBT structure

The TOEFL Internet-based variant is the test that is relevant to the research at hand. Unlike the paper-based TOEFL, the TOEFL iBT is managed through the Internet and is referred to as an integrated test since it encompasses, or integrates, the four main language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. Throughout the test, its developers ask test takers to perform the tasks that combine more than one skill in response to a question, such as reading, listening and then speaking; alternatively, listening and then speaking; or alternatively, reading, listening and then writing.

The reading section opens the test and consists of three to four reading passages on academic topics with 36 to 56 questions in total after all the passages. It takes from 60 minutes to complete the section (if three passages are given) to 100 minutes (in case of four passages). In the listening section, there are two main task types: lectures and classroom discussions, and conversations in an academic environment. The total number of questions is from 34 to 51, with a time limit of 60 or 90 minutes (as in the reading section, the time depends on the number of tasks in the section) (TOEFL iBT® Test Content and Structure 2015).

There is a mandatory break of ten minutes after the two first receptive skills sections, after which the test is continued with the speaking part, with a total number of six tasks. The tasks include two personal opinion questions and four integrated questions, where students have to read, or read and listen, and then summarise orally the main points of the material they have read, or read and heard. Each task has a time limit of 45 seconds (for personal opinion questions) to 60 seconds (for the rest of the tasks). Together with the instructions, tasks and all the answers, the speaking section lasts for about 20 minutes. An important point is that there is no physical examiner who interacts with a test taker; instead, the answers are recorded and sent to test centres via the Internet.

The last section on the TOEFL iBT is the writing section, which consists of two essays. The first essay is an integrated task. It requires test takers to read a passage on an academic topic, then listen to a lecture on the same topic that will either support or oppose the ideas from the reading passage; finally, test takers have to compare both the reading and listening in their written response. This task has a time limit of 20 minutes and a minimum word count of 150

words. The second task is a personal opinion essay, which lasts 30 minutes and must be at least 300 words long. A standard English language (QWERTY) computer keyboard is used for the test. For this reason all test takers are advised to develop their typing skills before taking the test (TOEFL iBT® Test Content and Structure 2015).

Recently, several new accents on the listening and speaking sections have been introduced by the ETS in order to better reflect the variety of native English accents students may come across in an educational environment. In addition to Northern American accents (American, Canadian), test takers can nowadays also encounter accents from the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia (TOEFL iBT® Test Content and Structure 2015).

On the TOEFL iBT, each skill is evaluated separately as a test section and is scored on a scale of 0-30 points, which at the end of the test adds up to the highest score of 120 points. As mentioned above, the test sections also have a time limit with a total of about four hours to complete the entire test. The results of the TOEFL iBT (as well as the results of any TOEFL test) can be received both by post and electronically. The test score can also be delivered directly to up to four institutions, which test takers put on the list while registering for the test. Although there is no limit to the number of times the test can be taken, it cannot be taken more than once in a 12-day period.

2.3.3. Scoring of the TOEFL iBT tests

The ETS is concerned with providing objective scores to ensure their security and integrity. Therefore, the TOEFL iBT tests are likely to be checked outside applicants' countries of origin and test sites. Both human raters and automated scoring techniques are used to show a complete and accurate picture of a test taker's ability. Automated scoring models complement human scoring in the two tasks of the writing section. Such a combination is essential to guarantee quality scores: while human raters measure the effectiveness of the response and the appropriateness of its meaning and content, an automated scoring system evaluates linguistic features of the answers (TOEFL iBT® Test Scores 2015).

A single TOEFL iBT test is scored by a group of raters who are extensively trained and continuously monitored by the TOEFL board. This system is implemented to achieve anonymity and objectivity of each score. Moreover, multiple raters' judgments minimize rater bias, and thus benefit test takers' speaking and writing scores (TOEFL iBT® Test Scores 2015).

3. Theory

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a theoretical background for the methods and assessment used in the TOEFL iBT preparation class. In section 3.2, an overview of the main theories of second language acquisition and their critical understanding are provided in order to demonstrate how the TOEFL iBT preparation methods relate to some of them. These theories explain the nature of various tasks and instructions used in the TOEFL iBT classroom and provide a foundation for understanding how students may react to them.

A historical overview of major language teaching approaches is discussed in section 3.3 to show how the process of English language teaching has developed towards the communicative approach. The latter is relevant for the thesis because it underlies the main philosophy and aims of the TOEFL iBT test. Thus, in section 3.4, the communicative approach is addressed in detail to demonstrate its principles of skills integration and connection with real life language use, which in turn constitute the foundation of the TOEFL iBT test.

Section 3.5 focuses on testing and assessment. It includes a brief summary of scholarly research on the topic and an overview of other international tests similar to the TOEFL iBT. In addition, this section addresses the issues of validity and reliability in general, and for the TOEFL iBT in particular, as necessary criteria used to assess language proficiency tests.

Finally, studies related to the TOEFL iBT preparation are reported in section 3.6 in order to show how the thesis fits within existing research in the area.

3.2. Theories of second language acquisition (SLA)

Different theories and hypotheses in the field of second language acquisition aim to explain the mechanisms behind how learners become proficient in a second language. Many theories that have been developed for first language acquisition are closely related to those for second language learning. For instance, in the process of shaping language learning, some theories focus on the importance of the environment, some emphasise the primary role of learners' innate characteristics, while others attempt to integrate learners' characteristics and

environmental aspects to explain the nature of second language acquisition (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 31).

Research in the field of second language acquisition is related to various disciplines, such as linguistics, applied linguistics, psychology, sociolinguistics, and neuroscience. Therefore, most theories of second language acquisition originate from the above-mentioned sciences and throw light on some related parts of the language learning processes. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 227) claim that ‘at least forty ‘theories’ of SLA have been proposed’. However, there is a lack of agreement among researchers and educators on a ‘complete’ theory of second language acquisition. Even if such agreement was reached, there would still be problems with interpreting this theory for language teaching (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 45).

Although there are various theories and hypotheses of second language acquisition, it seems that only some of them have had a major influence on language teaching. A brief summary of the most influential theories is provided below. These are Behaviourism, Innatism, Krashen’s ‘monitor model’ (Comprehension Hypothesis), Information Processing, Connectionism, and the Interaction Hypothesis.

Behaviourism

According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), behaviourists see their theory as learning in terms of imitation, practice, reinforcement (i.e. feedback on success), and habit formation. Learners receive linguistic input with the help of speakers in their environment. Later, associations between words, objects or events are formed. When experiences are repeated, such associations grow stronger, and learners try to imitate the linguistic input they have received. In the end, if these imitations are successful, learners receive either encouragement for their correct imitations, or corrective feedback on their errors. Lado (1964), cited in Lightbown and Spada (1999: 35), states that since language development is considered to be the formation of habits, it is believed that a person exploits the habits formed in the first language while acquiring a second language.

Researchers have linked behaviourism to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which states that there is a direct connection between the first and second (i.e. target) languages. If two languages are similar, learners will acquire target linguistic input faster. On the other hand, if the first language and the target language differ profoundly, learners are likely to experience difficulty (Ellis, 1994).

Behaviourism has received much criticism from scholars in different areas of expertise. For example, according to Johnson (2004: 18), cited in Menezes (2013: 2), 'Behaviourism undermined the role of mental processes and viewed learning as the ability to inductively discover patterns of rule-governed behaviour from the examples provided to the learner by his or her environment'. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 266) also doubt that behaviourist models can explain second language acquisition except for 'pronunciation and the rote-memorization of formulae'. Because the behaviourist account has proven to be an incomplete explanation for language learning, language scholars have proposed more complex theories, and innatism is one of them.

Innatism (Universal Grammar Hypothesis)

As a counterpoint to the environmental ideas of behaviourism, supporters of the Universal Grammar Hypothesis claim that every person is biologically provided with a language acquisition device that is responsible for language development at its initial stage (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 36-37). Innatism assumes that the individual has an innate ability to acquire language. According to this theory, the input of the environment is insufficient for language acquisition. Such a proposition was first offered by Chomsky (1976), who described how the principles of Universal Grammar help children to acquire the first language during a critical period of their development. Although Chomsky did not state whether this theory could be applied to second language learning, many language scholars have supported his ideas.

Opponents of Universal Grammar argue that Chomsky's hypothesis is not relevant for second language learners who have passed the critical period for language acquisition, although they agree that the Universal Grammar theory can be an appropriate framework for first language acquisition (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 36-37). Moreover, Mitchel and Myles (2004: 94) add that the Universal Grammar approach is only interested in the learner as 'a processor of a mind that contains language' and not as a human being in the social environment.

Krashen's 'monitor model' (Comprehension Hypothesis)

Influenced by Chomsky's ideas of the innate nature of language acquisition, Krashen (1982) proposed the 'monitor model', which consists of five hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis.

The first hypothesis presents the difference between acquisition (a subconscious process of acquiring samples of the second language which learners understand) and learning (a conscious process of rule learning and attention to language forms). Krashen considers that the most productive process is acquisition because only acquired language is available for natural communication. He also asserts that intentional learning cannot become acquisition (Krashen 1982: 10-11; Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 38).

Krashen further draws on the difference between the learned and acquired systems, which are parts of the 'monitor hypothesis'. According to this hypothesis, the learned system is used only as an editor, or 'monitor' of language acquisition. It is responsible for minor changes of the output of the acquired system, which accounts for fluency and judgements about language correctness. Thus, Krashen states that acquisition, not learning, should become the main focus of language teaching (Krashen 1982: 15-18; Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 38).

The 'natural order' hypothesis is aimed at proving that the features of a second language are acquired in a predictable order. Krashen's observations have shown that the rules which are the easiest to state and to learn are not necessarily those that are acquired first. What is more, Krashen assumes that the natural order does not depend on the order in which rules have been taught in class (Krashen 1982: 12-14; Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 39).

Another hypothesis developed by Krashen is the 'input hypothesis', which Krashen describes with the help of the 'i+1' formula. This concept is based on exposure to comprehensible input. If this input is just beyond learners' current level of knowledge (i.e. it is understandable, but contains structures that are not yet fully understood), then both comprehension and acquisition will take place ('i+1', as opposed to the current stage 'i'). Krashen presents the importance of reading as a source of comprehensible input. However, he agrees that some people cannot achieve success in language learning even if they are exposed to much comprehensible input. To explain this problem, Krashen introduces the 'affective filter' hypothesis (Krashen 1982: 20-30; Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 39).

For Krashen, the 'affective filter' is an imaginary barrier that hinders learners from acquiring a language. Depending on learners' emotional states, motives, attitudes, and needs, such a filter limits the input which is noticed and acquired. For example, if a learner is stressed, angry, unmotivated, or bored, the affective filter will block the available input, and no acquisition will occur. On the other hand, when the learner is relaxed, interested and motivated, the available input will be noticed and perceived (Krashen 1982: 30-33; Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 39).

Krashen's ideas have had an important influence on communicative language teaching. Nevertheless, they have been criticised for a lack of empirical evidence. As Cook (1991: 65-66) points out, the monitor model makes sense in its own terms, but is not verifiable.

Information Processing

The 'information processing' model views second language acquisition as a process of gradual formation of knowledge systems which later, through experience and practice, can be used automatically. In the initial stage, learners pay attention to the target language they are trying to produce. Gradually, with experience and practice, learners start using certain aspects of their knowledge automatically, not even noticing they are doing it. Thus, language development and automaticity occur through practice. In this meaning, 'practice' is not used as a set of mechanical exercises, but rather it is intentional learning. The latter has been theorized by Schmidt (1990), who presented the idea of 'noticing'.

Schmidt (1990), cited in Lightbown and Spada (1999: 41), claims that language input is first 'noticed' by our mind consciously. According to Schmidt and others (e.g. Ellis, 1997; Leow, 2000; Robinson, 2003) noticing may be an essential condition for learners' ability to acquire input, especially input focused on feedback on form (Brown, 2007: 292-293). Moreover, unlike Krashen (1982), Schmidt does not distinguish the difference between acquisition and learning.

In addition, some psychologists suggest that learners restructure their skills and knowledge systems of second language in a natural way they are capable of at their level. For instance, Clahsen (1984) explains how learners transform affirmative English sentences into interrogative ones with the help of a series of stages that represent restructuring.

Connectionism

As opposed to Innatism, Connectionism emphasises the role of the environment and doubts the existence of a neurological faculty that is designed for language acquisition alone in a human brain. Connectionists consider that knowledge is built up by degrees through language input from the environment. Having heard the same language structures repeatedly in specific situational and linguistic contexts, learners develop mental connections between these elements. The more frequently these elements appear together, the stronger these connections (and thus, knowledge) are (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 42).

Connectionist research, as well as the theory of information processing, have received criticism for using controlled linguistic features in their experiments, during which people learn very specific linguistic structures, often in invented languages. This disputes the probability of the same outcomes in natural human language learning (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 45).

Interaction Hypothesis

The interactionist position proposes that second language acquisition occurs through conversational interaction with native speakers. Long (1983), cited in Lightbown and Spada (1999: 43), argues that modified interaction is an essential mechanism to make conversational input comprehensible. Language modification involves linguistic simplification, slower speech rate, gestures, elaboration, comprehension checks, clarification requests, self-repetition, and paraphrase.

Another second language acquisition theory that is based on the role of interaction is the sociocultural theory of human mental processing offered by Vygotsky (1978 [1997]). Vygotsky claims that language learning is a socially-mediated process. Advancing to higher levels of second language knowledge is possible only through collaboration and interaction with native speakers of a target language, or with more knowledgeable speakers, such as teachers and more proficient learners (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 44). As confirmed by Mitchell and Myles (2004: 200), 'From a sociocultural perspective, children's early language learning arises from processes of meaning-making in collaborative activity with other members of a given culture'.

Critics of the interactionist hypothesis argue that there is much important language information which is not available through comprehensible input or solely interaction with native speakers. Therefore, they draw greater attention to the role of innate principles of a second language (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 45).

Summing up

In sum, researchers and educators have not reached agreement on a unified theory of second language acquisition, which seems to be logical since language learning is not a linear process and thus cannot follow a single pattern or theory. However, knowledge of second language acquisition theories, their similarities and differences, enables one to better comprehend different approaches to teaching second languages. The most prominent ones are discussed below.

3.3. An overview of English language teaching approaches

To begin with, it is necessary to state what the term ‘approach’ denotes. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986: 16), cited in Harmer (2001: 78), it stands for ‘theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as a source of practices and principles in language teaching’. In other words, an approach illustrates how language learners acquire knowledge and what conditions are most favourable to promote learning.

Throughout the history of English language teaching, although there have been various theories of language learning, not all of them seem to have had a great influence on the educational sphere. For this reason, the aim of this section is to describe only those approaches that have shaped scientific thought and served as a teaching philosophy at a particular time.

From a historical perspective, the grammar-translation approach seems to be one of the most enduring. For several centuries up until the 1960s, it was the dominant method of teaching foreign languages in Europe. According to Drew and Sørheim (2009: 23), the grammar-translation approach originated in the study of Latin and Greek, and is based on learning and memorising grammar rules and bilingual vocabulary lists, doing grammar exercises, and reading and translating texts. In the grammar-translation approach, the written skills (i.e. reading and writing) are considered to be of primary importance, and the role of accuracy is also emphasised. Grammar is taught in an organised and systematic way through a number of sequential stages: first, teacher-centred rule presentation, then providing examples, and finally, practice using many exercises (i.e. through a deductive language teaching method). The teacher is an authority in the classroom, whereas students have the role of passive receivers of instruction (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 4-7).

In contrast, the ‘direct approach’, or the ‘natural approach’, was developed as a response to the grammar-translation approach. It was first introduced in the USA in the 1860s by two European immigrants with teaching backgrounds, Sauveur and Berlitz (Drew and Sørheim (2009: 24). The main idea of the direct approach is to immerse learners in the language environment and to motivate students to think in the target language. In terms of language skills, attention is paid to the development of listening and speaking, but the importance of correct grammar and pronunciation is also accentuated. Unlike the grammar-translation approach, grammar is taught inductively in the direct method, i.e. examples of particular language forms are demonstrated for students to analyse them and find out the rule independently. In addition, vocabulary is taught either with the help of physical objects (such as realia and pictures) or

through demonstration. All teaching is conducted in the target language, and only useful everyday language is introduced. In a direct approach class, learners normally read aloud, do question-answer or fill-in-the blank exercises, write dictations, or do tasks on paragraph writing. The teacher is a primary source of comprehensible input (i.e. understandable language that learners are exposed to) who directs classroom activities. At the same time learners are 'processors' of this comprehensible input in the target language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Another once popular approach is the audio-lingual one that originated from behaviourist models of learning (see section 3.2). According to Harmer (2001: 79), this approach relies mostly on patterned drilling that is expected to gradually help students learn the target language, and the design of the drill prevents them from making mistakes. If mistakes occur, they should be immediately corrected by the teacher because the students may otherwise form bad habits. At the same time, good habits can be engendered through positive reinforcement (a reward which students receive following a desired behaviour, e.g. attention or praise). Similarly to the direct approach, grammar rules are induced from examples, and skills acquisition is carried out in a particular order: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The most common activities in the audio-lingual classroom include different types of drills, dialogue memorization, and grammar games. The teacher is a model of the target language, whereas students are only imitators (Nagaraj, 2005).

Despite the popularity of the audio-lingual approach in the 1970s, the so-called communicative approach entered the educational scene and changed views on language teaching at that time. It seems that communicative language teaching is the most relevant form of teaching in the context of this thesis and will thus be given more attention than the above-mentioned approaches. The reason for this is that the communicative approach is based on the idea of skills integration and connection to real life language use, which also describes the main principles of the TOEFL iBT proficiency test. Hence, having understood the aims and features of communicative language teaching, it can be easier to analyse the aims and procedures of the TOEFL iBT preparation class.

3.4. Communicative language teaching (CLT)

3.4.1. The history of communicative language teaching and communicative competence

At the beginning of the 1970s, UK and American scholars became preoccupied with a new interest in how language, particularly linguistic systems, interact with the outside world. This led to the development of the communicative movement, which introduced the belief that language teaching should take into consideration learners' needs and language application in the real world (Howatt, 2004: 326). Such innovative thoughts were triggered both by social and academic changes at the time. On the one hand, with the introduction of the European Common Market, an organisation created in 1957 and aimed at economic integration between its member states, the number of people wishing to study foreign languages for work or other personal reasons increased considerably. However, the grammar-translation approach used by teachers at that time was more theoretical than practical. For this reason, language educators had to change their methods so that students could apply acquired knowledge, and thus see the results of their studying faster. Moreover, as Whong (2011) points out, the trend of progressivism in language teaching, which stressed a more active student role in the classroom, encouraged scholars to seek a more effective language teaching approach.

On the other hand, the development of the communicative approach in language teaching was also stimulated by British and American applied- and sociolinguists. In Britain, according to Richard and Rodgers (2001: 153-155), the field of applied linguistics was concerned with the question of the efficiency of the situational approach (which emphasised the presentation of structures in/ through situations), dominant for British language teaching at the time. The doubts about the existing situational approach were partly caused by Chomsky's (1965) claim that focus only on language structures does not help students in real life communication. Chomsky (1965: 4), cited in Howatt (2004: 330), contrasted the notions of language 'competence' (described as 'the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language'), and 'performance' (seen as 'the actual use of the language'). Meanwhile the American sociolinguist Hymes (1966), certain that Chomsky's idea of competence was somewhat limited, introduced the concept of 'communicative competence'. Hymes (1966), cited in Howatt (2004: 330), explained communicative competence as the ability to use mastered language structures appropriately in social situations. His statement that 'there are rules of use without which the

rules of grammar would be useless' became the motto for the new communicative approach to language teaching (Howatt, 2004: 330).

Hymes (1966) insisted on social and functional rules of the language, defining communicative competence as an interpersonal construct that makes it possible for a human-being to convey and understand different messages in different contexts. Savignon (1983: 9), cited in Brown (2007: 219), pointed out that the notion of communicative competence is 'relative, not absolute, and depends on the cooperation of all participants involved'. This reflects Hymes' understanding of communicative competence as a dynamic, interpersonal aspect of language that can be seen only in the process of interaction between two or more individuals.

According to Brown (2007: 219), there was a distinction between linguistic and communicative competence in the 1970s. Language forms and structures were considered to represent linguistic competence, whereas knowledge that helped a person to communicate functionally was referred to as communicative competence. On the basis of such a distinction, Cummins (1979, 1980) offered two new terms: 'cognitive/ academic language proficiency' (CALP) and 'basic interpersonal communicative skills' (BICS). By CALP, Cummins meant the knowledge and skills learners can use to practise language forms in the classroom, not representing real communicative situations. In contrast to CALP, the idea of BICS was presented as the communicative capacity that learners could use in everyday interpersonal communication. Later, Cummins (1981) transformed the notions of CALP and BICS to context-reduced and context-embedded communication correspondingly. The first idea included classroom language and the latter reflected face-to-face interaction in the communicative context (Brown, 2007: 219).

Canale and Swain (1980) also carried out research to define communicative competence. As a result, they introduced three components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. By grammatical competence, Canale and Swain (1980: 29) meant 'knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology'. The concept of sociolinguistic competence was seen as knowledge of social and cultural rules of language and discourse, which can be simply explained by language appropriateness (i.e. correct use of relevant language in different social situations). The third component was strategic competence, which underlay learners' ability to deal with imperfect language and lack of knowledge by exploiting 'paraphrase, circumlocution, repetition, hesitation, avoidance, and guessing, as well

as shifts in register and style' (Canale and Swain, 1980: 40-41). Later, in 1983, Canale refined the earlier definition of communicative competence by adding its fourth component – discourse competence. This subcategory was explained as learners' ability to connect sentences in discourse and form meaningful units out of separate statements; that is to say, discourse competence is language cohesion and coherence.

The original model of communicative competence introduced by Canale and Swain (1980, 1983) has undergone several modifications over the years. According to Brown (2007: 220-221), the most complete survey of communicative competence is provided by Bachman (1990). In his work, Bachman refers to 'language competence' (formerly 'communicative competence') and divides it into two broad headings: 'organisational competence', which includes both grammatical and discourse competence (in Bachman's model it was renamed 'textual'), and 'pragmatic competence', which includes both sociolinguistic and 'illocutionary' competence (i.e. the functional aspect of language responsible for sending and receiving intended messages). Strategic competence is added by Bachman as a separate element of communication ability and is associated with the interlocutor's ability to use communication strategies effectively (Brown, 2007: 220-221).

The notion of communicative competence is one of the main foundations of the communicative approach to foreign language teaching. The new communicative teaching ideology became popular in the period of ten years between 1970 and 1980. As Howatt (2004: 327) points out, the first five years of the process could be defined as the 'quiet years' since it seemed that nothing new or innovative was happening in the field of linguistics and pedagogy, i.e. no major publications had been written to trigger the development of the movement. However, changes in language philosophy were, in fact, happening simultaneously in different places, and educators and scholars involved in the development of communicative language teaching engaged in a good deal of interaction within their community at conferences and through mutual visits to educational establishments. After the publication of *Cohesion in English* by Halliday and Hasan in 1976, the quiet years were overtaken by an outburst of activity in the development of practical methods for the communicative approach application (Howatt, 2004: 332).

3.4.2. Basic principles and main features of the communicative approach

Communicative language teaching (CLT), or the communicative approach, is based on the concept of interaction that is used both as a teaching method and the main aim of the studying process. Rather than focusing exclusively on grammar and vocabulary, CLT stresses the importance of language functions and opportunities found in real or realistic interaction. In CLT, the aspect of accuracy is not as significant as the idea of completing a communication task itself. It is believed that having a clear purpose for communication (for example, to buy a train ticket or to ask for directions in the street), and a desire to communicate, are the foundations of the approach. Fluency is more valued than accuracy since the result of the performed task is regarded as of paramount importance (Harmer, 2001: 84-86; Brown, 2007: 241-242).

Howatt (2004: 334-335) draws attention to two different notions that influenced the development of the communicative approach. They are the idea of problem-solving and the role of errors in the process of language acquisition. The first idea suggested that people learn through planning ahead and testing their plans out. If the plans function, successful ideas are adopted and later used by the brain subconsciously. In other words, to achieve a goal in communication, learners have to be trained to work out what to do by themselves. The other idea was the significance of learners' errors. Having previously been defined as a sign of failure, learners' errors now became a marker of success. The reason why learners made systematic mistakes ('errors') was explained by the fact that they had moved on to a new stage of language acquisition, but could not yet fully control their language. Thus, errors helped learners to make progress in language acquisition (Howatt, 2004: 335).

Harmer (2001: 85) gives an overview of general methods used in CLT with the help of the communication continuum, where communicative activities are contrasted with non-communicative. Harmer shows that the communicative approach emphasises content, not form; it uses a variety of language and does not focus on one language item solely. In communicative activities, teacher intervention and materials control are limited. Such principles, according to Harmer, are aimed at 'replicating real communication' (Harmer, 2001: 85).

CLT principles are often introduced as a list of general features of the communicative approach. For instance, Nunan (1991: 115) provides five characteristics of CLT. These are the focus on interaction while learning to communicate in the target language, an attempt to connect the language learning process in the classroom with the language activities outside it, an

increase of learners' personal experiences as an important tool in classroom learning, the use of authentic materials in different learning situations, and giving learners plenty of opportunities to focus on the learning process alongside language learning.

A similar list of CLT principles, but focused on somewhat different aspects, was introduced by Brown (2007: 241-242). Brown describes four interconnected characteristics that define the notion of CLT. They include emphasis on all components of communicative competence, without being restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence, and classroom activities that are designed with a focus on authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Additionally, accuracy and fluency are regarded as supplementary principles of communicative techniques, while fluency, by perforce, can become more significant in order to engage learners in more active language use. What is more, in CLT students have to use the language both receptively and productively in spontaneous language situations under the guidance, but never control, of the teacher.

It is claimed that such features depict how the communicative approach is concerned with students' language needs and the connection between classroom language and its application in real life. Nevertheless, this approach has come under attack for several reasons. Firstly, opponents accuse CLT of being prejudiced in favour of native speaker teachers because the teacher has to be able to answer any language question that appears in an unrehearsed communicative situation in class. What is more, CLT has also been criticised for its restriction of teacher intervention during an activity and negligence towards explicit teaching of grammar, which in turn has influenced students' accuracy and overall language competence (Harmer, 2001: 86).

3.4.3. Communicative activities and their application in the classroom

Based on the main principles of the communicative approach, activities used in the communicative classroom are mostly centred on students' interaction, which requires negotiation and cooperation between learners in order to fulfill the task. However, the communicative approach, although being focused primarily on developing speaking skills, is also used in a variety of forms to promote reading, listening and writing skills. The reason for this is the skills-integration principle that underlies communicative language teaching. Since real life communication does not solely consist of speaking, but also includes reading, listening and writing, receptive and productive skills also complement each other in the communicative

classroom (Brown, 2007: 241-242). The same principle applies to the TOEFL iBT test. Therefore, it is likely that activities and approaches used in the communicative class can also be applied to the TOEFL iBT preparation course. Below is a summary of some communicative activities intended for developing both receptive and productive skills.

Firstly, in terms of reading, despite the fact that reading may be perceived by some as a non-communicative activity, this does not apply to the communicative approach. While reading, there is normally no direct interaction as there is between the participants of an oral activity. However, in the process of reading the reader communicates with the writer and may later convey the information read to others. In order for reading to have a communicative element, one may divide a reading lesson into three logical stages of 'pre-reading', 'while-reading,' and 'post-reading'. In the stage of 'pre-reading' one can raise learners' interest in the topic, provide a helpful lead-in to the text, or check what students already know in relation to the topic.

As summarised by Howarth (2007), pre-reading activities include predicting the information in the text through the title or pictures, skimming the initial paragraph, exchanging personal background knowledge about the reading topic, or doing a quiz on general knowledge about the issue raised in the reading (Howarth, 2007).

While-reading activities with a communicative purpose are usually completed in pairs or small groups. Such tasks include running and reading (when students work in pairs, one student reads out a question about the text to his/ her partner, the other student runs to the opposite side of the classroom where the text is exposed, finds the relevant information and comes back to his/ her partner to dictate the answer), using cut up texts (students work in groups of three or four; having a different piece of the same text each, they have to answer the questions related to the text collaboratively), or jigsaw reading (which can be done with one text divided into two parts or two different texts on the same topic; each student reads his/her half of the text and completes a related task; students then work together and exchange their information). Such reading activities are used to introduce speaking into a reading lesson and to provide a real opportunity for genuine communication (Howarth, 2007).

The post-reading stage can be represented by follow-up discussions, reviews, and summaries of the text when students exchange information in pairs, small groups, or even as a whole class. Alternatively, a follow-up writing task can be given after the reading (Howarth, 2007).

The other receptive skill, which received much more attention after the introduction and further proliferation of the communicative approach, is listening. Harmer (2001: 228-229) claims that both extensive and intensive listening greatly benefit students' overall communicative competence. By extensive listening, Harmer means any type of material heard outside the classroom, for example, TV, radio, audio books and the Internet. To motivate students to listen and analyse such information, Harmer suggests teachers ask students to record their responses to what they have heard or seen, or to fill in special report forms on the content of learners' extensive listening material. Speaking about the notion of intensive listening, Harmer (2001: 229) focuses primarily on taped materials. Harmer points out that listening can be presented in several stages: lead-in, listening for gist, or general information (comprehension task), feedback, listening one more time for details or any specific information, feedback again, and finally, providing a follow-up text-related task (for example, in the form of a discussion based on the listening material).

There are various strategies to enhance listening comprehension in a communicative context. According to Nunan (1999), such strategies include listening for gist (e.g. Is the radio report about news or the weather?), for purpose (e.g. Does the speaker agree or disagree with the suggestion?), for the main idea (e.g. Why is the speaker asking the man?), for inference (e.g. What is the speaker implying by his words?), listening for specific information (e.g. How much does the train ticket cost?), listening for phonemic distinctions (e.g. Did the speaker say 'first' or 'fourth?'), listening for the tone/ pitch to identify the speaker's attitude (e.g. Did the speaker enjoy the wedding or not?), or listening for the stress (e.g. What is more important, where he bought the watch or when?). Listening in the communicative approach emphasises the importance of integrating different strategies into listening tasks and ensuring that students are familiar with them.

No less important a question in the communicative approach is the question of developing productive skills. As for speaking, the most common communicative activities include communicative games and information gap tasks, simulation and role-plays, or discussions and debates to promote language exchange and meaningful interaction within a group.

Communicative games are usually designed in the form of information gap activities, where learners have to solve a puzzle, draw a picture (describe and draw), put things in the correct order (describe and arrange), or find similarities or discrepancies between given pictures. Harmer (2001: 272) suggests that television and radio games can also be of great

importance in the communicative classroom. Games such as ‘Twenty Questions’ (students have to guess the object a chairperson is thinking of by asking 20 or fewer yes/no questions about it), ‘Call My Bluff’ (a team gets a word or an expression that members of the other team are unlikely to know; the team looks up the definition of the word in the dictionary and creates two more false definitions; the other team has to guess which definition is the right one), or ‘Fishbowl’ (where students have to take a previously written word, question, or phrase from the fishbowl and incorporate it in their speech) provide good fluency activities.

Simulation and role-plays are another way to develop students’ communicative skills. The first is based on the simulation of a real life situation students might encounter outside the classroom, for example, a business meeting or an airport check-in. Jones (1982: 4-7), cited in Harmer (2001: 274), describes important factors a simulation should contain in order to work. They are reality of function (students must think that they are real participants of a real situation), a simulated environment (the teacher emphasises that the classroom is a real place, for example an airport or a cafe), and structure of the activity (learners must understand the activity and have all the necessary information to complete it). A role-play differs from a simulation in that it provides students with some specific information about who they are, and what they think or feel at the moment. Such activities motivate students to use the language to defend their ‘role’ and achieve the final aim of the activity. Despite all the benefits of simulation and role-playing, such activities have not always been popular (Harmer, 2001). Harmer (2001: 275) responds in defence of simulation and role-plays by explaining that they have a number of advantages, such as being fun and motivating, encouraging more hesitant or silent students to speak, and involving a wider range of language in comparison with more task-based activities that require the use of the target language in order to complete a task.

Furthermore, discussions, along with debates, are considered to be effective communicative activities to promote fluency. Many educators argue that some students can be reluctant to share their opinions with the whole class because of a lack of ideas or lack of confidence. Hence, with these students, activities such as discussions will fail to succeed. However, Harmer (2001: 272-273) offers a solution to the problem by introducing the notion of the ‘buzz group’, in which students can discuss their opinions before allocating a speaker to present them in front of the whole class. In such a case, the stress-level is reduced and students are more willing to express their point of view or elaborate on a subject. A formal discussion or a debate, in contrast, is when students have to prepare ‘for and against’ arguments on a specific topic and present them in the form of a rehearsed speech. In this case, a speaker is

chosen to represent a group, while other members of the group can participate by adding or clarifying points as the debate progresses. It is believed that successful discussions and debates depend on the final aim to reach a consensus by all the members of the activity.

Finally, writing as a communicative activity is characterised by being meaningful, realistic and relevant to learners. Ideally, communicative writing tasks should be interesting and motivating for all learners. However, this does not always happen in reality for various reasons. Nevertheless, writing as a productive form of communication can be found in e-mails, letters to newspaper editors, wall-papers and posters. Kaye (2008) emphasises the role of modern means of communication, such as blogs and social networking sites, which can encourage students to express their thoughts and exchange opinions. In order to motivate students to write creatively, their works can later be published, for example on the British Council or the BBC websites, or simply displayed on the walls of the classroom for others to read and enjoy (Kaye 2008). Many writing tasks, correction and editing can be carried out in pairs or groups to stimulate analytical thinking, peer feedback, and to raise learners' responsibility both for the writing results and the feedback to it (Kaye 2008).

Moreover, Harmer (2001: 260) adds that cooperative writing can bring fruitful outcomes because it involves generating more ideas, more thorough revisions, and better editing. What is more, writing in groups usually creates more successful genre-specific texts (i.e. texts in a certain genre of writing, such as business letters, newspaper articles, and blog publications) than individual writing. Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (1992) introduce some techniques to promote learners' interaction while doing a writing activity. These include group brainstorming on a given topic, writing workshops or in-class writing (students consult each other and thus build texts in cooperation), whole class discussions of advantages and disadvantages of a particular text and the necessary editing it requires, group research on a given topic, peer-editing, and peer feedback. Such interactive writing activities have a clear communicative nature and, therefore, become a meaningful part of the communicative approach to language teaching.

Vocabulary as a subskill is not given a primary concern in CLT (Decarrico, 2001). For example, Kang and Golden (1994: 70) claim that much vocabulary is learnt incidentally in the communicative language classroom, and suggest that teachers' instruction should focus on '...how to learn vocabulary, instead of concentrating on teaching vocabulary itself'.

According to Harmer (2001), knowing a word involves knowing its meaning (being able to relate the word to an appropriate object or context), usage (knowing the word's collocations, style, register, any connotations, and associations), word formation (being able to spell and

pronounce the word correctly), and grammar (being able to use the word in an appropriate grammatical form).

There are various techniques for presenting vocabulary. For instance, with younger learners to show the meaning of the word the teacher can use realia (physical objects from real life), drawings (both by the teacher and by the students), demonstrations to show actions, and body language (miming and gestures) (Allen, 1983: 38, 41). With older learners, another technique of presenting vocabulary is defining words by means of other words, or giving an example sentence to illustrate the meaning of the word (Allen, 1983: 46).

Contextualisation of vocabulary plays an important role in remembering it. As Coady (1987) suggests, background knowledge of the word may serve as compensation for certain syntactic deficiencies. Thus, to remember words effectively and firmly, it is necessary to present and practise vocabulary items in a meaningful context.

Along with traditional vocabulary exercises (matching, fill-in the gaps, word transformation, multiple choice), numerous dramatic stories, anecdotes, and role-plays are used in the communicative classroom to help students learn target language words. Additionally, vocabulary games are a popular activity for all age groups at all the language ability levels (Wright, 2005). These are, for instance, crosswords, ‘Tic-Tac-Toe’, or ‘Noughts and Crosses’ (students have to explain the words and first draw a horizontal, vertical, or diagonal line in a 3×3 grid), vocabulary quizzes, ‘Unscramble’ (students have to make a word out of randomly given letters), ‘Hangman’ (students have to guess the letters in a word with only a limited number of guesses before the stick man is revealed and the game is over), and the like. In many cases, apart from helping to build vocabulary skills, such games also provide spelling practice (Uberman, 1998).

All in all, the integration of both receptive (reading and listening) and productive (speaking and writing) skills, discussed above, has become one of the main features of standard-based language tests. A detailed description of standardized testing in general is presented below in order to throw light on the notion of the TOEFL iBT in particular.

3.5. Standard-based testing

Since the TOEFL iBT is an international standardized language proficiency assessment, it is necessary to address the notion of standard-based assessment in general, its characteristics, and the issues of validity and reliability as the important criteria such testing should satisfy.

3.5.1. The notion of standardized assessment

According to Brown (2007: 86), standard-based assessment is represented through the measures that are used to evaluate student academic achievement and prove that language learners have reached particular performance levels, or standards. Brown (2007: 103) mentions four characteristics of standardized tests: they have to be standard-based (i.e. based on certain commonly approved standards), norm-referenced (i.e. the test aims to identify whether the test taker performed better or worse than other test takers), represent a product of research and development, and have systematic scoring and administration procedures.

Many countries worldwide develop standards specifically for language learning. In Europe, for example, a set of standards of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* reflects the goal to make language instruction more communicative. The *CEFR* identifies four basic domains for language use, namely personal, public, occupational, and educational (Council of Europe, 2001: 48–49). The personal domain focuses on home settings and interactions, or settings among family members or social networks (friends, acquaintances). The public domain is concerned with public spaces (streets, shops, restaurants, sports, or entertainment venues) and other social networks outside home. The occupational and educational domains refer to workplace settings (offices, workshops, conferences) and school settings (classrooms, colleges, universities, residence halls) correspondingly (MELAB 2015).

In order to ensure that English language learners would have access to effective educational programmes to meet the required standards of the *CEFR*, the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) organisation has presented ESL standards for education (Brown, 2007: 87). As Short (2000), cited in Brown (2007: 88), points out, these standards consist of three goals: to use English to communicate in social settings, to achieve academically in all content areas, and to use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways. It is clear that the development of standards presupposes the responsibility for assessing their accomplishment correctly. Thus, the need for standardized language assessment has been

recognized in the community of English language educators. Therefore, a variety of standard-based tests, including language proficiency tests, have appeared.

Harrison (1983: 7-8) points out that the aim of language proficiency tests is to evaluate students' ability to apply acquired knowledge in actual situations. Harrison demonstrates this real life application principle with the example of a test students have to complete to follow a university course in an English-speaking country. Such a test, according to Harrison, needs to take into consideration not only students' ability to understand listening to lectures, but also their ability to make good use of the information written on the board, the ability to take notes, and to further exploit them in subsequent writing. What is more, Harrison argues that a crucial element of language proficiency testing is the assessment of students' ability to communicate effectively by rephrasing, apologizing, asking for an explanation, and the like.

Nowadays, there are numerous standardized tests, including Cambridge English: Advanced test (CAE), Cambridge English: Proficiency test (CPE), and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). However, the most frequently taken English language proficiency tests are the Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-based version (TOEFL iBT), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB) (Brown, 2007: 107). These tests determine the language ability of students who apply for admission to foreign educational establishments, or occasionally they can be used to measure the language proficiency of job applicants, or meet the requirements for receiving a visa to an English-speaking country (Brown, 2007: 103-104).

The TOEFL iBT, a product of the ETS in the United States, has been discussed in detail earlier (see Chapter 2). Its British counterpart, the IELTS assessment, is developed in affiliation with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. Similarly to the TOEFL iBT, the IELTS focuses on the assessment of four language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. However, unlike the TOEFL iBT, it uses one-to-one speaking assessment with an examiner to reflect real life use of English. There are two versions of the test: the IELTS Academic and the IELTS General Training tests. They differ in the application areas. For instance, the IELTS Academic measures the English language proficiency needed for an academic, higher education environment, whereas the IELTS General Training evaluates English language proficiency in a practical, everyday context. The latter version of the test is also often a visa requirement for those planning to migrate to English-speaking countries, including Australia, the UK, and New Zealand. The results of the IELTS test are presented on

a 9-band scale, with 9 points being the highest achievement. Similarly to the TOEFL iBT, the results of the IELTS are valid for two years (IELTS 2015).

Another intermediate to advanced level English language proficiency test is the University of Michigan's Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB). The purpose of the MELAB is to evaluate the English language proficiency of adult non-native speakers who are required to use English for academic purposes (such as at colleges and universities), or for professional certification. Based on the standards of language assessment introduced by the *CEFR*, the MELAB tests writing, listening, reading, and speaking (though the speaking part is optional). The test is divided into four separate sections: the writing test, the listening test, the GCVR test (grammar, cloze, vocabulary, and reading), and the speaking test, where test takers engage in a conversation with an examiner (MELAB 2015). The test results are introduced on a scale from 0 to 99 for the average of the first three sections of writing, listening, and the GCVR test. Additionally, the speaking section is ranged from one to four and may include '+' or '-'. The MELAB results, as with the TOEFL iBT and IELTS results, are valid for two years (MELAB Scores 2015).

All the three above-mentioned English language proficiency tests (TOEFL iBT, IELTS, and MELAB) consist of both a multiple choice format for the reading and listening sections (in the case of MELAB, for the GCVR test) and human-scored sections for the speaking and writing (i.e. real examiners evaluate test takers' answers). However, in terms of the TOEFL iBT, the responses for the speaking and writing sections are evaluated later, using both an automated scoring system for linguistic features and human raters for content and meaning (TOEFL iBT Test Scores 2015). In the IELTS and MELAB tests, the speaking section is rated exclusively through the interaction with trained, certified and monitored human examiners, whereas writing tasks are assessed by at least two trained raters against a set of criteria (IELTS 2015; MELAB 2015). Such approaches to test rating are aimed at correctly identifying students' language level and presenting valid and reliable results. Nevertheless, standard-based language proficiency tests are still subjected to criticism.

3.5.2. Advantages and disadvantages of standardized language proficiency tests

Brown (2007: 104-105) presents an overview of both advantages and disadvantages of institutionally administered standardized testing. As for benefits, Brown claims that such assessment is a readily available product that has been previously validated, i.e. a study has

been conducted to show that the interpretation and the uses of the test results are valid. What is more, standard-based assessment is easily administered to large groups and, when exploiting the multiple-choice format, scoring, as well as reporting procedures, are streamlined.

At the same time Brown (2007: 105-106) also takes into account the disadvantages of standardized assessment. Firstly, there is the issue of the possible inappropriate use of such tests (for example, using an overall proficiency test as an achievement test only, due to the convenience of standardization). Moreover, there are potential test biases, such as language, culture, race, gender, or learning styles biases. For instance, asking test takers to complain or express any power relations between renters and landlords/ agencies in the writing task can be unfamiliar to certain test takers, and might thus represent a cultural bias (Brown, 2007: 97). There is also a negative washback effect (i.e. the effect tests have on teaching and learning) of standardized testing, when teaching is focused primarily on training students to answer multiple-choice test questions, while other language skills are somewhat neglected. What is more, Brown (2007: 95) addresses the ‘gate-keeping’ (somewhat limiting) role of standardized testing in its negative meaning. He explains that such tests are accepted globally in different areas of human life and, therefore, test takers’ future is dependent on the test results (for example, to receive a place at a university or a job offer from an international company). Additionally, standardized assessment results can be influenced by non-academic factors, such as anxiety, lack of attention, and fatigue.

All in all, both advantages and disadvantages of a particular standard-based language proficiency test are the consequences of validity and reliability concerns, which are discussed below.

3.5.3. Validation and reliability of language proficiency tests

Validation and reliability have traditionally been regarded as the basic criteria for any language test. Since reliability is now increasingly seen as a type of validity evidence (Chapelle, 1999: 258), it seems logical to discuss these two notions in the context of each other.

To begin with, the concept of validity has been discussed by many scholars and educators for a long time. Harrison (1983: 11), for example, defines the validity of a test as the extent to which it measures what it is intended to measure. Kelley (1927: 14), cited in Weir (2005: 12), uses an almost identical definition, saying that ‘the problem of validity is that of whether a test really measures what it is supposed to measure’. Cronbach (1971: 463), cited in

Weir (2005: 12), also supports such an explanation of validity: ‘Every time an educator asks ‘but what does the instrument really measure?’, he is calling for information on construct validity’. However, having analysed the most common views on the concept of validity, Weir (2005: 12) suggests that validity is represented in the scores on a certain administration of a test rather than in the test itself. Weir explains that validity resides in the extent to which a test can provide data, i.e. test scores, which accurately represent a candidate’s level of language proficiency.

Validity is multifaceted, i.e. various types of evidence are required to prove the validity of scores on a test. Weir (1988) distinguishes several elements of theory-based validity that are broadly divided into a priori validity evidence (before the test event) and a posteriori validity evidence (after the test event). A priori validity evidence includes the context (traditionally described as content) validity. According to Weir (2005: 19), context validity represents ‘the extent to which the choice of tasks in a test is representative of a larger universe of tasks of which the test is assumed to be a sample’. A posteriori validity represented by the scoring validity is a next step in the implementation stage when the test has already been administered. At this stage, the generated data should be analysed through statistical analyses to describe the degree to which test takers can depend on the results of a test (Weir, 2005: 14). Weir (2005: 22) proposes using the term ‘scoring validity’ as the superordinate word for all the aspects of reliability. Weir (2005: 14) quotes Alderson (1991: 61-61) to support the idea that reliability is better regarded as one form of validity evidence: ‘... the item homogeneity (internal consistency) can be seen as a matter of reliability, rather than as one of validity... parallel from reliability is simply concurrent validation’.

Jones (2001: 1), cited in Weir (2005: 22), describes reliability in testing as dependability, i.e. a reliable test can be dependent on providing very similar results in repeated uses. In other words, reliability (or scoring validity) accounts for the degree to which test results are stable over time, free from bias and consistent in terms of the content sampling (Weir, 2005: 23). Harrison (1983: 11) adds that there are therefore three aspects to reliability: ‘the circumstances in which the test is taken, the way in which it is marked and the uniformity of the assessment it makes’.

Finally, when scores and grades have been finalized, it is also possible to assess the test along two more posteriori dimensions of criterion-related validity (the extent to which a measure is related to an outcome) and consequential validity (the impact of the test on society and individuals or institutions) (Weir, 2005: 15).

There is a clear need for validation of any test at any stages of its development, implementation, scoring and evaluation. Among others, Bachman¹, cited in Weir (2005: 283), has noted that the higher the stakes of the test and the higher the importance of its impact, the more validation and the greater amount of evidence should be required. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the issues of validity and reliability for the standardized test at hand, i.e. for the TOEFL iBT.

3.5.4. Validity and reliability of the TOEFL iBT

By the end of the twentieth century, along with Cambridge English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in the UK, the ETS TOEFL began to acknowledge the legitimacy of the socio-cognitive elements of validity and reliability of language proficiency testing in the USA as well. These testing services have demonstrated the commitment to continual improvement of the validity aspect in tests (Weir, 2005: 11).

As Chapelle et al. (2008) point out, the validation process for the TOEFL iBT began with a conceptualization and design of the test. In the *TOEFL iBT Research Insight Series*, Volume 4, the editors describe in detail validity evidence supporting the interpretation and use of the TOEFL iBT scores. The above-mentioned document presents the propositions and related evidence in the TOEFL validity argument.

The first proposition is that the test content is relevant to and representative of written and oral texts and the kinds of tasks that students experience in an academic setting. Research that became the foundation of the development of the new test format (as opposed to an existing TOEFL paper-based and TOEFL computer-based versions) included three empirical studies. Firstly, through a survey of undergraduate and graduate faculty and students, Rosenfeld et al. (2001) assisted in establishing the importance of a variety of English-language skills and tasks for academic success. Secondly, Biber et al. (2004) helped to identify the authenticity and representativeness of the lectures and conversations in the listening section of the TOEFL iBT. Later, Cumming et al. (2005) provided evidence about the authenticity, educational appropriateness, and content relevance of the new integrated speaking and writing test tasks (TOEFL iBT Research, 2011: 4).

Effective task design and scoring rubrics that are relevant for identifying test takers' academic language abilities constitute the second proposition, which is proven by numerous

¹ Bachman, cited in Weir (2005: 283) as Bachman (LTEST-L 13/11/02)

exploratory studies that took over four years to complete. The results were presented in the Chapelle et al. (2008) study. What is more, special attention was paid to the development of criteria to assess speaking and writing responses. Groups of experts evaluated task takers' answers and suggested scoring criteria, while another group of investigators analysed raters' cognitive processes while assessing task takers' responses. Such a double system of evaluation contributed to the development of these scoring rubrics for speaking and writing (TOEFL iBT Research, 2011: 5).

The third proposition, i.e. academic language proficiency, which consists of linguistic knowledge, processes, and strategies test takers exploit while responding to test tasks, is also supported by several studies. For example, Cumming et al. (2006) analysed the discourse characteristics of a sample of 36 examinees' answers to independent and integrated essay questions. Cumming et al. (2006) arrived at the conclusion that the discourse characteristics varied with the writers' proficiency levels and with task types. A similar discourse analysis, but with the speaking prototype questions, was carried out by Brown et al. (2005). The results of the research showed that the qualities of spoken responses varied modestly with proficiency levels and, to a lesser extent, with task types. Additionally, Cohen and Upton (2006) conducted an investigation of test takers' strategies for answering the questions of the reading comprehension part. The findings revealed that test takers did not rely on the 'test wiseness' strategies (e.g. matching the words of a question to the passage without understanding), but they rather used reading strategies (e.g. reading a passage attentively) and appropriate test management strategies (e.g. choosing options based on meaning) (TOEFL iBT Research, 2011: 6).

The idea that the TOEFL iBT test structure is consistent with theoretical views of the relationships among English language skills is the fourth proposition. It was supported by factor analytic studies of the 2003-2004 TOEFL iBT field study test form (Sawaki et al., 2008). The researchers found that the structure of a test was best represented by a general factor (EFL ability) and four group factors (one for reading, listening, speaking, and writing). Moreover, in the research carried out by Stricker and Rock (2008), these factors proved to be stable across the subgroups who took the test and differed either in the first language background (Indo-European vs. Non-Indo-European) or in their exposure to English (TOEFL iBT Research, 2011: 6).

TOEFL iBT valid score interpretation and use are also represented by the proposition that the performance on the test is related to other indicators or criteria of academic language

proficiency. For the test at hand, they include academic placement, local institutional tests for international teaching assistants, and performance on simulated academic listening tasks. The criterion of self-assessment is explained by the 2003-2004 field study of the TOEFL iBT test form conducted by Wang et al. (2008). Over 2000 participants in the above-mentioned study had to answer how much they agreed with a number of 'can do' statements on a questionnaire. There were 14 to 16 statements for each of the four language skills tested on the TOEFL iBT (reading, listening, speaking, writing). As a result, observed correlations between the summative scores for each of the four self-assessment rubrics averaged .46 with test scores on the measures of the four skills, and .52 with the total test score. Furthermore, as mentioned in the ETS research on English language competency descriptors (2004a), the participants with higher test scores could better identify that they could do more complex tasks than those test takers with lower scores (TOEFL iBT Research, 2011: 7).

With regard to local institutional tests for international teaching assistants (ITA), the TOEFL iBT scores of the speaking section are potentially useful to distinguish whether candidates' language proficiency level is sufficient to begin teaching or not. Xi (2008) analysed the correlation between the TOEFL iBT speaking scores and the results received on the local tests after candidates' arrival at their educational establishments. It was found that the more the test was focused on speaking abilities and the less on teaching skills, the higher the correlation was between the scores on the local assessment for ITA and the scores on the TOEFL iBT speaking section. This is representative of the TOEFL iBT interpretation of speaking scores as a measure of language proficiency, and not teaching ability (TOEFL iBT Research, 2011: 8).

One more appropriate indicator of academic language proficiency is the performance on simulated listening tasks. Sawaki and Nissan (2009) investigated this question by comparing the TOEFL iBT listening section scores and the simulated academic listening tasks. First, Sawaki and Nissan created a set of three complex listening tasks by surveying how important a variety of academic listening tasks and course-related activities are for undergraduate and graduate students at four different universities. This survey revealed that the most appreciated and frequent listening activity was listening to lectures (instructors presenting academic materials), whereas the most frequent class activity, and the most important component relating to final grades, was answering objective and short-answer questions. Thus, using the results of this survey, Sawaki and Nissan constructed three simulated academic listening tasks (30-minute lectures) followed by a set of 32 objective and short-answer questions. A sample of 120 graduate and 64 undergraduate students completed these three academic listening tasks and a

TOEFL iBT listening section. As a result, the observed correlations between the two were .56 for undergraduate students and .64 for graduate students (TOEFL iBT Research, 2011: 8-9).

Last but not least, in the TOEFL iBT validity argument is the proposition that the test itself has positive consequences and is used appropriately according to its main aims. In order to maximize the positive consequences of the test and to ensure appropriate use of the TOEFL iBT scores, ETS has released a number of assisting publications and manuals for score users. Such materials include descriptive information on interpreting test scores (ETS, 2004a), guidance on how to set standards for using scores at educational institutions (ETS, 2005), and a study, mentioned above, on the efficacy of TOEFL iBT speaking scores while hiring international teaching assistants (Xi, 2008). Moreover, the ETS is also concerned with the issue of test negative washback effect on teaching and learning. It is claimed that such innovations of the TOEFL iBT, such as the inclusion of the speaking section and the introduction of integrated tasks, are aimed at creating and using test preparation materials that would resemble the communicative approach in academic English courses. Additionally, the manual 'Helping Your Students Communicate with Confidence' (ETS, 2004b) was created for teachers and curriculum coordinators to explain the relationships between communicative approaches and the TOEFL iBT design, and to suggest activities and sample tasks with the communicative orientation for the TOEFL iBT preparation classes. What is more, Wall and Horak (2006, 2008) started long-term research to investigate the impact of the TOEFL iBT on teaching and learning. Wall and Horak studied how a number of English teachers in Eastern-European countries react to the new test format, and how their preparation materials alter depending on the changes in the new test (TOEFL iBT Research, 2011: 9-10).

It seems to be necessary to point out that the TOEFL examination receives high internal consistency (a form of reliability which focuses on the consistency with each other of a test's internal elements, i.e. the homogeneity of its test items) figures, and therefore, is more likely to show a reliable result (Weir, 2005: 29-31). Anastasi (1988: 132), cited in Weir (2005: 31), explains that 'reliability coefficients depend on the variability of the sample within which they are found'. That means that candidates of widely ranging ability, such as those taking the TOEFL test, are easier to rank reliably, which also means that they will produce higher reliability indices (Weir, 2005: 32).

All in all, concerns about test validation and reliability have always been an integral part of the TOEFL iBT design process. Therefore, TOEFL iBT test validation is an ongoing process that is permanently supported by the ETS and the TOEFL Board with the help of the Committee

of Examiners (COE) Research Programme. Through the collaboration of ESL experts in the academic community in North America and all over the world, the issue of validity for the TOEFL iBT is growing and improving (TOEFL iBT Research, 2011: 10).

3.6. Studies related to the TOEFL iBT preparation

Despite the fact that the TOEFL iBT is nowadays one of the most widely used academic language proficiency tests (according to the official TOEFL iBT testing service *ets.org/toefl*), the aspect of the methodology of teaching aimed at preparing students for this test seems to be under-researched. Most TOEFL iBT textbooks and surveys provide only an overview of the test, giving some general tips and standard answers (the three most known preparation resources are the *Official Guide to the TOEFL® Test* (2012), *Cambridge Preparation for the TOEFL Test* (2006), and *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL iBT Test* (2006, 2012)).

In terms of scientific publications and studies, the question of preparing students for the TOEFL iBT also appears to be somewhat limited. The literature review on this topic has revealed several relevant studies, mostly published in Japan, China, or Iran.

For example, Ward (1998) provides some practical suggestions for the development of a TOEFL preparation class based on a Japanese university course with only twenty hours of instruction. Although Ward's article is outdated (because the advice is given for the old, paper version of the TOEFL test), some of its points can still be used as teaching directions for the TOEFL iBT version as well. The article outlines problems associated with the test preparation, gives some tips for educators on how to prepare for TOEFL classes, taking into consideration students' needs, how to select and use effective materials, and how to organise practice in test taking. Additionally, Ward provides a lesson-by-lesson language and skills development course outline and the explanation of the course content. Among many important suggestions that Ward makes are five test preparation techniques the author singles out. These are addressing effective needs of students, practising in test taking in order for students to get acquainted with the test format and procedures, choosing and using the most relevant preparation materials, focusing on language and skill building and, finally, training students in test taking techniques based on the TOEFL design and its features (Ward, 1998: 123).

Another more modern article related to the methodology of teaching the TOEFL iBT is by Cohen (2011). Here the author explores the issue of 'TOEFLizing of teaching' in several

parts, including ‘the problem of the efficacy – or lack thereof – of TOEFL preparation courses’, and how instruction results are configured in TOEFL iBT washback. Cohen (2011: 3) is quite critical about credit-bearing, college-level TOEFL preparation courses claiming that ‘evidence for the efficacy of TOEFL preparation courses is scarce’. Additionally, the researcher doubts test scores validity: ‘Test scores usually exceed test takers’ actual abilities’ (Cohen, 2011: 4). Cohen (2011: 4-5) also questions TOEFL iBT construct validity (‘the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure’) and predictive validity (‘for example, the degree of relationship between a student’s pre-departure TOEFL score and her overseas grade point average’). In order to help her students think critically and involve them in interdependent communicative activities, the author in collaboration with her students, develops her own TOEFL iBT preparation materials. After having analysed some examples of commercial test preparation materials, Cohen introduces authentic texts and students, by working in small groups or pairs, generate TOEFL iBT-like exercises for different sections of the test. Later, at the end of the semester, each student has to present TOEFL iBT-style exercises of their making own based on the authentic texts from the ‘Options List’, created and updated by Cohen herself. As evidence of her students’ success Cohen provides some test preparation materials designed by her students with ‘only minimal teacher intervention’ (Cohen, 2011: 12-24).

An overview of issues involved in teaching the preparation for the writing test, particularly preparing students for the TOEFL iBT independent writing task, is explored by Lucas et al. (2009). Based on the interviews of four instructors, Lucas et al. present a detailed description of the course designed to prepare students for the independent writing task on the TOEFL iBT. According to Lucas et al., the focus of the preparation course is to develop skill building abilities rather than simply simulating tests. All the traditional areas of essay composition are addressed during the course, including planning, outlining, cohesiveness, cohesion, and complexity of vocabulary and grammar. Additionally, self- and peer-editing are also used as useful processes for effective writing production. In the article, issues of teaching aimed at the test, such as the following, are discussed: teaching writing versus teaching to the prompt, the influence of the test rubric and the holistic scoring policy on teaching, and the use of textbooks. According to the instructors, the latter provides an overview of some effective resources that can be used while teaching the independent section of the TOEFL iBT. Finally, Lucas et al. (2009: 23) conclude that ‘teaching to the test is compatible with sound instructional practice’.

A longitudinal study, which is also relevant to the thesis at hand, is the monograph series by Wall and Horák (2006, 2008, 2011) on the impact of changes in the TOEFL examination on teaching and learning in central and eastern Europe. The study is divided into four phases, and different aspects of teachers' readiness for the new version of the TOEFL, TOEFL iBT are in the focus of the researchers. Firstly, in Phase 1 of the project, the baseline study is conducted to describe an accurate picture of teaching and learning in 12 TOEFL preparation classes in central and Eastern Europe. The study is aimed at gathering data that will later give the researchers an opportunity to compare whether the teaching and learning processes change with the introduction of the new version of the TOEFL test. The following aspects of teaching and learning are considered in the project: teaching listening, structure, reading, vocabulary, writing, speaking, assessment in the classroom, the role of the coursebook, the role of the computer, teacher training, and sources of information about the TOEFL test (Wall and Horák, 2006).

Secondly, Phase 2 of the project is focused on the impact of changes in the TOEFL test on teaching and learning in the TOEFL preparation courses. The researchers follow six of the Phase 1 teachers and investigate what they already know and understand about the soon-to-be introduced new TOEFL iBT version. The researchers also analyse the teachers' opinions on how the changes of the test format might influence their TOEFL preparation classes in the future. The teachers' plans for teaching reading, listening, speaking, writing, grammar, their choice of course material, and types of communication channels to receive information about the new test format, are described in detail in the second phase of the study. Additionally, some other factors promoting or hindering the changes in the TOEFL preparation courses are discussed at the end of the report (Wall and Horák, 2008).

The last two phases of the project are introduced as one report, although focused on different topics. Phase 3 presents findings on the role of the coursebook, while Phase 4 is aimed at describing the actual changes in the TOEFL preparation classes. In Phase 3, the researchers' objectives are to analyse the coursebooks that four of the teachers from the previous phases use while continuing to prepare their students for the TOEFL computer-based test (TOEFL CBT), but who are already planning the teaching for the new TOEFL iBT version. The use of the coursebooks, both by the teachers and the students, is also described in this study (Wall and Horák, 2011).

The aim of Phase 4 is to investigate what the preparation classes look like one year after the introduction of the TOEFL iBT. The data for the study is collected through interviews and

observations of the three teachers previously involved in the project. The final report also discusses the role of the new test and new coursebooks, and concludes with implications of the results for further research and teaching (Wall and Horák, 2011).

Some studies that are not directly connected with the methodology of teaching the TOEFL iBT, but which reveal some important considerations educators need to pay attention to while preparing students for the test, are related to the factors that influence test takers' performance. For instance, an interesting exploratory research on such factors of the TOEFL iBT was conducted by DeLuca et al. (2013). The researchers describe potential issues of the construct-dependent and construct-irrelevant factors of the TOEFL iBT that can affect students' performance. In the experiment, four language testing researchers take the TOEFL iBT and then report their experiences through focus groups. As a result, some important suggestions for the ways of measuring English academic language skills are made at the end of the research. What is more, the conclusions of the experiment show topical practical issues connected with the test design and language testing conditions on the TOEFL iBT.

Another study that is related to practical issues of the test at hand is by Amiryousefia and Tavakolib (2011). The researchers aim to examine probable effects of such construct-irrelevant factors as motivation and anxiety on test takers' performance on a language test. The study involves 30 students attending the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the Academic Centre for Education, Culture and Research in Iran. Their experiences are collected through the use of a test anxiety scale, a Multiple Intelligences Development Assessment Scales (MIDAS) questionnaire, and some survey questions on test anxiety-provoking factors. The findings of the research reveal that the issue of test anxiety exists almost for every test taker. The reasons for test anxiety are time limit, length of the test, and lack of self-confidence among test takers. What is more, the relation between musical and kinesthetic intelligences and writing and listening tasks respectively is established. It is explained that the TOEFL iBT test might be biased towards test takers with musical and kinesthetic intelligences, since their natural abilities can help them to successfully complete tasks on particular sections.

All in all, it seems that the topic of the methodology of preparing for the TOEFL iBT test has not currently been researched in depth. More studies, such as the present one, should be conducted in order to contribute to the research on how students are prepared for the test in TOEFL preparation classes because of its extensive use.

4. Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the methodology that has been used to answer the research questions of the thesis. These are:

How do the teachers prepare students for the TOEFL iBT?

Why do the teachers choose particular methods or tasks?

What resources do the teachers use for the test preparation and practice?

How do the students experience the test preparation and practice?

How do the final results (received by the official test centre) correspond with the teachers'/ students' expectations?

Qualitative data collection methods were used in the research. In section 4.2, a description of qualitative case study research is provided. The study and the actual methods are outlined in section 4.3. In section 4.4, the details of the data collection and analysis processes are described. In section 4.5, research validity and reliability aspects are considered. Finally, in section 4.6, ethical considerations of the research are addressed.

4.2. Qualitative data collection

Qualitative research is concerned with describing, understanding, and clarifying a human experience, as opposed to quantitative research that focuses on collecting numerical data and generalising it across particular groups of people (Dörnyei, 2007). The main purpose of qualitative research is to find individuals who are able to provide detailed and varied insights into the subject of investigation (Dörnyei, 2007: 126). Since, according to Dörnyei (2007: 127), a well-designed study usually requires a relatively small number of participants, three teachers and four students were chosen to be the respondents for the present study. Moreover, the aim of a qualitative study is not to generate as much data as possible, but rather to obtain 'useful', purposeful data that can produce valuable results (Dörnyei, 2007: 125).

The case study, as explained by Stake (1995: XI), cited in Dörnyei (2007: 151), is the study of the ‘particularity and complexity of a single case’. Almost anything can be seen as a case (people, a programme, an organisation, or a community) if it represents ‘a single entity with clearly defined boundaries’ (Dörnyei, 2007: 151). Three types of case study are distinguished: the ‘intrinsic case study’ (chosen to investigate a particular case and its nature), the ‘instrumental case study’ (undertaken to understand a wider issue while the actual case is paid somewhat less attention), and the ‘multiple or collective case study’ (intended to illustrate a phenomenon or general condition through a number of cases studied together) (Stake 1995; 2005, cited in Dörnyei, 2007: 152). The case of the present study has both an intrinsic and instrumental nature: a language school in Ukraine that offers the TOEFL iBT preparation course was chosen to investigate the value and speciality of the preparation process itself and to provide insight into the broader topic of the TOEFL iBT preparation in Ukraine in general since the school may be considered a typical language school in Ukraine.

4.3. Case study data collection

Interviews with teachers and students, in addition to lesson observations, were chosen as the qualitative methods of data collection for the study at hand. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the research and to gain a broader picture of the preparation for the TOEFL iBT test in the Ukrainian context, both teachers and students became respondents in the study.

4.3.1. Background information about the case study school and its participants

The case study was conducted in a language school that is located centrally in the city of Kharkiv, Ukraine. The school staff are represented by 22 teachers of different foreign languages (such as English, German, French, Chinese, Spanish, Italian, and Russian) and about 300 students of different language proficiency levels (from beginners to advanced) and different ages (from infants to retired people).

The curriculum for general language courses in the target school is structured according to the communicative approach of teaching foreign languages (see section 3.4). Two-hour classes take place in the morning, in the afternoon, or in the evening six days a week (including Saturday). Students are placed into classes according to their ability levels and are taught two

to three times a week. Besides a general language course, students can choose various courses for specific purposes, such as preparation for international language proficiency tests, including the TOEFL iBT preparation course.

The TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school lasts 12 weeks, with two-hour classes three times a week. Students wishing to apply for the course have to take a written language test. Those who prove their level to be B2 (intermediate) and above on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* scale are admitted to the TOEFL iBT preparation course. The TOEFL iBT preparation classes are not large: there are up to 12 students in a class to ensure personal attention to each participant on the course. The age difference between the students is not an issue because, as a rule, those taking the course are usually university students doing a Bachelor's or Master's degree with the intention of continuing their education abroad. The students who were the respondents for the present study started their preparation course in October 2015 and took the TOEFL iBT test in the period of January to February 2016.

4.3.2. The choice of the sample

The language school in Kharkiv was contacted through the researcher's personal network of contacts. The principal of the school agreed to participate in the study on behalf of the whole school. There were only three teachers who taught the TOEFL iBT preparation courses in the target school. These teachers were willing to participate in the study and were introduced to the researcher through the school principal. Thus, having selected participants from a particular subgroup who share important experiences relevant to this study (they are all TOEFL iBT teachers), the notion of homogeneous sampling was applied for the interviews with the teachers. According to Dörnyei (2007: 127), this type of sampling gives the opportunity to conduct an in-depth analysis to find some common, or shared patterns, in a group with similar characteristics.

Additionally, four students who had taken the TOEFL iBT preparation course were interviewed after completion of the course. Given that the case study school is relatively small and, at the period when the research was taking place, there were only two TOEFL iBT preparation classes with eight students in each, student interviews were also chosen as an appropriate research method. Such a method ensures that greater depth of information is achieved. The students were suggested to the researcher through the two teachers who were

teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course during the period of the research. The students were chosen on the basis of their willingness to participate in the study, their readiness to share experiences, and time availability. Four students from the two different classes (one male and one female from each class) were chosen to be interviewed.

Therefore, in the case of the school, and the student and teacher interviewees, the research is a convenience sample. Convenience sampling is the most common, but at the same time, the least desirable sampling strategy because of its practicality, and not purpose, in the choice of participants. However, on the other hand, convenience sampling usually provides rich data since it uses participants who are most willing to cooperate (Dörnyei, 2007: 129).

4.3.3. Interviews

The principal qualitative method used in this study was interviews. Dörnyei (2007: 134) points out that the interview is the most frequently used method in qualitative research. Its usual length varies from 30 to 60 minutes. The typical interview is ‘a one-off event’ in the form of a one-to-one ‘professional conversation’ (Kvale, 1996: 5, cited in Dörnyei, 2007: 135). In this study, one interview with each participant was conducted. However, the author became acquainted with the teachers and students one week before the actual interviews took place when she was introduced to them during the initial stage of lesson observations. Thus, although there was no explicit sequence of three stages of the interviewing process (setting rapport, actual interview, and final clarifications), as suggested by Polkinghorne (2005), cited in Dörnyei (2007: 134), the rapport was still developed and the areas for further investigation in the actual interviews were identified.

The interviewing process was conducted in two periods: with the teachers during the course in December 2015 in order to focus more on the methodology and assessment used for each test section, and with the students after completion of the course before taking the test to find out their overall views on the efficiency and intensity of the preparation course.

The interviews were conducted in English with the teachers and in Russian with the students. The teachers felt most comfortable to communicate their thoughts in English, whereas the students were not sure if they would accurately be able to express their ideas in English. For this reason, the student respondents were interviewed in Russian. The desired language of communication was agreed upon before the interview.

The preferred format chosen for the interviews was semi-structured interviews. As Dörnyei (2007: 136) points out, this type of interview offers a compromise between the two extremes of structured and unstructured interviews: despite the fact that there is a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts in semi-structured interviews (as in the ‘structured’ format), the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on certain issues by answering open-ended questions (as in ‘unstructured’ interviews). Borg and Gall (1989: 452) are in agreement with Dörnyei that the open-ended questions of semi-structured interviews have the benefit of being reasonably objective and deep, which helps to obtain more complete and accurate data.

The interview guides both for the teachers and the students were designed in advance (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). Both interview guides were piloted in order to ensure that the questions were clear and would be able to elicit the information necessary to answer the research questions. Moreover, piloting the interview guides helped to better identify the time frame needed for the interviews and any necessary corrections before the actual interviews would take place. The interview guides were piloted by a TOEFL iBT student from one of the classes involved in the research and by a TOEFL iBT teacher who taught the same course at a different school. As a result of the piloting, a number of necessary changes, such as the wording and order of questions, were made to the interview guides.

The interview guide for the teachers contained 77 questions and was broadly divided into the following subtopics: lead in/ background information, materials, practices (general), practices for each test skill, and beliefs and attitudes (see Appendix 1). The majority of the questions were focused on the teachers’ experiences with the TOEFL iBT test format and their personal choice of teaching methods and assessment types. It was important to find out what tasks the teachers used to improve the students’ skills, at which stages of the course these were used, how different the methodology for each section of the test was, and what influenced the teacher’s choice when deciding which tasks and strategies to implement. Additionally, the interview guide for the teachers asked what resources and materials were used for the test preparation and practice, how the teachers dealt with the issue of time limit set for all the sections of the test, and in what way they tried to boost the students’ confidence.

The interview guide for the students was considerably shorter (30 questions) than the one used for the teachers so as not to overload the students with too many questions (see Appendix 2). Similarly to the interview guide for the teachers, the students’ interview guide was structured according to subtopics: lead in/ background information, practices, and beliefs and attitudes. It aimed at eliciting the students’ attitudes to the teaching and learning processes

relating to each section of the test, their overall opinions about the intensity and effectiveness of the course and how they viewed their own progress.

When conducting the interviews, various practicalities had to be taken into consideration. The school premises (empty classrooms) were chosen as the most convenient location for the interviews with all the participants of the study. The interviews were audio-recorded with the prior agreement of the participants. Moreover, additional notes were also taken by the interviewer during the interviews. Special attention was paid to such nonverbal cues as gestures, eye movements, and facial expressions in order to gain a broader picture of the participants' answers.

4.3.4. Observations

Observations were also chosen as one of the research methods since it was considered important to see the teachers 'in action' during the class, observe how different tasks were addressed, and also observe the students' reactions to them. The most evident advantage of observational data is that it allows a researcher to see what teachers and students really do in the classroom without simply relying on what they claim they do (Dörnyei, 2007: 185). Thus, observations can provide an objective picture of events and behaviours in class. Naturally, there is a risk that simply recording the procedure does not lead to understanding why this or that particular event happened. Moreover, the presence of a researcher in the classroom can change the usual behaviour of those observed. Nevertheless, as Dörnyei (2007: 185) states, observations are essential since they provide 'descriptive contextual information about the setting of the targeted phenomenon'.

Non-participant lesson observations (when the researcher is not, or only minimally involved in the classroom activity) were chosen as the data collection method because a situated understanding of learning and analysis of various classroom processes and conditions could greatly contribute to the research outcomes. There were clear benefits of personally observing the phenomenon; that is why lesson observations focusing on the different language skills were conducted in different classes during the preparation for the different sections of the TOEFL iBT test. Additionally, the classes, conducted by the two interviewed teachers at different stages of the preparation process, were observed to better understand the classroom routines, teacher-student interaction, and materials used. The third interviewed teacher could not be observed as she was not teaching a TOEFL iBT preparation class at the time of the interview. During the

study, five different TOEFL iBT preparation lessons were observed: the lesson preparing for the reading section, the lesson focused on the preparation for the listening section, the lesson aimed at preparing for the speaking section, the lesson on preparing for the writing section and, finally, the lesson to practise the whole trial version of the test.

In order to achieve situated understanding of teaching and learning, open, or unstructured, observations were used. As Dörnyei (2007: 179) points out, such open observations, as opposed to structured observations that have an observation guide with pre-planned areas to pay attention to, do not have a clear focus on what precisely to observe; the researcher first needs to see what happens in the classroom, and only then decides what is relevant for the research. Unstructured observations were chosen to gather a wide range of information from observing the TOEFL iBT preparation classes in order to stay open-minded and attentive, not only to the classroom practices, but also to the students' reactions and attitudes to classroom teaching in general. Furthermore, instead of focusing on a particular issue, unstructured observations helped to acquire a broader picture of the preparation process.

4.4. The process of data collection and data analysis

The data collection took place in December 2015 and January 2016. The timing was connected with the TOEFL iBT preparation course dates set by the school and by the researcher's opportunity to travel to Ukraine and collect the data for the research.

The dates and time of the interviews were discussed and agreed upon with the participants beforehand. The observation schedule was first agreed upon with the school principal, then with the head teacher, and finally with the TOEFL iBT teachers themselves. The researcher decided not to record or videotape the observed lessons to avoid possible unnatural behaviour of the participants in the classroom as a consequence of them being recorded. Instead, the note-taking method of data collection was considered sufficient during the observations.

The process of data analysis took place in February and March 2016, after all the necessary information had been collected from the participants from the case study school. As a consequence of processing the data, the interviews with both the teachers and the students will be presented in the following results chapter in the form of a summary with direct and indirect quotations from the participants. The findings from the interviews will be arranged thematically according to the questions in the interview guides.

The lesson observations will be presented as a narrative in chronological order from the first to the last lesson and will give a description of how the lessons evolved. While analysing the data collected from the observed lessons, the researcher tried to describe in detail not only the classroom procedures, but also the participants' reactions and timing of classroom activities.

4.5. Research validity and reliability

An important aspect of the study is its validity and reliability. Validity implies that the study findings truly represent the phenomenon that is intended to be measured. Validity applies not only to data collection, but also to the research design and methods (Joppe, 2000: 1). The concept of reliability presupposes that any significant results of the research are not one-off findings and can be repeated in similar circumstances (Joppe, 2000: 1). The argument for validity and reliability of the research at hand is presented below.

Firstly, the validity of the research was strengthened by the fact that three sources of data (teacher interviews, student interviews, and lesson observations) were used to answer the research questions. Secondly, taking into consideration that the research is a qualitative case study, the number of respondents for the interviews (three TOEFL iBT teachers and four students) was considered to be sufficient to provide adequate information on the particular case study. Even though the scope of the study included only seven participants, there is no reason to believe that the case study school is not representative of language schools in Ukraine. The participants of the study represented both men and women with different backgrounds. Moreover, the teachers interviewed had different educational and teaching experiences, which also contributed to the validity of the study. Given that the information gathered through interviewing and observations answered all the research questions of the thesis in detail and presented an objective account of the phenomenon, it seems that the validity of the study was strengthened.

The reliability of the study was achieved in several ways. Firstly, having studied a number of semi-structured interview guide designs (Bø, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007; Lialikhova, 2014), the researcher composed interview guides appropriate for the study and consulted scholars from the English Department at the University of Stavanger about the appropriacy of their content. Secondly, both of the interview guides (for the teachers and for the students) were piloted by the researcher and, as a result, some necessary alterations were made to these.

Moreover, the researcher allowed the interviewed students to speak their mother tongue in order to gather more accurate, detailed information about the students' experiences of the TOEFL iBT preparation course.

4.6. Research ethics

Prior to the data collection, the researcher had to take into consideration ethical issues of the research. According to Bailey (2007: 15), in any research there are three major ethical concerns: informed consent, deception, and confidentiality.

The first issue of informed consent means that all the participants of the study are informed about its purpose and procedures (including the procedure aimed at protecting confidentiality), possible risks, and advantages of the research. The participants are also aware that they are volunteers for the research and have the right to withdraw from participation at any time (Bailey 2007: 17). In the research at hand, the issue of informed consent was fulfilled by writing and sending an information letter to the case study school, in which the researcher explained in detail all of the above-mentioned matters (see Appendix 3). The information letter was addressed to the school principal, the TOEFL iBT teachers, and the students of the TOEFL iBT classes.

The second ethical issue of deception takes place if the participants of the study are misled about its purpose and details, if they are not informed about their participation in the research, or if the participants are not aware of the researcher's identity or status (Bailey 2007: 20). Unlike in Norway, where researchers often have to apply for approval from the Norwegian Social Science Data Service, this procedure was abolished in Ukraine. Therefore, in order to avoid deception, the researcher presented as complete and accurate information as possible about the research in the afore-mentioned information letter to the case study school (see Appendix 3).

The third and final issue of confidentiality presupposes that the research is completely anonymous and any records taken during the research that have some sensitive information (such as recordings and observation forms) are not disclosed. The researcher fulfilled the requirement of confidentiality by informing the participants of the study through the information letter in written form, and by restating the confidentiality issues before each interview in oral form. All the participants of the study were aware that the research was

completely anonymous, thus no real names were mentioned. Since the study was anonymous, the school, the teachers and the students are referred to by pseudonyms in the thesis. In order to satisfy the ethical requirements for the research, the interview recordings and lesson observation notes were kept confidential for the researcher's use only and were not disclosed to anybody.

5. Findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the research on the methods and tasks used by the teachers while preparing students for taking the TOEFL iBT language proficiency test at the case study school. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the following research methods have been used: teacher interviews, student interviews, and lesson observations.

In section 5.2, the results of the interviews with the three teachers from the case study school are presented. These three teachers were interviewed because they are the ones who conduct the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school. The interviewed teachers have been given the following pseudonyms: Nataliia, Tetyana, and Olga.

In section 5.3, the data acquired through the student interviews is presented. The four interviewed students had completed the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the chosen case study school shortly before the interviews took place. Two students from one class and two students from another class were interviewed.

Finally, section 5.4 presents the results of the six non-participant lesson observations, held in the two different classes at different stages of the test preparation. The researcher observed one lesson preparing students for the reading section of the test, one lesson preparing students for the listening section, one lesson focused on the preparation for the speaking section, and one lesson preparing students for the writing section. The teachers emphasised that the observed lessons were typical preparation lessons and that the presence of the observer did not influence the classroom routine and teaching. During the lesson observations, the researcher positioned herself at the back of the classroom in order not to be involved in the classroom activity and not to distract the students' attention. During all the observations, notes were taken on the methods and tasks used.

5.2. Teacher interviews

5.2.1. Teachers' biographical information

At the time of the interview, the three teachers had some common characteristics: all of them were in their late twenties and had an MA degree in teaching English as a foreign language completed at different universities in Kharkiv, Ukraine. Moreover, all three teachers had completed in-service teacher-training courses, such as the CMTEFL training seminars (Communicative Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and the TEFLA course (Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults), given by the case study school as mandatory courses for teachers' professional development. Additionally, all of the teachers had attended the teaching course devoted to the methodology of the TOEFL iBT preparation course and, at the end of the course, took a trial version of the actual TOEFL iBT language proficiency test.

At the same time, the interviewed teachers had different lengths of experience of teaching English and teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course. Tetyana had been teaching English for four years and the TOEFL iBT course for about two years. Olga had been working as a teacher of English for five years and had been a TOEFL iBT instructor for four years. Finally, Nataliia had seven years of English teaching experience and approximately two years' experience of teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course.

5.2.2. General practices used in the TOEFL iBT preparation classes

The teacher interviews started with questions on the general practices of the teachers while preparing students for the TOEFL iBT. All the three teachers used the same structure of the course, i.e. they started the course with a general TOEFL iBT overview lesson, where they checked what the students already knew (test structure, timing, necessary skills, test score, and validity aspects) in relation to the test through a short true-false questionnaire. Then, they checked the students' answers with the help of the TOEFL iBT educational video, created by the ETS online². Later during the course, the TOEFL iBT test sections were taught in the same order as they appeared in the actual test: the reading section, the listening section, followed by the speaking section, and finally, the writing section. At the end of the preparation course, when

² http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/tour/highrez/start-web_content.html

all the four sections had been covered, the students practised the whole test several times. Such a structure of the course was considered the most logical because it reflected the exact order the skills were presented in the actual TOEFL iBT test. For example, Tetyana pointed out: 'I don't want to confuse my students with the structure, so I let them get accustomed to the structure they are supposed to have during the exam.'

As for the time spent on different sections, the teachers said that it could vary depending on the class level and students' progress. The preparation course lasted twelve weeks, which were unequally divided between the TOEFL iBT sections. Normally, the students started their preparation with the reading section of the test already in the second lesson. Developing reading skills lasted from two to three weeks, and was followed by the preparation for the listening section, which in turn, lasted about two weeks. The speaking section was subsequently introduced, and the highest proportion of time was given to it – approximately three to four weeks. The writing section was taught last and required about two weeks of preparation. The course was rounded off at the end by one to two weeks TOEFL iBT whole test practice, when students had to take several timed trial tests in test conditions most resembling those of the test centre.

The time devoted to each section varied since, as Olga said:

If the level of the students is quite high, for example upper-intermediate or advanced, we can spend less time < for the preparation for each section separately > and more time on the general practice of the whole test. If we speak about lower levels < of students >, we spend more time on some particular sections, like reading, for example, because students cannot sometimes understand even the general meaning of the given text.

That is why the teachers occasionally had to pay more attention to problematic skills, such as reading and speaking.

All the three teachers commented that there was a particular classroom routine. The class would normally begin with vocabulary warming up to check students' home assignments. The teachers reported doing communicative activities, such as 'Running Dictations' (when students work in pairs; one student from a pair runs to the teacher and reads the explanation of the word and has to understand what word is meant; the student then runs quickly back to the partner and dictates the target word only; the team with the highest number of correct and correctly spelt words wins), 'Tic-Tac-Toe' (students play in pairs against each other and try to

draw a line explaining in English the meaning of words, written in squares), or ‘Synonym/Antonym Hat’ (when students have to explain a word from the hat, using its synonyms or antonyms, to the rest of the class; at the end the student with the most cards wins the game). Tetyana justified such activities as follows: ‘By starting with a communicative game, most often a vocabulary revision game, I so to say kill two birds with one stone: we revise vocabulary and I tune my students in for the lesson.’

Nataliia added that warming up activities were sometimes not connected to any TOEFL iBT aspects:

Even in such a limited period of time devoted to the preparation course, we still try to teach our students some cultural aspects of the English language by including some warmers connected to different holidays or special days. Of course, only if such information is topical for the time when the lesson is conducted.

Almost every TOEFL iBT preparation class was summarised at the end. Together with her students, Olga would normally go through the questions covered in class with the help of either a teacher-student discussion (question-answer) or a summing up activity, such as ‘Jeopardy’ (when students have to choose the topic and the complexity of the question by selecting a square from the grid on the white board; each square is worth a certain sum of ‘money’; the student who has gained the most wins).

When asked to comment on teaching vocabulary, the teachers admitted that this topic was covered only partially because of time constraints and the idea that vocabulary could be given for self-study. Nevertheless, the teachers had different approaches to addressing vocabulary issues in the TOEFL iBT preparation classes. For instance, Tetyana mentioned one book she constantly used as a resource for vocabulary practice both at home and in class: ‘As we don’t have enough time for paying much attention to vocabulary development, I always use a lesson or two from the book *400 Must-Have Words for the TOEFL* (2005) as a home assignment.’

The book that Tetyana mentioned consisted of forty lessons on different topics covered in the TOEFL iBT test. In each lesson, there were ten target words with English definitions and example sentences. Her students practised the target words through a number of vocabulary tasks, such as fill-in-the gaps, matching synonyms/ antonyms, or choosing the word that best completes a sentence. Finally, each vocabulary lesson ended with a short text, where all the

target words were used in context. Having read the text, the students had to answer two or three comprehension questions, similar to the reading section of the real test. The correct answers to all the tasks (keys) were given at the end of the lesson, so students could check themselves individually. Tetyana added:

In this way students complete a new vocabulary lesson at home, and in class, I only check the form, meaning, use, and pronunciation of the target words. At times, though, we do discuss some problematic areas or questions that arose while doing homework.

Tetyana believed that such an approach was the best since the students learnt new vocabulary for each new lesson, and not much class time was spent on vocabulary practice (up to ten minutes at the beginning of every lesson).

At the same time, Nataliia, apart from using the above-mentioned book (*400 Must-Have Words for the TOEFL* (2010)) as a home assignment resource, made use of one more vocabulary booster called *500 Words, Phrases, Idioms. TOEFL iBT* (2010). Nataliia's students would spend 15-20 minutes every lesson doing the recycling exercises introduced by this book, which were divided into four quizzes: multiple-choice, sentence completion, spelling, and 60-word typing. Nataliia found such an approach the best:

Such an integrated learning vocabulary system as recycling seems to be very productive for my students. They continually integrate and apply new words and phrases across four different contexts, or quizzes, if you like. Moreover, six TOEFL iBT skill sets are used here: reading, listening, speaking, writing, spelling, and typing, which is extremely important for the writing section, you know.

Nataliia also added that additional vocabulary practice in class helped her students to acquire more TOEFL-level vocabulary. This idea was also supported by Olga, who suggested that vocabulary had to be learnt on a regular basis (not less than 10-20 words per lesson), using a variety of mnemonic strategies, personalisation, and the inclusion of different types of memory, such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and even tactile. In addition, Olga mentioned various mobile phone applications aimed at increasing TOEFL iBT vocabulary skills and which could easily be downloaded online free of charge.

As for teaching of grammar in the TOEFL iBT preparation course, all three teachers agreed that it was not presented and practised explicitly in class because it was not the main focus of the test itself, but rather a subskill that had to be trained when needed. Tetyana commented on the mediocre quality of the TOEFL iBT grammar books and said that she preferred to use any other grammar resource that corresponded to the level of her students (for example, *English Grammar in Use* (2004) or *Round-Up* series (2010)). Tetyana said: ‘At the beginning of the course, I always ask my students to be honest and tell me what gaps and weak points of English grammar they have and would like to improve. Later, I prepare some grammar tasks for classroom and home training.’

In contrast, Nataliia mentioned the *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test. Next Generation IBT* (2006, 2012) as an effective resource for grammar skills development:

In the Longman <book>, we have a good part that’s called ‘Appendix’. [...] Not only does it cover some typical grammatical issues, like the use of tenses, pronouns, determiners and the like, but also this part presents, for example, some tasks on transition expressions for cohesion, sentence structures and so on. [...] It’s very good for the speaking and writing sections. [...] Also, recently I have found one more useful book not only for grammar, but also for vocabulary practice. As far as I remember, it’s called *Collins Vocabulary and Grammar for the TOEFL Test* (2013). I like this book because the vocabulary and grammar introduced here are explicitly connected to the TOEFL iBT test. Plus, it comes with a CD to mimic the exercises that actually appear on the test.

The teachers did not address grammar issues every lesson; however, they did pay attention to it once a week, which was once every three classes.

When discussing homework assigned to students, the teachers stressed its importance and regularity. The TOEFL iBT preparation course was relatively short (twelve weeks long), and the material covered was quite complicated, even for the students with high language proficiency levels (upper-intermediate and advanced). Therefore, the students were given a home assignment every lesson. Depending on the section that was being taught, students would receive several tasks connected to it (for instance, if the preparation for the reading section was in progress, the home assignment included a text with comprehension tasks that would simulate the tasks of the real exam). Additionally, students would get vocabulary homework as well. For

each forthcoming lesson, students had to complete a vocabulary lesson that consisted of 10 to 20 target words grouped together by one topic (from the above-mentioned book *400 Must-Have Words for the TOEFL* (2005). At times, students would also receive some grammar training exercises focusing on a particular grammar topic (from the above-mentioned *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test. Next Generation IBT* (2006, 2012), or other supplementary grammar resources, such as from *English in Use* (2004).

5.2.3. TOEFL iBT materials

The interview section on the TOEFL iBT materials started with a question related to the factors that influence a teacher's choice of preparation materials. The answers varied from factors such as students' level (Olga), the number of useful tasks and examples given (Nataliia), to the range of topics and variety of exercises and the book's publisher (Tetyana). The latter factor was explained by Tetyana in the following way:

The publisher, for example, Longman or Oxford, is important because, first of all, we work with their course books in our general English language course. So I quite like them. I'm quite satisfied with the material they give, with the structure of the books. That's why counting on such advantages, I can expect the TOEFL iBT preparation materials, printed by these publishers, to be of the same level.

When asked about a textbook the teachers used during the whole course, it appeared to be that there was no single textbook which could be used for all the sections. The teachers were in agreement that none of the preparation books and manuals that existed in the educational market were good enough to use on a regular basis in class. For this reason, a combination of materials from different sources was the most popular solution.

According to Olga, the *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test. Next Generation IBT* (2006, 2012) had effective practice tests, but lacked clear theoretical information, such as strategies and useful tips. On the other hand, a book such as *Cracking the TOEFL iBT* (2009, 2014) outlined important test strategies, but failed to present valid practice tests. For additional training, Olga chose the *Cambridge Preparation for the TOEFL® Test, Fourth Edition* (2006), the *Macmillan Testbuilder for TOEFL iBT Pack* (2011), and *Kaplan TOEFL iBT Premier 2014-2015, Fifth Edition* (2014).

In Tetyana's opinion, the combination of sources worked best since such an approach allowed the teachers and the students to look at the TOEFL iBT test from different perspectives and points of view. What is more, using a number of materials introduced variety to the course. Tetyana also added: 'The newer the edition of the book, the better it is. That's why, for example, I have chosen the *Official Guide to the TOEFL Test, Fourth Edition* (2012, 2014) to combine with other preparation materials.'

Regarding the question of teachers' independence while choosing materials, all the teachers said that they were free to select any kind of sources themselves as long as they were relevant to the TOEFL iBT preparation course. Neither the administration nor the head teacher of the case study school imposed anything on them. However, some recommendations and suggestions as for the relevance of materials could occasionally be given.

As for the teachers' cooperation about the TOEFL iBT preparation materials, it was underlined that informal communication between the teachers usually took place in the teachers' room or in the chat room online. The teachers would normally share their opinions about different resources, post some useful tasks and links, discuss various strategies and tips, ask for advice while evaluating students' recorded speech or written essays, and share any new, updated information about the TOEFL iBT. Tetyana found such cooperation extremely valuable:

We are colleagues, and we get on well with each other. So, if we find something interesting on the Internet, we can download this material or copy the link and post it in our special 'TOEFL iBT Resource Pack' folder on the computer in the teachers' room. [...] Sometimes I can come to any TOEFL iBT teacher (and the teachers come to me) to ask for advice on how to, for example, start teaching speaking and which materials and books to use for it, where to find speaking and writing topics and templates, or how to boost vocabulary and which resources to take. So, yeah, it's quite OK to share, discuss, and help each other.

Generally, all the teachers used computers and the Internet in the TOEFL iBT preparation class. Since the very first lesson, educational videos, created by TOEFL iBT experts, would serve as useful examples for students. Videos on YouTube such as *TOEFLtv*, *iTeacher iBT TOEFL*, *engVidRebecca ESL*, *NoteFull TOEFL Mastery*, and the like, helped students to choose the strategy appropriate for them and provided additional listening, speaking,

and writing practice. Moreover, the teachers highly recommended the official website of the ETS³, where students could find detailed information and materials for the TOEFL iBT preparation, register for this test and take part in TOEFL iBT online webinars free of charge. The websites *goodlucktoefl.com* and *toeflgoanywhere.org* provided additional TOEFL iBT practice that most resembled authentic TOEFL iBT tests. For training a variety of speaking tasks, the teachers suggested *englonl.com*.

Olga summarised the importance of using computers and the Internet for the TOEFL iBT preparation:

Seeing that the test itself is computerised, to my mind, it's beneficial for students to be exposed to all the technologies and Internet access. They get accustomed to the test format and use of computers in class, so when they come to the test centre on a test day, students already know what to expect.

5.2.4. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding the TOEFL iBT

As for beliefs and attitudes, the teachers were first asked about the test washback effect. When asked to comment on how much their teaching depended on the test itself during the preparation course, the teachers admitted that the TOEFL iBT preparation course given at the case study school was certainly 'teaching to the test'. Olga explained that the aim of the given preparation course was to teach students how to receive the best score at their current level with only minor improvement of students' general English skills. The reason for this was, firstly, that the course was originally directed at those students with a high English proficiency level (upper-intermediate and advanced), who only needed to learn the TOEFL iBT structure and strategies. Moreover, as Tetyana noted, the 12-week time for preparation is suitable only for highly motivated students who are prepared not only to work in class but also to devote a good deal of time to self-study. Nataliia added:

The students who wanted to take the course but failed to show at least the intermediate level at the placement test were advised to first improve their general language level and only then apply for the TOEFL iBT preparation course at our school.

³ ets.org/toefl

Students' overall language level was also mentioned while answering the question about the influence of students' background (such as education, language level, prior experience of the test and the like) on their performance. From Nataliia's experience, in most cases the higher the level of the student, the better result the student could expect on the TOEFL iBT. She also stressed the importance of students' previous experience of studying foreign languages and taking different language tests (not necessarily the TOEFL iBT). What is more, Nataliia was certain that those students who for some time had been staying abroad (especially in an English-speaking country) could demonstrate higher scores at the TOEFL iBT test as well:

Those who have the experience of staying abroad are usually better at speaking than their classmates. As a rule, they have quite a good accent and are not afraid of speaking tasks on the TOEFL iBT. Thus, their chances to get a score above 20 for the speaking section are higher.

When asked if the number of students in a class had an impact on the effectiveness of the preparation process, the teachers answered positively. It appeared to be that the 'ideal' TOEFL iBT preparation class would consist of up to six students, and preferably their number had to be even in order to vary interaction within the group (pair work, group work). In this case, the teachers were able to pay more attention to every student in class and provide better training in terms of applying test strategies in practice.

Discussing the factors that could influence students' final results, all the three teachers first named psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, and fatigue. 'Unfortunately, staying calm and cold-blooded at the test is something we cannot teach them,' said Tetyana. She also added that at times students did not fully understand that at least three months had to be spent on the TOEFL iBT preparation: 'Students come to our school and expect to know everything within a month, which is, of course, impossible because of the amount of material and its complexity.'

In Olga's opinion, the fact that there would be other test takers in the test room could greatly distract students and thus negatively influence their performance. That is why it was especially useful for students to practise sections such as speaking and writing altogether:

First, students are confused. They don't understand why everybody has to speak simultaneously. But then, they get used to it and start concentrating only on their task

and not on other sounds around. This is exactly what we want them to do in real test conditions.

Finally, Nataliia summarised that despite a myriad of factors that could influence students' results, by the end of the preparation course, having learnt the test structure, question types, test strategies, and being aware of what to expect, students become more confident and result-oriented.

At the end of the interviews, the teachers had to express their opinions on whether the TOEFL iBT reflected students' real language proficiency level or not. The three teachers had different opinions on this question. Nataliia, for instance, was certain that the TOEFL iBT results were quite reliable. In her view, skills integration and the combination of academic and general English in the listening and speaking sections of the test demonstrated TOEFL iBT validity and reliability aspects. Contrary to Nataliia's opinion, Olga was convinced that the test checked purely academic language skills and students' readiness to communicate in an educational environment. Tetyana appeared to be in-between: on the one hand, she claimed that the TOEFL iBT showed 'students' ability to be good test takers', while on the other hand, Tetyana's experience had showed that the students' final results did reflect ('more or less') their real language proficiency level.

5.3. Student interviews

5.3.1. Students' biographical information

At the time of the interview, Svitlana, Oleksandr, and Viktor were in their early twenties, whereas Iuliia was in her mid-twenties.

The first interviewed student was Svitlana. She was doing Bachelor's degree in International Law at the Faculty of International Economic Relations at one of the Kharkiv universities. At the time of the interview, Svitlana had been studying English for about ten years at school, with a private tutor, and at university. When Svitlana applied for the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school, her level of English was upper-intermediate (B2+) (according to the oral and written placement test given by the case study school). She had also studied the Chinese and German languages and had taken the Chinese language proficiency test

(The Hànyǔ Shuǐpíng Kǎoshì (HSK) and the German language proficiency test (The Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache (TestDaF)). The main reason why Svitlana had decided to take the TOEFL iBT preparation course, and consequently the test itself, was her ambition to do a Master's degree in one of the European universities.

At the time of the interview, Oleksandr was doing a Master's degree in Computer Engineering at the Faculty of Computer Technologies at one of the Kharkiv universities. He had been studying English for about 12 years (at school and at university) but had never had any additional classes with a private tutor. When Oleksandr applied for the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school, he was at the intermediate level (B2) of English language proficiency. He had never studied any other languages apart from English, and had never taken any language proficiency tests. Oleksandr wanted to do a Master's degree at a German university and had to take the TOEFL iBT as a proof of his language proficiency.

The third student, Viktor, had already been awarded a Master's degree in Electro mechanics from one of the universities in Zaporizhzhya, in the south of Ukraine. Viktor had been studying English for about ten years at school, at university and with a private tutor before taking part in the four-month 'Work and Travel Programme' in the USA. When Viktor took the placement test offered by the case study school, his English language proficiency level was upper-intermediate (B2+). Viktor had never studied any other foreign languages and had never taken any language proficiency tests. Viktor aimed at studying for another Master's degree at a German university, and subsequently applying for a post-graduate programme in Europe.

The last interviewed student was Iuliia. At the time of the interview, Iuliia had already been awarded a Master's degree in Microbiology from one of the universities in Kharkiv. After that, she had been working as a leading specialist at the laboratory in one of the state research centres. Iuliia had studied English at school and at university for about 13 years. At work, she sometimes used English to translate her scientific articles for international journals. When Iuliia had applied for the TOEFL iBT preparation course, her level of English was upper-intermediate (B2+). She was also studying French at the pre-intermediate level (B1) at one of the language schools in Kharkiv. Iuliia had never taken any language proficiency tests, but was hoping to pass the TOEFL iBT test successfully to enter a post-graduate course at a Canadian university.

5.3.2. Practices used in the TOEFL iBT preparation classes

The interview guide for the students started with questions on the structure and content of the course. All the four students agreed that the four sections of the TOEFL iBT test, namely reading, listening, speaking, and writing, were covered fully during the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school. At the same time, some of the students wished they could have had more practice devoted to the sections they found the most difficult. For example, Svitlana, Oleksandr, and Iuliia thought that more attention should have been paid to the reading section, whereas Viktor found it particularly difficult to compose effective essays within a given time limit in the writing section of the test.

When asked about the order of the test sections, the students supported the idea that it was logical and quite effective. Viktor commented: ‘Since the four sections were introduced and practised in the order they appear on the actual test, we gradually got used to it and by the end of the course were all aware of what would follow each section and even which task to expect next.’ According to Viktor, such a habit helped him to be prepared and stay focused during the test. Svitlana agreed with Viktor but added that if she could have chosen the order of the sections herself, she would have started with the writing section. Svitlana explained: ‘For me, writing is not a problem at all. That’s why I would personally start with the easiest section and then would study the rest of the sections as they appear at the test.’

Speaking about the relevance of the course activities and tasks, the students believed that all of them were really helpful and effective. Viktor was particularly satisfied with the vocabulary homework and additional vocabulary recycling exercises practised in class:

The vocabulary boosters we used both at home and in class (*400 Must-Have Words for the TOEFL* (2005), *500 Words, Phrases, Idioms. TOEFL iBT* (2010) have really increased my vocabulary. First, the words and phrases seemed to be confusing and too complicated. But as time passed, I started noticing these words in the texts from the reading sections and lectures from the listening section! I was amazed that the vocabulary we had studied was explicitly used in the TOEFL iBT tasks, and I could understand it and make good use of it. Moreover, later in the speaking and writing sections, I was able to use these words and phrases to make my answers more advanced.

At the same time, Svitlana and Iuliia thought that the amount of vocabulary studied during the course was not enough, and much self-studying had to be done with the help of additional vocabulary books and mobile phone applications.

When asked to comment on the length of the TOEFL iBT preparation course, only Iuliia thought it was appropriate. She said that those who were willing to take the TOEFL iBT had to estimate their language proficiency objectively: 'If you are upper-intermediate or advanced in English, three months for preparation, which is about 72 hours, is enough, I believe.' However, the other interviewed students pointed out that an additional two to four weeks for preparation would allow them to practise various tasks more and thus help them to feel even more confident. Oleksandr, for example, expressed his hope that in the future the school would extend the time of the preparation course to up to four months (instead of the current three months devoted to the course at the time of the interview).

As for the difficulties and challenges the students had experienced during the course, all the students paid particular attention to the time limit set for all the tasks in all the sections of the test. Svitlana said:

To my mind, 45 seconds allocated for the reply in the first two personal opinion questions in the speaking section cannot possibly demonstrate a student's language level. What's more, the length of texts, the number of follow-up comprehension questions and their complexity make it really difficult to answer all the questions in the reading section within 60 (or even 80) minutes.

However, Svitlana stated that she managed to cope with the problem of time limit with the help of her teacher, Nataliia. According to Svitlana, the teacher showed some effective strategies that could be applied for all the sections. For instance, the students were advised not to read the whole text, when it first appeared on the screen in the reading section. Instead, the students would have to use the 'active reading strategy', which consisted of several steps used to quickly understand the gist (main idea) of the text. Svitlana explained:

At the very beginning of practising the reading section, our teacher pointed out that in order to answer comprehension questions that follow each text we didn't have to read the text in detail (and waste our precious time). Instead, we were told to first read the title of the text. If the title was clear, for example, 'City Planning in 19th Century', we

could scroll the text over and start immediately answering the questions after the text. In the case of a title being unclear, like ‘Artisans in 16th Century’ (Who or what are these ‘artisans’?), we were advised to read the first paragraph of the text. The teacher explained to us that the first paragraph of all the TOEFL iBT texts is usually introductory and would easily give us understanding of the main idea of the text.

According to Svitlana, such a strategy worked really well for her on the actual TOEFL iBT exam because it helped her to save more time for answering questions. Moreover, having studied the types of questions in each section, it was easier to apply different strategies to answer the questions effectively. Iuliia, for instance, mentioned that the strategy of ‘extreme words’ (the correct variant does not include such words as ‘always’, ‘never’, ‘impossible’, ‘all’, ‘none’, ‘best’, and ‘worst’) for the inference question in the reading section, was really useful for her.

Apart from the time limit pressure, Viktor also experienced some problems with essay composition in the writing section of the test. He admitted that this part of the TOEFL iBT was the most complicated for him because he had little practice of writing in English. Despite his quite advanced command of vocabulary and grammar, and his effective oral skills, Viktor found it hard to express his thoughts in writing. In order to increase students’ writing competence, Viktor’s teacher, Nataliia, suggested using ‘skeletons’ (essay plans with leading sentences for each paragraph). ‘Such skeletons,’ said Viktor, ‘would put my thoughts in order and would not distract my attention from expressing my point of view.’ Having studied the leading sentences, Viktor would already have a plan for his answer, and only needed to describe his ideas in each paragraph. Additionally, according to Viktor, the transitional words and expressions (e.g. ‘moreover’, ‘therefore’, ‘seeing that’) the students studied with the teacher made their speech (both oral and written) more logical. What is more, transitional words also helped the students to identify the change of direction in the texts from the reading section, or in the dialogues and lectures from the listening section.

In Oleksandr’s opinion, the listening section was the most challenging. He believed that the topics of some academic lectures and speakers’ accents were especially confusing. Oleksandr remembered:

Being a computer engineer, it was really hard for me to understand the main idea of the lectures on the subjects I had never studied before. For example, one lecture from a psychology class could be devoted to body layers and how the body structure could

influence personality types, whereas another lecture from an economics class would present the origin of banking. Speakers' accents became one more stumbling block for me. Before I applied for this preparation course, I had never listened to so much English. Well, only in songs maybe...

Oleksandr's teacher, Olga, advised the students to develop their listening skills daily on a regular basis. Apart from vocabulary home assignments, while working on the listening section, Olga would give her students an additional task: to listen to a dialogue (or a lecture) that she would send each student by e-mail, and have them transcribe it. The students would type the answers on their computers (as additional practice for typing in the writing section), and send them back to be checked by the teacher. Oleksandr saw the improvement of his listening skills already after having completed three or four above-mentioned tasks.

Iuliia also added that her teacher, Olga, encouraged her and her classmates to 'surround themselves with the English language'. It meant watching films and TV programmes in English, listening to the radio and podcasts from the Internet, and watching (or listening to) educational videos on different subjects on the website *ted.com*. The only additional suggestion was to use recordings and videos with North-American accents, which are the predominant ones in the TOEFL iBT test.

Regarding the question of whether the preparation course was effective, all the interviewed students answered positively. Among the most effective classroom activities and tasks the students named vocabulary quizzes and various vocabulary games, practising identifying different types of questions and discussing the strategies of how to answer them correctly using the elimination approach, i.e. the process of excluding the incorrect variants to find the correct one. Also, the students mentioned recording their speech and analysing it both independently and with a teacher, practising answering the questions in the speaking and writing sections with the time limit, using a special structure (or 'skeletons') for their answers and studying how to effectively make notes while listening.

The students were hesitant on commenting on the classroom activities they thought were not so helpful. Viktor and Iuliia could not say that there were some tasks during the course that did not help them at all. Svitlana stated that she was quite satisfied with the studying materials and the teacher's approach to presenting information. However, one question type from the listening section left her confused:

For me, the most difficult question from the listening section was to understand the speaker's stance, which means to understand how the speaker feels about a particular topic. Maybe, I can't understand how people feel well enough, or maybe this information was not explained well enough, but I still don't get how to answer such kind of questions. Unfortunately.

As for Oleksandr, he acknowledged that occasionally some classroom activities were too difficult for him and he could not keep pace with the class:

I could see that my language level was a bit lower than the level of most students in my class, and thus I understood perfectly well why I was sometimes the last to finish or the one with the most mistakes. Of course, Olga (our teacher) did her best to help me, and paid some extra attention to me (sometimes I would even work with her in pairs). But I believe that the problem was not in the tasks themselves, but in my language level.

When asked about the feedback from the teacher, the students expressed their undivided opinion that it was undoubtedly useful. Iuliia explained that for each section of the test, the teacher (Olga) used different feedback methods. For the reading and the listening sections, the teacher would normally check the answers in a group, asking the students to explain why this or that answer was wrong, and prove from the text why the correct answer was the only one possible. However, Svitlana was concerned that her teacher, Nataliia, did not analyse why the answers were right or wrong with her class. For the speaking section, the students usually answered the questions in pairs, recording their speech. Then the teacher and the rest of the class would listen to the recording and discuss the structure, clarity of ideas, and language use together. The teacher also commented on the use of vocabulary and grammar. Finally, the feedback for the writing section was usually given in written form to all the students individually after they had sent their essays to the teacher by e-mail. However, the teacher would sometimes spend five to ten minutes in class analysing the most common errors and giving suggestions for essays improvement.

As for the usefulness of feedback from the fellow students, the opinions appeared to be different. Some students (Oleksandr) believed it was 'embarrassing to criticise' their peers, but most of the students were in agreement that it was useful to analyse someone else's speech and even learn from the fellow students. Viktor said:

It (peer feedback) depends on how you see it and how you're open to it. Our teacher told us at the beginning that its aim was not to criticise each other but rather to state some points to work on in the future. We could learn from our friends' mistakes, or vice versa, pick up some successful ideas for ourselves. We were also encouraged to mention what we liked or found particularly interesting. So personally, I really enjoyed giving feedback and listening to it in terms of my own answers.

Regarding self-studying while preparing for the TOEFL iBT, the interviewed students found it quite important. All of them mentioned that they tried to practise at home or outside the classroom with the friends but confessed that they wished they had studied harder on a regular basis. At the beginning of the course, the teachers had provided the students with additional materials for self-studying and useful Internet links. But, according to the students, because of the lack of time, they rarely made use of these materials. Svitlana commented: 'Basically, in terms of knowledge, we counted on the preparation course only. Yes, we understood how beneficial it could be to have extra training at home, but we were still reluctant to study alone.'

As for the size of the class, only Iuliia stated that it did not affect teaching significantly. Oleksandr, Svitlana, and Viktor were sure that the smaller the number of students there were in the class, the better. The reason for this is that every student in a small class could receive more teacher attention and time. Thus, it was concluded that the 'ideal' number of students for the TOEFL iBT preparation course was from four to six, and this number had to be even (in order for students to work effectively in pairs at different stages of the course).

5.3.3. Students' beliefs and attitudes regarding the TOEFL iBT preparation course

As for beliefs and attitudes, the students were first asked about the importance of the TOEFL iBT preparation course personally for them. All the four interviewed students were confident that it was necessary to apply for this kind of preparation course. Having understood the difficulty of the TOEFL iBT, the students thought it was the right decision to get acquainted with the structure of the test, its types of tasks, and requirements. 'Without such preparation,' said Oleksandr, 'the 'mission' of passing the TOEFL iBT seems to be impossible for students of any language level...and even for native speakers.'

When asked to comment on how effective and useful the TOEFL iBT preparation course given by the case study school was, the students replied somewhat differently. Depending on the language level of each respondent and some personal considerations, the percentage of the course effectiveness varied. For instance, Oleksandr, who was at the intermediate level at the placement test while applying for the course, noted that for him personally the preparation was useful at 60-70 percent out of 100 percent possible. Oleksandr explained that some classroom and home tasks and activities were too advanced for him, and generally, he needed more time for understanding such tasks and activities. For Svitlana and Viktor, the course was 80-90 percent effective. The remaining 10-20 percent was missing because of the short length of the preparation course. Svitlana specified:

To my mind, 12 weeks, which is only three months, is not enough for thorough preparation. If we had had at least four months, we could have practised much more, and thus now be better prepared.

At the same time, in Iuliia's opinion, the TOEFL iBT preparation course offered by the case study school was almost 100 percent effective and useful. She underlined that without it, she would not be able to take the test at all:

When I first opened an example of one of the tests I found on the Internet, I was shocked and scared. I didn't know what to start with and how to approach different sections. Thanks to this preparation course, my fears disappeared and I put all the thoughts in order in my head. I feel more confident now. I know I can crack the TOEFL iBT now.

As for what could have been done differently during the course, most answers were related to some organisational aspects, such as the number of students in the class (less than eight students; four to six students at most). Also, the students paid attention to the language level of the other students in the class (more thorough selection according to the language level should be carried out in the future; only the students with more or less the same knowledge should study in one class). Additionally, the students mentioned the necessity to prolong the duration of the course from three months to at least four months long. Viktor and Svitlana also mentioned that they wished more time had been devoted to developing reading skills and practising reading strategies in the texts on different topics.

Generally, the course quality, methods and activities used during the course lived up to the students' expectations because they had learnt how to effectively answer the questions to get the best result. Oleksandr, for example, underlined:

I think our general English level has not improved much during the course. Well, maybe we have learnt more vocabulary and have better auditory skills now, but all in all, our language level hasn't changed much. But, to tell you the truth, improving English within three months wasn't our aim, I believe. What we really aimed at was understanding the test structure, learning some tricks on how to cope with the test, and receiving professional feedback on our attempts. And I feel we have received everything we initially wanted from the preparation course.

As for the question of how confident the students felt at the time of the interview compared to before the course, all the four students replied that the preparation course had helped them to be more sure about what to expect on the actual test. At the same time, Svitlana (who by the time of the interview had already taken the TOEFL iBT at one of the test sites in Kharkiv, Ukraine) admitted that on the test day she had still felt really nervous and unsure. 'Maybe your confidence depends on your type of character and how quickly you can get hold of yourself in a stressful situation,' said Svitlana.

Answering the question which section of the TOEFL iBT was the most difficult, three out of four interviewed students (Iuliia, Viktor, and Svitlana) named the reading section as the most complicated one in the test. For Oleksandr, the listening section appeared to be more difficult than other sections. In contrast, two students (Iuliia and Oleksandr) named the speaking section as the easiest, whereas Svitlana thought that the writing section was the least challenging. For Viktor, the listening section was the easiest.

Regarding the areas, or skills, students developed the most during the TOEFL iBT preparation course, the general consensus was listening skills. Iuliia explained:

Listening skills have definitely improved the most after the course. I think there are several reasons for it. Firstly, listening as a skill is required in three of the TOEFL iBT sections out of four (listening section itself, for four integrated tasks in the speaking section, and for the first task of the writing section). So, it means we worked on our listening skills almost every lesson. Moreover, additional home assignments, where we

had to listen to a lecture or a dialogue and transcribe it, with time made it easier for us to understand not only the main idea of the recording, but also helped us to develop the skill of listening to details.

At the same time, the students thought that the reading skill had developed the least during the TOEFL iBT preparation course because of the inconsistency between the advanced level of texts and their length, and the time given for the preparation for the reading section. Moreover, Svitlana assumed that since most class time was spent with the students practising a paper variant of the texts, while in the actual exam the students had to read from the computer screen, this could also influence the students' performance in the reading section on the test day.

The final question of the student interview guide was devoted to the students' expectations for their results in the actual TOEFL iBT test. At the time of the interview, Svitlana had already taken the TOEFL iBT test but had not received the results yet. Svitlana expected to receive at least 85-90 points out of 120 points possible. Later, Svitlana contacted the researcher via e-mail and informed that her actual TOEFL iBT score was 82 points.

At the time of the interview, Oleksandr had already been registered for taking the TOEFL iBT and was hoping to receive at least 80 points after the test (this is the lowest acceptable score in English required by the university where Oleksandr wanted to continue his education). When he was contacted by the researcher via e-mail in February, Oleksandr said that he had received 78 points in the TOEFL iBT.

Similarly to Oleksandr, at the time of the interview Viktor had also been registered for the TOEFL iBT test and after completing the test, expected to be awarded between 80 and 85 points. His actual score, received by the researcher via e-mail, was 84 points. Finally, Iuliia's aim was to score at least 90 points in the actual TOEFL iBT because such was the language requirement for the PhD programme she was applying for at a Canadian university. In February, Iuliia achieved her aim by scoring 93 points.

5.4. Lesson observations

5.4.1. Lesson observation 1 – preparing for the reading section

Lesson observation one took place in Nataliia's class devoted to the preparation for the reading section of the TOEFL iBT test. The lesson lasted 120 minutes including a ten-minute break between the first and the second parts of the lesson. There were eight students present in the classroom. The students were sitting in a group around the tables, arranged together in the middle of the class. The white board and the overhead projector screen were in front of the students, and the teacher's place was at one end of the tables, facing the students.

The lesson started with greetings and the teacher's explanation of the researcher's presence in class. The teacher then asked the students some personal questions about their mood, what they had done at the weekend (the lesson was on Monday), and what plans they had for the week. It was noticeable that the students were familiar with this kind of routine and they were willing to share some personal information, make jokes, and ask each other some follow-up questions. This conversation lasted no more than five to seven minutes, and the teacher continued the lesson with a vocabulary warming up exercise.

The 'Tic-tac-Toe', or 'Noughts and Crosses', vocabulary warming up exercise was focused on checking the students' home assignment (lesson four, 'Petroleum Alternatives', from the book *400 Must Have Words for the TOEFL* (2005)). For this, the students were randomly grouped into pairs. Each pair was given a sheet of paper divided into nine squares with the target words from the vocabulary lesson on each of them. The following words were used: 'constraint', 'contamination', 'extinction', 'deplete', 'reservoir', 'dispose of', 'shrink', 'elementally', 'emission'. The teacher gave short instructions, according to which the students had to play against each other, explaining the meaning of the words written in the squares in English and trying to draw a vertical, horizontal, or diagonal line with the words they had already explained. The first person to draw the line became the winner.

The students were excited about the activity, and were eager to speak English. Apart from simply explaining the words, some students also created example sentences using the target words from the squares. When the game had finished and the class had congratulated the winners with a round of applause, the teacher asked if there had been any questions or disagreements. The teacher also asked if the students had had any problems with vocabulary

lesson four at home. The students did not express any concerns and the lesson continued with the reading practice.

In the observed lesson, the teacher discussed with the students the ‘sentence simplification’ reading skill. The teacher explained this type of reading question and asked students to simplify, or make it easier or simpler to understand, the meaning of a long and complex sentence from a text. The teacher drew the students’ attention to the overhead projector screen. An example from the TOEFL iBT test appeared there. The screen was divided into two parts: in the left part, there was a question with four answer alternatives, whereas in the right part, there was a part of the text with a highlighted sentence. The teacher asked the students to individually read the question and try to identify the correct answer (the simplified version of the highlighted sentence). After several minutes, the students were encouraged to share their answers in pairs. Finally, the class discussed the correct variant and the students who had suggested it had to explain how they came to such a conclusion. Then, the second example appeared on the screen, and the procedure was repeated.

After the two examples and their discussions in class, the teacher, together with the students, completed the ‘Sentence Simplification Questions’ chart drawn on the white board. The chart had the following columns: ‘How to identify the question’, ‘Where to find the answer’, and ‘How to answer the question’.

Additionally, the teacher presented the ‘Trimming the Fat’ strategy. She explained that in order to increase comprehension of a complex, sometimes intricate TOEFL iBT sentence, it was important to ignore all the extra, unnecessary words in the given sentence (or to ‘trim the fat’). The teacher asked the students to name the parts of the sentence that were the most important. One student said (in Russian, because she did not know the English equivalent for the words) ‘subject’ and ‘predicate’. The teacher praised the student for the correct answer and wrote on the white board: ‘subject (who or what is doing the action?)’, ‘verb (the action: did what?)’, and ‘object (who or what receives the action of the verb)’. The teacher explained that when faced with a complicated sentence, the students had to look for these three basic parts, which would help them to understand the main idea of the target sentence.

Subsequently, a long example sentence appeared on the screen. The teacher asked the students to read the sentence and paraphrase it with the students’ own words. Such a task was quite complicated for the students and none of them could correctly explain the meaning of the sentence. The teacher then asked them to identify the subject, verb, and object of the sentence, underlining these on the screen. Now the students could see the main information on the board

and it was easy for them to simplify the target sentence. Next, the four answer alternatives appeared on the screen under the sentence, and the students had to choose the one that most resembled the simplified version of the target sentence.

This routine was repeated again (a new highlighted target sentence, its simplification based on the three basic elements, and choosing the correct answer). After this, the 'Trimming the Fat' strategy was discussed step by step and put on the white board for the students to note it down.

This was followed by the teacher handing out ten complex sentences for the students to practise 'trimming the fat' (the handout was taken from the *Cracking the TOEFL iBT* (2009)). The students worked in pairs and were given five minutes to complete the task. All the pairs cooperated well, and sometimes some pairs even wanted to check what the other pairs had chosen. The teacher observed the class by walking around and helping if needed. As Nataliia later commented in her interview, it was important for her to see how well the students understood the idea of the strategy and to help those who were still confused. At the end of the activity, the answers were checked in class and all the disagreements were clarified.

After a ten-minute break, the second part of the lesson began with practising the sentence simplification type of question. First, Nataliia reminded the students about the useful strategies discussed in detail in the first part of the lesson and then asked them to apply them in the following activity. The students opened the *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test. Next Generation IBT* (2006) and were given the task to answer the first two sentence simplification questions from the first passage (text) 'Camouflage' individually. There was no time limit set for this task. Nataliia waited for the students to finish. When everyone had finished, she asked the students to volunteer and say the answers they had chosen. The first student to raise his hand read out his answers to question one. Some students disagreed and Nataliia asked one of the students to explain his choice. As there was still some disagreement, the teacher suggested taking each answer separately and proving why it was right or wrong. Finally, by eliminating the incorrect answers, the class agreed on the right one.

The same procedure was repeated with question two of the same 'Camouflage' text. The teacher subsequently asked the students to answer the rest of the questions (there were twelve remaining questions) from the three texts on different topics. Nataliia set a time limit of 15 minutes and the students started working individually. During this time, Nataliia was occasionally monitoring students by walking around the class, but did not answer any of the students' questions concerning the task. When the time was up, the teacher asked the students

to compare their answers in pairs. She arranged the pairs and some students had to stand up and move to their partners. While comparing the answers in pairs, the students would sometimes switch to Russian, but the teacher would remind them about the rule of using English. At the end, the whole class checked the answers for all the questions together, discussing why the correct variant was the only one possible. Nataliia tried to involve all the students, even the passive ones, in the discussion.

At the end of the second part of the lesson, the teacher asked if the students had any questions about the sentence simplification type of question. The students answered that everything was quite understandable. Thus, Nataliia decided to check what the students remembered from the lesson with the help of a short test. The test included eight questions concerning the topics covered in class, such as naming the three basic elements in the 'Trimming the Fat' strategy, explaining how to identify the sentence simplification questions, and the like. The test lasted no more than five minutes and the students could then compare their answers with the correct ones, displayed on the overhead projector screen. It seemed as if all of the students had coped quite well (only with minor mistakes). The teacher praised them for having been attentive, cooperative, and involved during the class. Finally, Nataliia gave the students a home assignment for the next class and wished them to have a nice end of the day.

5.4.2. Lesson observation 2 – preparing for the listening section

Lesson observation two took place in Olga's class focused on the preparation for the listening section of the TOEFL iBT. The lesson lasted 120 minutes, including a ten-minute break between the first and the second parts of the lesson. There were six students present in the classroom. There was the usual seating arrangement (i.e. the students were sitting in a group around the tables, arranged together in the middle of the class; the white board and the overhead projector screen were in front of the students, and the teacher's place was at the one end of the tables, facing the students).

The lesson started with Olga's greetings and explanation of the researcher's presence in class. Olga then presented a grammar warming up exercise connected with the topic of infinitive and gerund phrases, discussed in the previous lesson. Olga explained to the students that she would slowly read a short story and if the students heard a mistake (connected with the infinitive versus gerund phrases), they would have to clap and correct the mistake. When the game started, all the students were very attentive and tried to do their best. Only one student seemed to be

reluctant, and clapped only once (in the lesson that student was also quiet and seemed unconfident). As Olga commented later in her interview, such an activity was used to revise the grammar topic they had previously discussed and to work on the students' listening abilities. The teacher also noted that such an 'audial' warming activity up was a kind of a lead-in to the new topic they were starting that lesson, i.e. the listening section of the TOEFL iBT.

After the warming up activity, the teacher introduced the new topic, and asked the students what they already knew, or remembered about the listening section of the test. Olga paid particular attention to the content of the listening section, the number of questions the students had to expect to answer after they would listen to academic lectures and conversations, the section timing, and the tool bar that the students would have to be familiar with. All the answers were written down by the teacher on the white board. The students also asked Olga several questions about the test structure and scoring system.

After that, the teacher suggested trying a mini-listening diagnostic pre-test that would resemble the real TOEFL iBT listening section. The teacher handed out the copies of the pre-test to each student and explained that it was not a complete listening section, but only a part of it. Olga also pointed out that each paper from the handouts represented a screenshot of the screen that the students would see in the real test. The first page started with the listening section instructions. Olga switched on the recording and the students had to listen to (or listen to and read) the instructions. During the interview, the teacher explained that listening to the instructions happened only in the first listening preparation lesson. As the TOEFL iBT instructions were always the same, during the next lessons they would usually skip the instructions and continue with the tasks themselves.

When the instructions had been given and the signal of the test start sounded, the teacher asked the students to turn to the second page of the handout. Two screenshots with the words 'Consultation. Problem class' on one, and a picture of a female professor and a male student on another, were depicted on the page. The students were to listen to a discussion between a student and an advisor. The conversation lasted about two to three minutes and the students listened attentively to the recording. The majority of the students took notes as well. When the conversation had finished, Olga asked the students to open page three and start answering six follow-up questions. The teacher set a three-minute time limit. Following this, the students opened page four, and three screenshots appeared (one with the topic of the discussion: 'Psychology. Sleep', one with four students discussing something, and one with a diagram). The students heard the instructions to listen to the professor discussing some material from a

psychology class. The recording lasted about four to five minutes. When it had finished, the students opened page five with seven follow-up questions. Olga set a four-minute time limit and when it was up, she asked the students to put down their pens. The teacher then displayed the chart with the correct answers on the overhead projector screen and asked the students to circle the number of the questions they got wrong. Olga explained that they would not discuss the answers in detail in class (the students could read the scripts at home and find the explanation to their answers individually), but mentioned that at the end of the lesson they would come back to these pre-tests. Olga also encouraged the students to share their impressions of the pre-test: its tasks, difficulty, time limit, and the like. Three students out of the six present agreed that the test was not difficult, but the thought of the time limit made them feel uncomfortable. Two students commented that the first conversation was almost completely understandable, whereas the second discussion was a bit more confusing because of the scientific terms and a number of definitions. One student was reluctant to share his opinion and only said that the test was quite difficult for him. Olga rounded up the discussion by saying that the students could now get an idea of what to expect from the listening section and expressed hope that the students' listening skills would gradually improve with every lesson.

After a ten-minute break, the second part of the lesson started with the TOEFL iBT strategies for listening. The teacher drew the students' attention to the screen and instructed them to watch a video, where students from all over the world who had previously done the TOEFL iBT gave advice on how to cope with the listening section successfully. The teacher switched on the video and a girl gave her suggestions. Olga stopped the video and asked the students' opinions about the suggestions. This routine was repeated six times with six different suggestions. During the discussion Olga asked the students to note down some advice if they thought it was helpful. Later, in her interview, Olga explained that such brainstorming strategies not only provided useful information, but also gave her students additional speaking practice, made them prove their opinions, and personalise their experience.

After the discussion on strategies, Olga reminded the students that the reading section had different types of questions and explained that the same organisation existed for the listening questions. Olga handed out to each student a copy of the types of questions in the listening section. She asked the students to read individually the information on six types of questions, their descriptions and examples. The class then discussed any misunderstandings (it was particularly difficult for the students to understand the type of questions connected with the speaker's stance, or attitude). Next, Olga arranged the students in pairs, gave each pair two

sets of cards, and explained a new task: to choose the correct type of listening question for every example question. For instance, there was written ‘Gist (main idea) question’ on one card, and the students had to match it to the example question that was written on another card: ‘What is the topic of the conversation?’ While the students were working in pairs, Olga monitored their activity by walking around the class and observing each pair. When the task was completed and the answers were compared, it appeared that all the pairs had coped with the task successfully.

An almost identical activity followed. The students had to work individually by matching the types of questions to the example tasks from different listening tests. When the students had compared their answers in groups of three, a whole-class check took place. The teacher stressed the importance of this kind of activity and explained that having identified the type of questions correctly would allow the students to use appropriate strategies (which would be studied later in the course) to find the correct answer.

At the end of the lesson, Olga asked the students to look at their listening diagnostic pre-tests again and identify the type of questions the students got wrong. In the future, the teacher said, every student would have to pay additional attention to the types of questions that they had had problems with on the diagnostic pre-test.

The class finished with a short summary of the lesson in the form of a teacher-student question-answer session. Then Olga thanked her students for the productive lesson and assigned tasks for their homework.

5.4.3. Lesson observation 3 – preparing for the speaking section

Lesson observation three took place in Olga’s class devoted to the preparation for the TOEFL iBT speaking section. The lesson lasted 120 minutes including a ten-minute break between the first and the second parts of the lesson. There were eight students present in class that lesson. The seating arrangements were identical to those in the previous lessons observed by the researcher (see sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2).

The lesson started with greetings and a short conversation about the students’ day: what the students had already done and what they were going to do after the class. Then Olga introduced a warming up activity. The teacher divided the students into pairs and asked them to sit facing their partners. Then, with a sombrero hat in her hands, she explained the task. The students had to answer a question they would pick up from the hat within a given time limit. Olga pointed out that the students would have to use the structure of the TOEFL iBT question

two 'Personal Choice', and they would have 15 seconds for preparation and 45 seconds to speak (similar conditions to the TOEFL iBT speaking task two). Olga asked the students to remind her of the structure of the answer to question two and wrote it on the white board. After that, Olga closed her eyes and took out a piece of paper with a question from the hat. She read the question aloud, waited for 15 seconds, and demonstrated the answer within 45 seconds, following the structure written on the board. The teacher said that each person in the pair would have to produce his/her answer. While one student was speaking, the partner would have to listen attentively and then give their feedback to the answer. In addition, the students would have to control the time themselves. Olga walked around the room with the hat, and the students picked their questions. Then each pair chose who was to start answering, and the activity began. With everyone speaking simultaneously, the level of noise in the classroom increased considerably, but it seemed that the students did not pay much attention to that and were all focused on their answers.

During the interview, Olga explained that this kind of speaking activity was very common while preparing for the speaking section of the test. Firstly, because it allowed the students to revise what had already been studied. Secondly, such oral warming up activities provided additional practice and imitated actual test conditions. Moreover, as Olga added, a speaking warming up activity at the beginning of the lesson served as a good tuning in for the next two hours of the class.

When all the students had finished the activity, Olga decided to check how attentively the partners had been listening to each other, and asked them to summarise their partners' answers in one sentence. All the students managed to do so, although with some grammar mistakes.

The teacher then introduced the new topic: 'Speaking Question 3: Summarise an Opinion'. Olga explained that unlike the first two personal opinion and personal choice questions discussed before, question three was an integrated one. The teacher asked what was meant by an 'integrated' question and received the correct answer. Next, Olga wondered if any of the students knew any information about speaking question three, but the students were silent. The teacher therefore suggested watching a short video lesson⁴ from the *NoteFull.com* website about that type of speaking question. Olga asked the students to watch attentively and to take notes on the most useful information.

⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-n_nOBDLd4

While watching the video, Olga would occasionally stop it to ask the students some comprehension questions or to clarify some parts. The instructor from the educational video talked about the content of speaking question three, its timing, how to take effective notes, and which structure of the answer was productive. Question three of the TOEFL iBT speaking section consisted of reading a short text (usually a notice about some change connected to the university life), followed by listening to a conversation between two students who would express their opinion about the notice. The task of speaking question three was to summarise both the reading and the listening. Moreover, the plan, or ‘skeleton’, of the answer was also introduced in this video. It included pointing out the ‘Change’ from the reading (C[R]), the ‘Opinion’ from the listening (O[L]), ‘Reason one’ (R1[L]) and ‘Reason two’ (R2[L]) from the listening, and ‘Conclusion’ for the whole answer (Con). In the video, it was also advised to use the following phrases: ‘The reading states that...The student’s opinion is that...He/ She provided two reasons. First,... Second,...That’s why...’).

When the video had finished, Olga summarised its content together with her students and put the most important information about speaking question three on the white board. Subsequently, the teacher suggested practising that type of question. The students received the copies of a short text and were given 45 seconds to read it. When the time was up, Olga collected the texts, asked the class to listen to two students discussing the notice, and switched on the recording. While the students were taking notes, they relied on the note-taking suggestions from the educational video, described above. After the conversation between the two students from the recording was over, the students heard a question: ‘The man expresses his opinion of the announcement. State his opinion and give the reasons he gives for holding that opinion.’

The teacher gave the students two minutes to prepare their answers individually and reminded them to use the answer plan for question three that was written on the white board. Some of the students wrote their answers in full, while others only took notes. Olga monitored the students by walking around the room and helping them when needed. In her interview, Olga stressed the importance of controlled practice at the stage of the first several attempts to answer a new type of speaking question.

Olga encouraged the students to share their answers. Only one student volunteered, and as the student was presenting her answer, Olga pointed to the answer plan on the board. It appeared that the student had covered all the points in the plan, but had forgotten to draw a conclusion. When this error was corrected, the teacher asked the student to read the answer one more time. This kind of demonstration, said Olga later, helped the students to see how the

strategy and answer plan worked in practice. After the first example, other students wanted to share their answers in class as well (apart from one student who said he was not ready yet). Apparently, the first student's success motivated the other students to be forthcoming.

When all the answers had been analysed, Olga suggested listening to the two recordings of the two students giving their responses to the same task. The teacher told the students to listen to the first speaker and give their feedback to the answer, paying special attention to three features: delivery, language use, and topic development. It seemed that the students were familiar with such terms and had already used them previously while giving feedback to other types of speaking questions. When the first recording was over, Olga appointed one student to comment on it. She also asked the students to rate the response on a four-point scale (from 0 to 4) and explain their choice of score. The same routine was repeated with the second recording. In a conversation with the researcher after the class, Olga explained that listening to someone's speech and being able to compare, contrast, and analyse it was crucially important because such practice gave students more understanding of what effective and ineffective answers looked like.

After a break, the second part of the lesson was focused on practising question number three. Olga gave the students the copies with the text (the announcement about the increase of tuition fees) that they had to read within a 45-second time limit. When the time was up, the teacher collected the copies and switched on the recording, which was played from an Internet website. The students heard the task and started listening to a conversation between two students. At the end of the recording, they were told to summarise the man's opinion and the reasons he gave for holding his opinion. The speaking task also appeared on the overhead projector screen. The teacher then instructed the students to prepare their mobile phones for recording the answer. Olga also asked some students to move to the seats by the wall so as not to disturb each other while speaking. This was followed by Olga giving the class 20 seconds for preparation and she then asked the students to record their responses individually within 60 seconds. When the time was up, Olga said 'stop', and all the students stopped their recordings and came back to their original places. She then explained that they would listen to the recordings and try to analyse what worked well and what could be changed for the future. The students were not surprised at such a task (apparently, they had already done it before while practising speaking questions one and two); however, some of the students in the class seemed to feel somewhat uncomfortable.

First, Olga asked volunteers to share their answers. Three students raised their hands, and the teacher, together with the other students, listened to their recordings and gave them feedback based on the three points: delivery (clarity of speech), language use (language structures and vocabulary), and topic development (completeness, coherence, and cohesion of the response). Before Olga gave her recommendations about the students' answers, she asked the respondents to analyse their answers themselves. While giving the feedback, the teacher focused not only on the points to improve, but also praised good use of language, attention to details, the use of transitional expressions, and the like. When all the volunteers' answers had been discussed, Olga decided to move on to the next task of practising question three.

In a private conversation with the researcher after the lesson, Olga explained that at the initial stage of practice, she did not want to pressurise those students who were not ready to share their recordings in class. Instead, Olga asked those whose speech was not analysed in class, to send her the recordings after the lesson. She would listen to each of them individually and give written feedback to each of the students.

The lesson continued with practice task two on the same speaking question three. The procedure was repeated again, but this time the students worked in pairs. The partner followed the time, recorded the answer, and then gave feedback on it. Then the students changed their roles. At the end of the activity, Olga chose three students who had not showed their recordings yet, and gave feedback on their responses.

It was an interesting finding that during the whole speaking preparation lesson, no textbook was used. All the tasks were taken either from different books or downloaded from the Internet. Later, during the interview, Olga pointed out that using a single textbook for preparing for the TOEFL iBT speaking section was impossible due to the lack of consistency and effective tasks in the TOEFL iBT textbooks of the different publishing houses.

After the second practice task and its feedback, there were only seven minutes left before the end of the lesson. Olga summarised the lesson with a teacher-student question-answer discussion about speaking question three and assigned homework for the next class. She also reminded the students to practise the first three speaking questions at home by recording and analysing them.

5.4.4. Lesson observation 4 – preparing for the writing section

Lesson observation four took place in Nataliia's class, which was devoted to the preparation for the TOEFL iBT writing section. The lesson lasted 120 minutes including a ten-minute break between the first and the second parts of the lesson. There were seven students present in class. The seating arrangement was unusual in comparison with the lessons preparing the students for the first three sections of the test (reading, listening, and speaking). In the observed writing preparation class, the students sat individually in two rows one after another with a laptop on each desk. As Nataliia explained later in her interview, this seating arrangement was used for the students not to disturb each other while working on their laptops (typing their answers).

Nataliia started the lesson with greetings and a short conversation with the students: their mood, plans for the rest of the day, and the like. Then, Nataliia introduced a warming up activity that was connected with the revision of the vocabulary homework on the recycling of lessons 41 to 45 from the book *500 Words, Phrases, Idioms. TOEFL iBT* (2010). The teacher divided the students into groups of three and four and asked the students from the same group to sit together around one desk. Nataliia gave each group a set of cards with 25 words on each of them. The words were chosen from the five recycling lessons from the above-mentioned book. The instructions for the activity were to take a card with a word from the pile and to explain the word in English within 30 seconds. The first person in the group to guess the word received the card, and the turn went to another person in the group. The students with the highest number of words (cards) at the end of the game won. Nataliia demonstrated the procedure herself by picking up a card from the top of the pile and by explaining it to the students within ten seconds. Before the activity started, the teacher allocated two minutes for the students to revise the words from the chosen vocabulary lessons.

During the activity, Nataliia monitored the students by walking around the room, listening to their explanations, and taking some notes. At the end of the game, when the winners were announced, the teacher decided to draw the students' attention to some of the most common mistakes the students had made while speaking. For instance, Nataliia stressed the correct pronunciation of the word 'entrepreneur' by writing the word and its transcription on the white board, and asking the students to repeat it first altogether after her, and then one by one in a chain. Additionally, Nataliia gave several recommendations for the correct word order in the English sentence, reminded the students about the 's' ending in the third person singular present tense, and quickly outlined the difference between the use of the present perfect and the

simple past tenses. The analysis of mistakes took approximately five to seven minutes, and the lesson continued with the new topic ‘Writing Question 2: Independent Task’.

First, the teacher asked what the students already knew about the second question in the TOEFL iBT writing section. The students could explain why that type of question was defined as ‘independent’, state how much time was given to type the answer, and how many words an effective response had to contain. When Nataliia asked some additional questions about writing question two, the students seemed to be confused. She therefore suggested watching an educational video ‘Inside the TOEFL® Test: Writing Question 2’⁵, from the *TOEFLtv channel* on the Youtube video hosting. Nataliia instructed the students to watch the video and write down any information they thought was important. While playing the video, the teacher would pause it occasionally to discuss some of the points, such as question structure, approach tips, scoring criteria, sample response, and skill building tips. Nataliia disagreed with one piece of advice given in the video concerning the answer plan. The problem was that the instructor from the video outlined a five-paragraph essay (an introduction, three supporting reasons, and a conclusion) as the most effective one on the TOEFL iBT test. The teacher, at the same time, explained that, judging from her personal experience and the information she read on official TOEFL iBT forums, it was almost impossible to develop all three reasons well enough in a five-paragraph essay within the given 30-minute time. For that reason, Nataliia advised the students to produce four-paragraph essays (an introduction, two supporting reasons, and a conclusion), but to pay additional attention to the development of ideas in the two main body paragraphs. The teacher stressed that the best score in the TOEFL iBT writing section was not given for the quantity of writing, but for the quality.

Additionally, Nataliia emphasised the importance of planning the essay by quickly outlining the main ideas of each paragraph. To practise this skill, she handed out the copies with ten different topics that could be found in the TOEFL iBT writing question two. Nataliia instructed the students to work individually and note down possible supporting reasons for each of the topics within ten minutes. The first task was done together as an example. While the students were working, Nataliia monitored them, checking what they were writing, and helping them when needed. At the end of the activity, the students shared their ideas in class, and discussed ways of how to quickly come up with supporting reasons.

In the second part of the lesson, the teacher suggested trying TOEFL iBT writing question two in practice. Before giving the students the task, Nataliia reminded them of the

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zx3AXbGWNbA>

structure of the answer and its 30-minute time limit. The students had to type their answers on the laptops that were placed on each desk. When everyone in the classroom was ready to start, Nataliia showed a question task on the overhead projector screen. It said: ‘The younger generation is more likely to improve the world. Do you agree or disagree? Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion.’ The students started working on their laptops. While they were answering the question, Nataliia walked around the room and took some notes. When the time was up, the teacher shortly commented on the students’ writing process, paying attention to the importance of planning the response at the beginning, and leaving five minutes to proofread the answers and check the organisation of the text.

Nataliia then printed out the students’ essays (without any names), numbered them from one to seven and, with the help of two students, hung them on the walls around the classroom. The students were quite nervous that everyone could read their essays, but the fact that the writing was anonymous made them feel somewhat more confident. Nataliia asked the students to walk around the classroom and read the essays. While reading each text, the students had to take notes on the writing development, organisation, and appropriate use of vocabulary and grammar. Later, when the students came back to their places, Nataliia also asked them to look through their notes and score each essay (including their own) against a five-point grading system (similar to the TOEFL iBT writing section scoring). It took the students approximately 15 minutes to complete the task. After that, Nataliia and the students started giving feedback on each essay. There were some disagreements concerning the scores for several essays, but at the end of the discussion, all the essays were rated and the authors of the two best ones (according to the students’ voting) received their prize (the teacher presented the students with chocolate). In her interview, Nataliia explained that the ability to analyse and give feedback at the early stage of practice was the key to success for the students in the future. She also added that some small rewards (like chocolate) made the students feel appreciated.

When the activity was over, Nataliia asked the students to e-mail her the discussed essays; she would read the essays one more time and send each student more detailed feedback. As there were only five minutes left until the end of the class, Nataliia quickly summarised the lesson by reading out seven statements about the TOEFL iBT writing question two, while the students, one by one, explained whether the statement was true or false.

At the end of the lesson, the teacher assigned homework and thanked the students for their active participation.

5.4.5. Lesson observation 5 – practising all the TOEFL iBT sections together

Lesson observation five took place in Nataliia's class that was devoted to the TOEFL iBT whole test practice. It was one of the last lessons in the preparation course. For the purpose of practising all the sections of the language proficiency test, the two usual TOEFL iBT classes (two hours long each) were merged into one four-hour class. Thus, the class lasted about four hours, including the mandatory ten-minute break between the listening and the speaking sections.

There were six students present in class. The students took their places in a random order at the desks with a laptop and a head set on each of them. The four desks were placed in a row facing the other four desks opposite them. Plywood partitions on the desks were used to create a personal space for each student. Later in her interview, Nataliia commented on the seating arrangement used in class that lesson. She explained that for the concluding practice, it was necessary to create the environment that most resembled the environment of the TOEFL iBT test centre on a test day.

The lesson started with the teacher's greetings and a brief outline of the lesson plan. Nataliia said that the tasks for all the sections of the TOEFL iBT would appear on the laptop screen. The students had to answer the questions in the reading and listening sections first. Then there would be an obligatory ten-minute break, during which the students would have to leave the room. After the break, the speaking section would begin. The texts and tasks would appear on the laptop screen and listening to the recordings was possible with the help of the head set. The responses for the speaking section had to be recorded by the students on their mobile phones personally. The same instructions applied to the writing section. Its task would appear on the laptop screen, but the response had to be typed separately into a special programme. After the lesson, in a personal communication with the researcher, the teacher explained that the computer programme used for practising the test was not able to record the students' speech and to save typed essays. Thus, the students had to do it themselves and send the recordings and essays later for the teacher's feedback.

The trial test started approximately ten minutes after the beginning of the lesson. The students worked independently and everyone received different test samples. The reading section took 60 minutes and the listening section took 90 minutes to complete. Almost all of the students used the whole time, and only one student finished five minutes earlier.

After the break, the teacher asked the students to prepare their head sets and mobile phones. Nataliia also reminded the students to stay focused on their task and not to pay attention to their partners (the head set would help to distract from the noise). The students started the speaking section of the trial test. During the first two independent personal types of questions, the students spoke almost simultaneously, but when the time came for the integrated questions, the students started and finished speaking at different times (which was not so distracting for them any more).

The writing section started immediately after the speaking section. The students typed their answers into a special programme. When the time was up, the students could see their scores on the screen for the reading and listening sections (the TOEFL iBT programme automatically counted the score out of 30 maximum points for each of the sections). The results of the speaking and writing sections (detailed feedback) would later be e-mailed to each student personally after the teacher had listened to the recordings of the responses from the speaking sections and checked the essays from the writing section. The students would then be able to receive their final score on the TOEFL iBT trial test and form some conclusions as for their readiness to take the actual TOEFL iBT test, and the level of their preparation.

The lesson finished with a discussion of the trial test, for example, whether it was complicated or not, which sections appeared to be the easiest and why, and whether there was enough time for each of the sections. Despite the fact that the students seemed to be really tired after a three and a half hour test, they were still eager to share their opinions.

At the end of the lesson, the teacher gave a new home assignment and asked the students to contact her if they had any questions about the speaking and writing section feedback they were going to receive later via e-mail.

6. Discussion

6.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the present research, based on the teacher and student interviews and lesson observations, and the meaning and significance of its results. The chapter also presents the links between the findings of the research and the theory and other studies related to teaching the TOEFL iBT, as reviewed in Chapter 3. At the end of the chapter, some implications and recommendations regarding the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school are given.

The research addresses five research questions. Therefore, the discussion is arranged into sections related to each research question. Firstly, section 6.2 addresses the question of how the teachers of the case study school prepare students for the TOEFL iBT. Secondly, section 6.3 discusses why the teachers choose particular methods and tasks. In section 6.4, an overview of the resources that the teachers use for the test preparation and practice is provided. Section 6.5 discusses how the students experience the process of test preparation and practice. Section 6.6 considers how the final results, received by the official test centre, correspond with teachers' and students' expectations. Finally, section 6.7 rounds up the discussion with some implications of the study and the researcher's recommendations.

6.2. How the teachers prepared students for the TOEFL iBT

The first research question relates to the general process of preparing students of the case study school for taking the TOEFL iBT. In their interviews, the teachers agreed that there was a particular structure of the course they all followed (see section 5.2.2). Moreover, the TOEFL iBT sections were presented and taught in the same order as they appeared on the actual test (reading, listening, speaking, and writing). This course structure was considered to be the most logical and justified since it would allow the students to get accustomed to the test format and thus be fully aware of what to expect on the test day. Following the same structure of the preparation course can be explained by the fact that all of the interviewed teachers had attended the teaching course devoted to the methodology of the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school. At this course, the teachers were advised on the structure, the time devoted

to each section, approaches to teaching different language skills, and effective materials (both printed and Internet resources) for the test preparation. However, the information given during the above-mentioned TOEFL iBT course for the teachers was more of a recommended nature than a set of strict rules to follow while teaching. Therefore, each teacher could adapt the recommendations depending on different factors, such as the number of students in a class, students' individual needs, and the general level of the class. For the same reason, the time devoted for studying each TOEFL iBT section in the different classes could also vary. For example, in Nataliia's class, the reading section was covered in two weeks, whereas it took about three weeks for Olga's class to finish practising reading skills.

It seems that the classroom routines in general, and the activities and tasks used in class in particular, were based primarily on the communicative approach of language teaching, as expected (Brown 2007; Harmer 2001; Howatt 2004; Nunan 1991). The teachers would normally use a set of communicative warming up activities (as a rule, vocabulary) at the beginning of the lesson. Communicative vocabulary games such as 'Running Dictation', 'Tic-Tac-Toe', 'Synonym/Antonym Hat' were reported by different teachers. By starting lessons with warming up activities, the teachers aimed at tuning their students in for English and revising the material through students' negotiation and cooperation while fulfilling the task. The idea of problem-solving and cooperation between learners is one of the main principles of the communicative approach (Howatt, 2004: 334-335).

The lesson observations the researcher conducted at the case study school confirmed that the principles of the communicative approach seemed to prevail in the TOEFL iBT preparation classroom. For instance, the emphasis on studying all the components of communicative competence (Brown, 2007: 241), was realised in the skills integration tasks, especially in the speaking and writing sections of the test preparation process. The principle of using authentic materials in different learning situations (Nunan, 1991: 115) was addressed in the real life conversations and authentic academic lectures and discussions used in the classroom. Additionally, practising the language both receptively and productively in spontaneous language situations in every lesson also reflected Brown's CLT principles (Brown, 2007: 241-242).

Teaching vocabulary in the TOEFL iBT preparation course was not explicit. This may be explained by the limited time frame of the course and the fact that vocabulary is not checked directly in the TOEFL iBT. However, the teachers, understanding the importance of a good command of vocabulary, did pay attention to teaching it, but in somewhat different ways. For

example, Tetyana preferred to give her students vocabulary home assignments and then to check homework in class through a number of communicative activities and games. At the same time, apart from giving vocabulary homework, Nataliia also used the recycling learning vocabulary system, which consisted of integrating and applying new words and phrases across the different contexts of reading, listening, speaking, writing, spelling, and typing. According to Nataliia, such contextualisation of vocabulary helped her students to remember the words faster and to practise them more effectively. This idea reflects Coady's (1987) suggestion that vocabulary should be studied in a meaningful context. Nataliia's approach to teaching vocabulary seemed to be more productive than simply assigning the study of vocabulary at home, as Nataliia's students did not express any dissatisfaction with vocabulary teaching. This will be discussed extensively in section 6.5.

Only occasional attention to teaching grammar during the preparation course may be explained by the lack of time for the test preparation. Another explanation is likely to be the lack of the need to teach grammar explicitly, for example, by explaining the formal rules of grammar and by paying particular attention to practising it in class, since grammar is tested only as a subskill in the TOEFL iBT through complicated grammar structures in the reading passages, and the correct and effective use of grammar in spoken and written responses. Thus, grammar issues were discussed only when they appeared problematic and common for the majority of students in a class. For instance, when answering the personal speaking question about wishes and dreams, most of the students had difficulty with conditional sentences. It can be assumed that such an approach to teaching grammar is justified within the framework of the TOEFL iBT preparation course because the students who apply for the course are already expected to have quite a high language proficiency level (B2 (intermediate) – C1 (advanced)), and thus, in most cases, are able to control their use of grammar.

In general, despite the fact that the TOEFL iBT preparation course was not originally intended to improve the students' vocabulary and language skills, it seems that the teachers nevertheless did try to expand the students' vocabulary and language sophistication by paying attention to vocabulary and grammar learning both in class and at home. In fact, more time was devoted to teaching vocabulary than teaching grammar (the latter was mostly given for self-study). It seems logical that the teachers would try to improve the students' overall language when trying to prepare them for a language proficiency test since a good command of vocabulary and sophisticated language would obviously be awarded in the language test. Thus, the researcher's earlier assumption (expressed in the introduction) that the TOEFL iBT

preparation course would mostly consist of teaching geared towards practising test strategies and would not aim at increasing students' general language level was not fully supported by the findings.

As for homework and self-study, in the interviews the teachers also acknowledged the importance of regular homework and self-study. Ideally, all the students had to complete home assignments and devote time to self-study. In reality, doing homework could occasionally be left out (as some students admitted). Moreover, although the teachers always provided the students with a list of resources and materials for self-study, the latter depended solely on the students' motivation, self-discipline, and responsibility. Thus, the regularity and effect of self-study may be questioned among the students.

The lesson observations also showed certain trends in teaching the preparation course. One interesting observation was that what some teachers said in the interviews was not always supported by what happened in the classroom. For instance, in her interview, Nataliia stressed that she always discussed with her students why the answers were right and wrong for all the sections. However, her student (Svitlana) was concerned that her teacher did not always analyse the answers with the class and that she preferred only to hear from the students which was the correct answer.

Another trend observed during the lessons was teaching different types of questions, or skills, for all the sections of the TOEFL iBT. For example, in the lesson preparing for the reading section, the 'sentence simplification' type of question (or skill) was used. In the lesson focused on the preparation for the listening section, the teacher presented six listening types of questions, including basic comprehension questions ('understand the gist' and 'understand the details'), pragmatic understanding questions ('understand the function' and 'understand the speakers' stance, or attitude'), and the connecting information question types ('understand the organisation' and 'understand relationships'). This latter teaching approach resembles the strategies used to enhance listening comprehension in a communicative context (Nunan, 1999).

It is necessary to point out that the number of question types and the formulation of the question labels (names) in the reading and listening sections vary from one textbook to another. However, irrespective of the question label, the meaning of the question stays almost the same. For example, one can compare the 'paraphrase' question type in the *Cracking the TOEFL iBT* (2014) with the 'sentence simplification' question type in the *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test. Next Generation IBT* (2006, 2012). Thus, as different teachers use different textbooks, and even a combination of textbooks, the names of the skills studied during the

TOEFL iBT preparation course might differ, but the content of the skills and approaches to teaching them seem to be similar. Depending on the type of question (skill), the teachers tried out various strategies with their students (described in the textbooks, seen in the TOEFL iBT educational videos, or read on the teachers'/ students' forums), and chose the ones that fitted the students best.

Unlike in the reading and listening sections, the types of questions in the speaking and writing sections were defined by the test developers (ETS) and, therefore, these did not differ across different textbooks. The teachers used a number of approaches to teach the speaking and writing sections. The researcher personally observed teaching speaking question 3, 'Summarise an opinion', and noticed that to help the students structure their responses in a limited time given for preparation (20 seconds) the teacher used the plan (also called 'skeleton') of the answer, with the leading phrases for each point of the plan. Similarly, in the writing section, special attention was paid to the structure of essays. Writing skill building activities used in class resembled the ones discussed by Lucas et al. (2009) (see section 3.6). The students developed the plans, or skeletons, of the answers that included leading phrases for all the paragraphs and transitional words and phrases to indicate connections between ideas in the writing. Some students of lower language ability levels (B2) were even advised to learn answer 'skeletons' by heart (both for the speaking and writing sections). The latter recommendation is questionable because learning by heart does not always mean understanding and using something appropriately, but it seems that in the context of the TOEFL iBT preparation course, and teaching to the test format, such a suggestion may be rather effective. Moreover, the lesson observations showed that in some cases the students practised the same question and its structure so much that they later used the plans of the answers automatically, without remembering them on purpose.

Another interesting trend was the emphasis on note taking for all the tasks of the tests, apart from the reading section. The teachers mentioned that taking notes was voluntary, but at the same time they always discussed in class how to take notes effectively, e.g. what information to pay attention to, where to find it and how to write it down fast. Having interviewed the teachers and observed them teaching note taking in class, the researcher believes that the knowledge of how to take notes correctly helped the students to structure information, find answers to the questions (as in the listening section), and even pre-plan oral and written responses (as in the speaking and writing sections).

An additional interesting trend was linked to the use of computers and Internet resources. Seeing that the TOEFL iBT test itself is completely managed via Internet with the help of computers, the researcher originally expected to observe a great deal of computer-based teaching. However, the test practice was only partially computerised at the case study school (for the writing section and for the final full trial test), and most of the test practice was thus done on paper. The latter can be explained by a number of factors, such as sticking to traditional approaches to teaching (i.e. using paper resources), free of charge availability of paper resources on the Internet, and the high cost of specialised computer test programmes that can be used instead of paper resources. Taking into consideration that the actual TOEFL iBT test does not contain any paper tasks, and that students have to answer the questions in all the sections via computers, it would seem to be an advantage if students experienced more computerised practice during the preparation course than was actually the case in the case study school in order to get better accustomed to the test format.

In general, the ideas about the TOEFL preparation course expressed by Ward (1998: 123) seem to reflect the methodology of TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school. These ideas are based on the necessity of addressing students' effective needs, extensive test practising for students to get acquainted with the test format and procedures, selecting relevant preparation materials, focusing on language and skill building and, finally, training students in test techniques and strategies based on the TOEFL iBT design.

To sum up, the above-described findings support the earlier expressed expectation (see section 3.3) that the TOEFL iBT course at the case study school would be mostly based on the communicative approach of language teaching. At the same time, the course structure and content showed that the teaching methods of the course were primarily geared towards practising how to answer the questions in the test with the help of certain test strategies.

6.3. Why the teachers chose particular methods or tasks

The second research question involved finding out the reasons why the teachers chose particular methods and tasks in the TOEFL iBT preparation classes. As has been revealed from the teachers' interviews and lesson observations, there are various explanations to the teachers' choices.

The main factor influencing the teachers was the TOEFL iBT test requirements, which are grounded on the principles of skills integration (TOEFL® iBT Test Content and Structure 2015). For this reason, irrespective of the section that was being studied, the teachers included methods and tasks that would involve the combination of several skills. For example, while practising the first integrated task in the writing section, the students had to first read a passage on a particular topic (reading), and then they listened to a discussion on the same topic (listening). Afterwards they discussed the differences between the reading and the listening in pairs (speaking) and, finally, they wrote an essay describing the discrepancies they had found individually (writing).

The choice of methods and tasks used in class was also substantially influenced by the preparation materials that existed on the educational market at the time of the preparation course. The teachers would normally use a variety of commercial books and Internet resources in combination to provide the students with valid, up-to-date TOEFL iBT practice. It seems that the absence of a certain unified TOEFL iBT preparation textbook has its own advantages and disadvantages. The aspect of the test preparation resources will be discussed in detail in 6.4.

In the interviews, the teachers referred to the students' language proficiency level as one more important factor to take into consideration while selecting methods and tasks for classroom use. Depending on the average level of the students in a class, the teachers chose the resources and materials appropriate for the class level. Krashen's (1982) 'input hypothesis', i.e. reaching the 'i+1' level through comprehensible input (see section 3.2), was also taken into consideration when the teachers occasionally made use of the resources with a more advanced level of difficulty in the preparation materials. However, some interviewed students (e.g. Oleksandr) felt that the students with the lower language proficiency levels in the class were occasionally left behind because they could not follow the pace of the lesson and had difficulty comprehending some of the tasks. Therefore, the researcher assumes that before students are put into classes, a more thorough check of their language ability level should be made to avoid students of different language levels studying together. For example, the students of the B2 level could be placed in one class, whereas the students of the B2+ and C1 levels could study together in another class.

One more important factor that the teachers took into account while choosing particular methods or tasks was the number of students in the class. When observing the lessons, the researcher noticed many activities and tasks that involved students' interaction in pairs and in small groups. The teachers would normally place the students together to discuss the answers

for the reading and listening sections, to structure a response and give feedback on the answers in the speaking section, or to brainstorm ideas for the writing section. What is more, the teachers pointed out that the most productive classes needed to consist of no more than six students (preferably an even number of students). At the same time, in reality, the TOEFL iBT preparation classes at the case study school consisted of up to twelve students, with some differences in students' level of language proficiency.

Since the case study school supported the idea of communicative language teaching, the TOEFL iBT preparation course methods and tasks were also based on this approach. As can be concluded from the teachers' interviews and lesson observations, the teachers varied the classroom activities by using mostly communicative games and information gap tasks, simulation and role-plays, discussions, and debates. Similar activities are described by Harmer (2001), Uberman (1998), and Wright (2005). It seems that the focus on communicative competence, problem-solving tasks, and the emphasis on students' interaction within the group helped the students not only to strengthen the four primary language skills (i.e. reading, listening, speaking, and writing), but also to develop their academic skills, such as skimming, scanning, synthesising, summarising, and paraphrasing.

Certain methods and tasks for the TOEFL iBT preparation course were also chosen on the grounds of students' needs and individual requests. In line with Ward (1998), who emphasised the importance of addressing students' effective needs, the teachers chose some tasks depending on students' requests. This was particularly evident in the relatively limited choice of grammar topics that were discussed in the classroom and the nature of home assignments. The latter consisted of obligatory vocabulary practice and additional tasks, usually chosen to satisfy students' requests and help them to understand the material which was not covered in class. Naturally, not all of the students' individual problems could be solved in class or with the help of the homework because of, for example, students' different backgrounds, language levels and personal abilities. However, it appeared important for the teachers to pay attention to the students' feedback on the course and, if possible, to adjust their teaching accordingly.

Finally, the length of the preparation course was also an important factor to consider while choosing teaching methods and tasks. Given that the whole course at the case study school lasted about 12 weeks, the teachers were somewhat limited in time. Thus, they had to prioritise and think of effective tasks that would give immediate results. For this reason, some language

aspects (e.g. vocabulary and grammar) were only partially addressed during the course, and much was often left to self-study and practice.

6.4. The resources the teachers used for the test preparation and practice

The third research question pertained to the resources the teachers used for the test preparation and practice. Generally, such preparation materials can be divided into commercial books, printed by well-known publishers, such as McGraw-Hill (ETS), Longman, Cambridge, Collins, Princeton, and Oxford, and Internet resources (e.g. TOEFL iBT preparation websites, e-books, TOEFL iBT YouTube channels, blogs and the like). From the teachers' interviews and lesson observations, it appeared that the teachers preferred to combine several commercial books with various Internet resources instead of using a single textbook. There are a number of reasons for such a choice.

Firstly, the teachers in their interviews explained that the quality of the existing (at that time) commercial textbooks was not satisfying. Many of the textbooks focused on giving general instructions for the test and providing test samples without any additional explanations. For example, Olga mentioned that the *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test. Next Generation iBT* (2006, 2012) had many practice tests, but failed to include clear theoretical information on the test's strategies and useful tips. Moreover, this textbook contained reading passages and recordings for the listening sections that were too simplified in comparison with the actual TOEFL iBT tasks. At the same time, the *Cracking the TOEFL iBT* (2014), according to Olga, outlined some important test strategies, explanations and helpful exercises for analysing sentences, paragraphs, texts, and lectures, although this textbook included little practice material.

The teachers also pointed out that the newer the edition of the textbook, the better it was in terms of similarity to the actual TOEFL iBT. For this reason, Tetyana, for instance, chose to supplement the *Official Guide to the TOEFL Test, Fourth Edition* (2012, 2014) with other preparation materials. For additional training, the teachers used the *Cambridge Preparation for the TOEFL® Test, Fourth Edition* (2006), the *Macmillan Testbuilder for TOEFL iBT Pack* (2011), and the *Kaplan TOEFL iBT Premier 2014-2015, Fifth Edition* (2014).

As already pointed out, it seems that the absence of a single TOEFL iBT preparation textbook has its own advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, one commonly used

textbook may have a more structured and understandable approach to skill building exercises and practice tests, as its format and layout would be more unified. Moreover, using one major preparation material would allow the teachers to spend less time on lesson preparation. On the other hand, a combination of sources may help teachers and students to look at the TOEFL iBT from different perspectives and points of view, taking into consideration more ideas and recommendations from different authors.

With regard to the vocabulary and grammar books, the teachers named the *400 Must-Have Words for the TOEFL* (2005) as the one used as a vocabulary booster for home assignments. Despite the fact that the teachers honestly admitted that this book had its drawbacks (e.g. little practice containing simplified tests), the book was still considered a well-structured resource, where the new vocabulary was introduced in the context and practised through a number of tasks, such as fill-in-the gaps, matching synonyms/ antonyms, or choosing the word that best completes a sentence.

In addition to the above-mentioned book used for homework, Nataliia, for example, preferred to use the *500 Words, Phrases, Idioms. TOEFL iBT* (2010) in class. The teacher emphasised the effective structure of the book and the TOEFL iBT skills developing practice exercises.

As for the TOEFL iBT grammar preparation resources, all the teachers commented on the mediocre quality of grammar books. Thus, they chose to use general grammar resources that would correspond to the level of the class, such as the *English Grammar in Use* (2004) or the *Round-Up* series (2010). Additionally, some teachers mentioned the Appendix from the *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test. Next Generation IBT* (2006, 2012) as a good TOEFL iBT guide, with rules and exercises for grammar skills development. Another grammar and vocabulary book, the *Collins Vocabulary and Grammar for the TOEFL Test* (2013), was tried out by Nataiia. The teacher praised the resource for being explicitly connected to the actual TOEFL iBT test and including a CD to practise vocabulary and grammar through test-like listening, speaking, and writing tasks.

Among the printed TOEFL iBT textbooks and vocabulary and grammar resources, the teachers also named the importance and effectiveness of various educational computer programmes and mobile phone applications. Apparently, modern technologies may benefit the educational process because such TOEFL iBT programmes and applications can be found online and downloaded free of charge, they are easily accessible (for example, an application on the mobile phone), and they have plenty of practice materials. However, not all of the

programmes and applications are equally useful. For this reason, the teachers at the case study school advised the students to choose only those programmes that the teachers themselves had tried first hand. These included the *TOEFL Vocabulary Flashcards* (Magoosh), *TOEFL Grammar* (Exam English Ltd), *TOEFL Speaking Master* (TOEFL Speaking Master), *TOEFL iBT preparation* (XuviF), and *Magoosh TOEFL Prep* (Magoosh). All of the above-mentioned applications can be downloaded via Google Play Market.

The Internet was also one of the main resources of information during the TOEFL iBT preparation course. The web page that was used as a starting point for the whole course was the Internet page of the ETS⁶, which was the only official TOEFL iBT test provider. The teachers and students consulted this website for various reasons: to receive general information about the test, to register for the test, to prepare for the test with the help of the preparation materials online, and to access educational videos from the TOEFL iBT library. For additional training online, the teachers also recommended the *goodlucktoefl.com*, *toeflgoanywhere.org*, and *englon1.com*.

Last but not least, TOEFL iBT educational videos on YouTube were explicitly used during the preparation course as the resource for consultation and additional practice. Such YouTube channels as the *TOEFLtv*, *iTeacher iBT TOEFL*, *engVidRebecca ESL*, *NoteFull TOEFL Mastery* were considered to be the most relevant and helpful.

It is worth pointing out that the teachers of the case study school claimed to have complete freedom in choosing the TOEFL iBT resources for the preparation course. Neither the administration, nor the head teacher, imposed any kind of materials on them. At the same time, it seems that the teachers still took into consideration some of the recommendations for preparation resources given during the teaching course devoted to the methodology of the TOEFL iBT preparation course they had previously attended. Such an observation was confirmed by the paper and Internet resources (with only some differences) that all the three teachers used for their courses. However, the use of the same materials can also be explained by teachers' cooperation with each other.

⁶ <http://www.ets.org/toefl>

6.5. How the students experienced the test preparation and practice

The fourth research question concerned the students' experiences during the test preparation and practice. In the interviews, the students were asked to express their opinions on the structure and content of the preparation course, the relevance of the course materials, the length of the course, any difficulties and challenges they experienced during their studying, and the general effectiveness of the preparation course. Additionally, the students commented on their attitudes to the feedback from the teacher and from the fellow students, the importance of self-studying, and the influence of the class size on teaching. The students also shared their views on what could have been done differently during the TOEFL iBT preparation course and expressed their expectations for the TOEFL iBT scores they would receive (the latter is discussed in detail in section 6.6).

As for the structure and content of the course, all the students agreed that the test sections (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) were covered completely during the course. However, it appeared that the majority of the interviewed students (three out of four) also wished that more time had been spent on the reading section. Such a tendency can be explained by several factors.

Firstly, the reading section always opens the preparation course, as well as the actual TOEFL iBT test, and becomes a starting point for the students. Therefore, they might not yet be prepared to absorb such a great amount of new information at that early stage of the course. Moreover, the length of the reading section (approximately 700 words per passage, three to five passages for the whole section) and the number of questions to respond to in a limited time (36-55 questions in 60-100 minutes) might confuse and worry some students. The complexity of the passages in the reading section also plays an important role in the students' opinions about the reading section because the complexity of vocabulary and grammar used in the selection of texts might be unfamiliar to many students who apply for the TOEFL iBT preparation course. What is more, the researcher's first-hand teaching experience shows that most of the students in Ukraine are simply inexperienced in reading in English and are unaware of how to apply reading strategies in practice.

The question about the relevance of the course activities and tasks showed that the students were generally satisfied with them. Nevertheless, some of them expressed concern with the lack of vocabulary studied during the course. Apparently, the vocabulary books the teachers made use of in class and as a resource for the homework (the *400 Must-Have Words*

for the TOEFL (2005), *the 500 Words, Phrases, Idioms. TOEFL iBT* (2010), and *the Vocabulary and Grammar for the TOEFL Test* (2013) were inadequate for high-level language students.

The length of the preparation course (12 weeks) seemed to be insufficient for almost all the interviewed students, who were confident that an additional two or four weeks was absolutely necessary for more thorough preparation. Given that the TOEFL iBT preparation course has its own peculiarities (according to Brown (2007: 95), it is a high-stakes test with a gate-keeping function), it seems quite natural that the students expressed the wish to study for a longer period of time.

With regard to the difficulties and challenges the students experienced during the preparation course, the time limit appeared to be the most frequently named problem. It was obvious that the teachers were aware of this difficulty and did their best to help the students by teaching and practising a number of strategies to cope with this issue, for example active reading, particular strategies for different types of questions, and practising with a timer. However, sometimes during the lesson observations the researcher could still notice how the time pressure could affect even the most confident students.

Among other challenges mentioned by the students in their interviews there were difficulties with essay composition in the writing section, problems with different accents and the speed of the speech in the listening section, advanced vocabulary, and complicated sentence structures in the reading section. Despite all the challenges the students encountered during the TOEFL iBT preparation course, they all felt that the teachers' advice and tips really helped them to improve their test skills and, in some cases, even raise their language level. For instance, Harmer's (2001) suggestion to use extensive listening (TV, radio, Internet, computer games) outside the classroom reflected Olga's advice on how to improve students' listening skills. From the students' answers in the interviews, and their behaviour during the observations, it was apparent to the researcher that the teacher was an authority in the classroom, whose recommendations were a call for action for most of the students. Therefore, it is understandable why the students considered the TOEFL iBT preparation course to be quite effective and why they were hesitant to name activities that were not so helpful.

At the same time, one student (Oleksandr) found it difficult to follow the pace of the lessons since the materials discussed in class were much more advanced than his actual language level. Oleksandr's case confirms that it is an advantage if the language level of the students in the same class is similar. It seems that the written placement test that is administered

at the case study school before the admission for the TOEFL iBT preparation course may not be adequate enough for identifying students' readiness to take part in the course.

When asked about their attitudes to the feedback from the teacher, the students found it undoubtedly useful in all the sections of the test, especially in the speaking and writing sections. The students seemed to value both types of teacher feedback: oral, given in class in front of other students, and individual written feedback received by e-mail. Such an attentive and responsible attitude towards teacher feedback might be explained by the traditions of Ukrainian educational system, taking its roots from the Soviet education. The latter established that the teacher was a role model whose opinion had to be valued (Treffers, 1985).

In contrast, the feedback from fellow students seemed to be a new experience for most of the students in both observed classes. Possibly for this reason, some of the students did not consider the feedback from their peers as useful as the teacher's feedback. Some students (for example, Oleksandr) felt it was 'embarrassing to criticise' others, whereas other students (such as Viktor) expressed the hope that they could learn from each other and 'pick up some interesting ideas'. The students' cautious attitude to giving and receiving peer feedback can also be explained by the educational traditions that have existed in Ukraine. Peer feedback has only recently become popular as a practice in language education (Coady and Tsehelska, 2013).

Regarding the question of self-studying, the researcher expected to find out that most of the students devoted much personal time to it. Given the amount of information the students had to absorb in the relatively short period of three months, it was initially expected that the role of self-studying would be quite important. Nonetheless, the students admitted in the interviews that they did not pay much attention to self-studying during the course for different reasons. In terms of gaining knowledge about English and the TOEFL iBT, they seemed to primarily rely on the preparation course at the case study school.

It also appeared that the size of the classes in which the students studied during the TOEFL iBT preparation course (eight students per a class) did not affect their studying experience significantly. According to the students, all of them received enough attention from the teachers. However, when asked about the 'ideal' number of students in a class, most of the students said that mini-groups of four to six people would be the most effective. The idea of an even number of students in a class (for the sake of pair-interaction) was suggested by both the students and their teachers (see sections 5.2.4 and 6.2). Such a suggestion seems to be somewhat unreasonable because not all students are always present in class. Thus, pair-interaction can

sometimes be substituted with group interaction (for example, a group of three students working together).

On the whole, it seems that the TOEFL iBT preparation course given by the case study school lived up to the students' expectations with only minor (mostly organisational) aspects that they felt could have been improved. The students were all aware that the given preparation course was mostly teaching for the test and they did not expect to raise their language proficiency level substantially.

6.6. How the final results (received by the official test centre) corresponded with the teachers'/ students' expectations

Both the teachers and the students in their interviews were asked about their expectations for the final results received by the official test centre. Nataliia and the two students from her class (Svitlana, Viktor), in addition to Olga and the two students from her class (Iuliia, Oleksandr), stated their expectations and could later compare these with real TOEFL iBT scores.

The first interviewed student was Svitlana. At the time of the interview, Svitlana expected to receive at least 85-90 points out of 120 points possible. Svitlana's actual TOEFL iBT result was 82 points, which coincided with her teacher's expectations of 80-85 points, but was slightly lower than her own.

Oleksandr hoped to receive at least 80 points that were required as a minimum score for admission to his chosen university. The actual score Oleksandr received on his personal TOEFL iBT test taker's page was 78. His teacher, Nataliia, appeared to be quite realistic about Oleksandr's possible result and, in her interview, predicted a score of less than 80. Despite the fact that Oleksandr did not achieve the minimum required score on the TOEFL iBT, it was still possible for him to apply for the chosen programme because his previous high university grades could influence the decision of the selection committee.

Viktor was more positive about his possible TOEFL iBT score. He expected to be awarded between 80-85 points. When he received the actual score for the test (84 points), he was not surprised. Olga, Viktor's teacher, also expected Viktor to score above 80, and was right in her judgement.

The final interviewed student, Iuliia, seemed to be quite confident about her language abilities. At the time of the interview, Iuliia's aim was to score at least 90 points, which was

required for a PhD programme at the chosen university. The score that Iuliia actually received was 93 points, which is three points more than her teacher Olga expected.

Having compared the correspondence between the expected and the actual scores, it appears that in most cases the teachers could correctly identify the correct result with only a few points difference. At the same time, two students were somewhat overconfident (Svitlana, Oleksandr) about their actual scores and two of them (Iuliia, Viktor) were able to predict their actual scores more or less accurately. The explanation for such a close correspondence between the expected (by the teachers) and actual scores may be that the teachers were able to correctly identify each student's strengths and weaknesses during the course. What is more, the students had to take a complete trial TOEFL iBT test at the end of the course, the results of which could also be taken into consideration with some allowances for psychological factors, e.g. anxiety, stress, fatigue, and unfamiliar test centre conditions. However, it is important to acknowledge that with a larger sample of students and teachers, the correspondence between the expected and actual scores might be different.

Among many factors that may influence the correspondence between the expected and actual scores, the above-mentioned psychological factor might affect it the most. As stated in section 3.2, students' emotional states, motives, attitudes, and needs can either hinder or help the learning process (Krashen, 1982: 30-33). The idea that students' psychological states during the test play an important role was also confirmed by Amiryousefia and Tavakolib (2011), who studied the influence of motivation and anxiety on test takers' performance on a language test (see section 3.6). This link was also pointed out in the interviews with the teachers and students of the case study school. For instance, Svitlana, the student who had already taken the actual TOEFL iBT at the time of the interview, admitted that it was difficult for her to cope with a stressful situation of a high-stakes test and assumed that her final results would be influenced by her psychological state. What is more, all of the interviewed teachers agreed that such construct-irrelevant factors, such as test anxiety, fatigue, and stress, could truly become a stumbling block for many diligent students with high language proficiency level.

6.7. Implications and recommendations

Having reviewed the literature and relevant research connected to the TOEFL iBT and its teaching, and having collected and analysed the data through the teacher and student interviews

and lesson observations, it seems appropriate to share the researcher's recommendations about the TOEFL iBT preparation course at the case study school and possible implications of the thesis findings for education.

To begin with, it seems necessary to extend the TOEFL iBT preparation course from the studying period of three months (12 weeks) to four months (16 weeks). Such a conclusion is based on the students' opinions about the course length and the teachers' general remarks about the limited time set for teaching the course. Obviously, course extension might not be supported by some students because it requires additional costs (one more month to pay) and time spent on preparation. However, as the findings of the research indicate, most of the students were ready to spend extra money and time for the sake of the opportunity to improve their language and test skills.

This recommendation to extend the TOEFL iBT course is directly connected to the suggestion of providing the students with more vocabulary practice. In the interviews, the teachers admitted that vocabulary was mostly given for self-study during the course, and the students felt that they did not learn sufficient amount of vocabulary and could not develop and practise it well enough. The lack of vocabulary, and little time devoted to practising it in class, was also obvious from the lesson observations. Therefore, it seems important for the TOEFL iBT course teachers to pay more attention to developing the students' vocabulary skills, which was happening to a certain degree during the observed preparation course. This can be done by using both paper books in class and also by introducing computer TOEFL iBT vocabulary programmes and vocabulary flashcards.

One more aspect that requires reconsideration is the language ability level of students who study in the same class. At the time of the research, the TOEFL iBT preparation classes consisted of mixed ability students (the language level varied from B2 up to C1). Such a grouping seemed to be somewhat ineffective because the students of high language levels coped with many tasks faster than the students of lower levels. Moreover, the latter students sometimes felt confused and lagging behind. The case study school did indeed have a written placement test to identify the language level of the students applying for the preparation course. This test was mostly focused on checking vocabulary and grammar skills. However, it seems that this written test is inadequate because it does not also check students' listening and speaking skills, which are important for identifying students' overall language level in the context of the TOEFL iBT. The solution to the problem might be introducing an oral test along with the written

placement test and a more thorough grouping of students according to their language proficiency levels.

Finally, it seems necessary for the case study school to consider the issue of the computerisation of the preparation course. Since, at the time of the research, most of the preparation practice in class was conducted on paper, it might be useful in the future to introduce specialised computer TOEFL iBT preparation programmes, along with partial use of paper resources.

7. Conclusion

The thesis at hand aimed at researching the methods and tasks used by teachers while preparing students to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-based version (TOEFL iBT). The research was performed in the form of a qualitative case study at a typical Ukrainian language school. Five research questions were addressed to explore the process of preparing students for the TOEFL iBT at the case study school. The research questions focused on how the teachers prepared students for the TOEFL iBT, why the teachers chose particular methods or tasks, what resources the teachers used for the test preparation and practice, how the students experienced the test preparation and practice and, finally, how the final results (received by the official test centre) corresponded with the teachers'/ students' expectations.

The data for the research was collected through qualitative data collection methods, namely teacher and student interviews, and lesson observations. During the research, interviews were conducted with three EFL teachers who taught the TOEFL iBT preparation course (although one teacher did not teach it at that time), and four students (one male and one female from two different classes) who were taking the course at the case study school. Also, the researcher observed five lessons devoted to different aspects of the TOEFL iBT which were conducted by the two of the interviewed teachers.

One of the main findings of the research was that the TOEFL iBT preparation course was based primarily on communicative language teaching (Nunan 1991, Harmer 2001, Howatt 2004, Brown 2007). This finding was based on the explicit use of skill-integration tasks (especially while practising for the speaking and writing sections), by the close connection of teaching materials to real life (the resources used for the preparation were authentic; the tasks were meaningful in terms of academic use of English), and by frequent student interactions within the groups (with pair-work prevailing). What is more, communicative warming up activities (as a rule, vocabulary) at the beginning of the lesson were a part of the classroom routines in the observed lessons.

The expectation that the TOEFL iBT preparation course would mostly consist of teaching geared towards the test was confirmed by the teachers and by the lesson observations. For instance, in the interviews, the teachers acknowledged that the course aimed at teaching students the TOEFL iBT structure and useful strategies to achieve the best possible results on the test, and not to raise students' general language competence, although this also seemed to be happening to a certain extent, for example the particular attention to the students' formal

errors. While observing the lessons, the researcher also noticed that skill-based methods and activities, which are typical for teaching geared towards the test (Bond, 2004), were dominant in class.

The teachers chose particular methods and tasks on the grounds of various considerations. These considerations were the TOEFL iBT test requirements, the preparation materials that existed on the educational market at the time of the preparation course, students' language proficiency level, their needs and individual requests, the number of students in the class, and the length of the TOEFL iBT preparation course.

The resources used for the test preparation and practice could generally be divided into commercial paper books and Internet resources, including TOEFL iBT preparation websites, e-books, TOEFL iBT YouTube channels, and blogs. Contrary to expectation, it also appeared that there was no single textbook used in class; instead, the combination of several commercial books with various Internet resources was common practice. It seemed that using a combination of preparation materials allowed the teachers and the students to look at the TOEFL iBT from different perspectives and points of view, taking into consideration more ideas and recommendations from different authors.

As for the interviewed students, they expressed general satisfaction with the TOEFL iBT preparation course given by the case study school. Both the interviews and lesson observations showed that the focus on communicative competence, real life problem-solving tasks, and emphasis on student interaction seemed to help the students to both strengthen the four primary language skills (i.e. reading, listening, speaking, and writing), and to develop their academic skills, such as skimming, scanning, synthesising, summarising, and paraphrasing. On the other hand, the students also felt that some aspects of the preparation course could have been changed. For example, according to the students, the length of the course should have been extended and the number and ability levels of the students in the class should have been considered more thoroughly. At the same time, all the interviewed students appeared to be fully aware that the given preparation course was mostly based on teaching for the test, and thus, they did not expect to raise their language proficiency level substantially.

The correspondence between the final results, received by the official test centre, and the teachers' expectations appeared to be quite high (the two interviewed teachers could predict the four students' actual scores with only a few points difference). However, only two out of four students interviewed were able to predict their actual scores reasonably accurately. Such a close correspondence between the actual scores and the teachers' expectations might be the

evidence that, during the preparation course, the teachers followed the TOEFL iBT score requirements and ETS raters' guidelines to correctly determine students' personal strengths and weaknesses.

One of the main contributions of the thesis is that it has addressed such a relatively new field of study, i.e. preparation for Internet-based standardised testing. Since contemporary society is developing towards computer-based education, one may assume that online testing will become more and more popular in the future. Thus, the necessity to research the topic of preparation for online standardised testing is extremely relevant for the educational sphere.

Additionally, given that the TOEFL iBT is a modernised version of the TOEFL test, it was important to explore how the methods and tasks used for the test preparation had been altered and revised in accordance with the requirements of the new test format. The latter idea was supported by the fact that there was limited research devoted to the methodology of teaching students to prepare for the TOEFL iBT. While the literature review on this topic revealed a number of relevant studies, most of them had been conducted in Asia. Therefore, it seemed important to research the issue of preparation for the TOEFL iBT in a European environment, with European informants, since the research on the preparation methodology of the TOEFL iBT seems to be limited in the European context.

Moreover, another contribution of the thesis has been its study of the TOEFL iBT preparation assisting materials and guidelines for teachers. It has described and reflected on various teaching methods and tasks used in this preparation. The thesis has also presented an overview of the TOEFL iBT preparation resources that could be taken into consideration by the TOEFL iBT teachers and students preparing for the test.

Finally, since the thesis has been conducted in the Ukrainian context, its outcomes may be particularly relevant for the post-Soviet countries that have some common cultural and educational peculiarities, for example, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and Kazakhstan. Thus, the educators from these countries who already teach, or are willing to start teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course, may benefit from insight into the current research.

One of the limitations of the present thesis is that, being a case study, it cannot generalise the findings. However, the informants (the teachers and the students) participating in the research represented a typical language school in Ukraine. Thus, there is no reason to doubt its representativeness of teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course within that context.

Another limitation is the small number of students and teachers involved in the research. On the other hand, the thesis is a qualitative study aimed at providing rich and varied insights

into the phenomenon of the TOEFL iBT preparation. In this respect, the interviewees helped the researcher to collect the data necessary to answer the research questions.

Having analysed the findings, contribution, and limitations of the thesis at hand, one of the directions for further research could be to study the methodology of teaching separate sections of the TOEFL iBT. Such research could provide a detailed description of possible methods and tasks that could be effective at different stages of the test preparation. What is more, a detailed analysis of a particular section could reveal new approaches and strategies for preparing for the test.

It would also be important to explore the issue of computerised teaching in general and TOEFL iBT computerised teaching in particular. Seeing that technology has already become an indispensable part of the modern educational process, and the fact that the TOEFL iBT itself is completely conducted online, there is a need to research teaching which is based on the extensive use of computers and Internet, both in class and at home.

Finally, to form a broader picture of the TOEFL iBT preparation methodology, it would be useful to carry out more research that comprised teacher and student interviews and questionnaires involving a selection of multiple schools, instead of just one.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Teacher interview guide

Opening remarks

The purpose of the interview is to obtain necessary data for my Master thesis devoted to preparing EFL students to take the TOEFL iBT in the Ukrainian context. The interview is completely anonymous – neither the school, nor the name will be disclosed. The interview will be recorded in order to accurately transcribe the essence of it.

Lead-in/ Background questions:

1. How old are you?
2. How many years have you been teaching English as a foreign language?
3. How long have you been teaching the TOEFL iBT preparation course?
4. What education/ qualifications do you have?
 - 4.1. Do you have a university degree in teaching English?
 - 4.2. Have you attended any in-service courses or training seminars? If yes, where?
 - 4.3. Have these courses/ trainings been connected with teaching how to prepare students for the TOEFL iBT?
5. Have you taken the TOEFL iBT yourself? If yes, when and where?

Practices (general):

1. What does the TOEFL iBT preparation course consist of?
2. Do you teach all the sections simultaneously or focus on teaching each section separately, one by one?
3. Which skill (reading, listening, speaking, writing) do you start teaching with and why?
4. How do you usually start and end the class? Is there any routine?
5. Do you pay attention to teaching vocabulary?
 - 5.1. When (each class/ once a week/ at the beginning/ at the end of the class etc.)?
 - 5.2. How do you teach it?
 - 5.3. How often?
6. Do you teach grammar in the TOEFL iBT class?
 - 6.1. When?

6.2. How do you teach it?

6.3. How often?

7. What kind of interaction do you use in class? Are lessons mostly teacher- or student-centred?

8. Is there any homework assigned to students? If yes, how often?

Practices (Reading section):

1. What is a usual structure of a class devoted to the reading section?

2. How would you normally go through a text in class?

3. Do you focus on the types of questions in the reading section? If yes, why and how?

4. Is there any particular approach (advice, tricks) to answering the questions?

5. How do you deal with the issue of time limit?

6. Are there any particular tasks you use to develop students reading skills?

7. How do you check students' answers?

Practices (Listening section):

1. What is a usual structure of a class devoted to the listening section?

2. Do you use recordings or read scripts yourself?

2.1. How many times do students listen to the recordings?

3. Do you focus on the types of questions in the listening section? If yes, why and how?

4. Is there any particular approach (advice, tricks) to answering the questions?

5. How do you deal with the issue of time limit?

6. Do students experience any problems with different accents?

6.1. If yes, in what way do you try to help students?

7. Are there any particular tasks you use to develop students listening skills?

8. How do you check students' answers?

Practices (Speaking section):

1. What is a usual structure of a class devoted to the speaking section?

2. Do you focus on the types of questions in the speaking section? If yes, why and how?

3. Is there any particular approach (advice, tricks) to answering the questions?

4. How do you deal with the issue of time limit?

5. How do students practise their answers? Do they record them?

6. In what way do you give feedback to students?

- 6.1. Are other students in the class involved in giving feedback to their peers?
- 6.2. Do you analyse with students their errors? If yes, when and how?

Practices (Writing section):

1. What is a usual structure of a class devoted to the writing section?
2. Do you discuss with students the types of tasks in the writing section? If yes, how?
3. Is there any particular approach (advice, tricks) to answering the questions?
4. How do you deal with the issue of time limit?
5. How do students practise the tasks? Do they use computers/ laptops to print their answers?
7. In what way do you give feedback to students?
 - 7.1. Are other students in the class involved in giving feedback to their peers?
 - 7.2. Do you analyse with students their errors? If yes, when and how?

Materials:

1. What factors influence your choice of materials?
2. Do you use a textbook (e.g. Cambridge Preparation for the TOEFL iBT, Official Guide for the TOEFL iBT etc.)?
 - 3.1. How often?
 - 3.2. What do you think of the quality of the textbook?
3. Do you use any other materials?
 - 4.1. Which?
 - 4.2. How often?
5. Do you use computers/ laptops?
 - 5.1. When?
 - 5.2. How often?
6. Do you use the internet for the preparation?
 - 6.1. In what way?
 - 6.2. How often?
 - 6.3. What internet resources do you use most often?
7. Who decides which materials you can have/use in your class?
8. Do the teachers in your school co-operate about the TOEFL iBT preparation materials?

Beliefs/attitudes:

1. How strong is the washback effect of the TOEFL iBT preparation course? Is it the course that is mostly focused on teaching to the test?
2. Does students' background (education, language level, prior experience of the test) influence their performance?
3. Does the number of students in a class influence your choice of methods and tasks?
4. Does the number of students in a class have any impact on the effectiveness of the preparation?
5. What factors can influence students' final results?
6. In your opinion, does the TOEFL iBT exam reflect students' real language proficiency?

Final remarks from the informant

Appendix 2: Student interview guide

Opening remarks

The purpose of the interview is to obtain necessary data for my Master thesis devoted to preparing EFL students to take the TOEFL iBT in the Ukrainian context. The interview is completely anonymous – neither the school, nor will the names of those interviewed be disclosed. The interview will be recorded in order to accurately transcribe the essence of it.

Lead-in/ Background questions:

1. How old are you?
2. What education do you have?
 - 2.1. Do you have a Bachelor's/ Master's degree? If yes, what is your specialization?
3. How long have you been studying English?
 - 3.1. Where have you studied English before (at school/university, with a tutor/ abroad etc.)?
 - 3.2. What is your current language level (intermediate/ upper-intermediate/ advanced)?
4. Have you ever taken any language proficiency tests? If yes, which test, when, where and why?
 - 4.1. Have you ever taken the TOEFL iBT? If yes, when, where and why? What was your result?
 - 4.2. Why are you taking the TOEFL iBT now?

Practices:

1. What do you think about the content and structure of the course? (Have all the sections been covered fully? Has the order of the sections been logical and effective? Have the activities and tasks been relevant?)
 - 1.1. What are your views on the length of the course?
2. What difficulties and challenges have you experienced during the course? How have you coped with them?
3. How effective has the teaching been?
 - 3.1. In your opinion, which classroom activities and tasks have helped you the most? Why?
 - 3.2. Which classroom activities and tasks have not been so helpful? Why?
4. How useful has the feedback from the teacher/ fellow students been? Why?
5. How important do you think self-studying is while preparing for the TOEFL iBT?
 - 5.1. Have you been self-studying? If so, what exactly have you been doing?

- 5.2. Which resources have you been using?
- 5.3. How effective do you think the self-studying has been?
6. How many students were there in your TOEFL iBT preparation class?
 - 6.1. How has the size of the class affected the teaching?

Beliefs/ Attitudes:

1. How important is the TOEFL iBT preparation course for you? Why?
2. In your opinion, how effective/ useful is the TOEFL iBT preparation course given by this school? Why?
 - 2.1. What could have been done differently during the course?
 - 2.2. Have methods/ activities/ course quality lived up to your expectations? Why?
3. How confident do you feel now compared to before the course? Why?
4. Which section has been the easiest/ the most difficult for you? Why?
 - 4.1. Which areas (skills) have you developed the most/ the least? Why?
5. What result (how many points) do you expect to receive at the actual TOEFL iBT test?

Final remarks from the informant

Appendix 3: Information letter to the case study school

The qualitative research project on preparing EFL students to take the TOEFL internet-based (iBT) test in the Ukrainian context performed by the University of Stavanger

Dear school principal, TOEFL iBT teachers and students,

My name is Olena Nikolaieva, and I am a second-year Master students in Literacy Studies at the University of Stavanger. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project on preparing EFL students to take the TOEFL internet-based (iBT) test in the Ukrainian context. The aim of the project is to discover particular methods and tasks the teachers use in the preparation classroom, to present an overview of the TOEFL iBT preparation resources the teachers and the students address to, and to describe students' experiences of the preparation course at your school.

In order to collect data, I will interview the teachers who conduct the TOEFL iBT preparation course and some students who take part in the course. The teachers and the students will be interviewed individually and anonymously. During the interviews, I will be using a sound recorder to be able to process the recorded data afterwards. I am also planning to observe some of the lessons during the TOEFL iBT preparation course. I guarantee that the names of all the research participants (school, teachers, and students) will not be disclosed, and all the information received through the interviews and lesson observations will be for my personal use only.

Your participation in this research project is highly important, but it is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from it at any time. At the same time, I hope that you will be interested in the project and will be willing to share your experiences and ideas with me.

If you have any questions or concerns about the reserach project, you are welcome to contact me via e-mail [lena.nikolaieva@gmail.com](mailto:lana.nikolaieva@gmail.com), or mobile phone: +47 486 80 614.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Looking forward to receiving your answer.

Best regards,
Olena Nikolaieva,
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