Test preparation and identity: Cases of Korean test takers preparing tests of English speaking proficiency

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Abstract

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With the rapid growth in high-stakes testing in recent decades, we have witnessed the phenomenon of large groups of test takers investing increasing amounts of time, resources and energy on test preparation. Their goal is to achieve scores that will enable them to make life defining choices. For many of them, I have discovered that test preparation requires engaging in pressurised practice to achieve a high score rather than engaging in meaningful learning. This research has found the test preparation experience to be a critical experience that impacts on an individual’s life. Until now, we have not known why and how learners prepare to take tests, nor how they construct their identities as test takers, or are constructed by the test preparation. One objective of this study is therefore to examine Korean test takers’ preparation practices for English-speaking proficiency tests from the test takers’ perspectives. The second major objective is to examine how the act of test preparation affects test takers’ identity. The qualitative methodology adopted to investigate these issues included interviews with test takers and observation of test preparation classes in Korea. The data were analysed using coding and thematic categorisation. It was found that test takers tended to study in cram schools, and that preparation was dependent upon instructors and the test for which they were preparing. The study revealed a complex situation with regard to identity construction, related to: (1) personal goal and test preparation choice, (2) English mediated identity in speaking activities and (3) self-conflicts over time. It is suggested that the impact of test preparation on a test taker’s identity may be devaluation of a sense of self. The implications of the study are to raise awareness of the importance of links between test preparation and identity in the field of language testing and teaching.
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*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,*

*I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

*(Psalm 23:4)*
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Chapter 1  Introduction

This chapter introduces this study by first identifying a problem in a research context and then presenting the research aims and questions. This chapter concludes with the significance of this research and structure of the study.

1.1 Identifying a problem

A current social phenomenon is the growing use of speaking tests to make high-stakes employment and education decisions, especially in South Korea. South Korea's education system relies heavily on English language tests. From elementary to adult education, many test takers prepare for these tests in order to acquire admission to schools as well as to improve employment and promotion opportunities in workplace settings. According to Educational Testing Service (ETS), 150,000 South Koreans took the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in 2008, making up 20 percent of the world total and representing an increase from 34,000 in 2007 (The Korea Times, 2009). In fact, South Korea has the largest number of TOEFL test takers in the world. Recently, English speaking tests have been used to evaluate applicants’ speaking proficiency in workplace settings as well as in academic contexts, through commercial tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the TOEFL Internet-based Test (iBT), the Test of English for International Communication Speaking (TOEIC Speaking) and the Oral Proficiency Interview-computer (OPIc). In these situations, most South Korean college students prepare for English speaking tests in order to get better jobs. It is accurate to comment that acquiring a high level of proficiency in English is the way to ensure success in South Korea. In addition, this has led to a growing test preparation industry. It is easy to see that many South Korean students are in a long queue at cram schools in order to enrol for test preparation in well-known institutions.

However, this social phenomenon raises a lot of questions. First, people find quick and easy ways to achieve the scores they require within a short time frame. This has led
to a growing test preparation industry. Many cram schools and online programs have advertised that they will deliver high scores and success in the shortest time possible. Many students and parents trust instructors in cram schools and follow their instruction in order to raise scores. However, we do not know how test takers are preparing for high-stakes English speaking tests. Studies of high-stakes tests have indicated that these tests create pressure on students and teachers to raise scores. In addition, it is claimed that these pressures frequently have negative impacts on teaching and learning, such as narrowing the curriculum and focusing on test-taking skills rather than language development (Fulcher, 2009; Gulek, 2003; Lumley & Stoneman, 2000; Mansell, 2007; Smith, 1991). More test-specific strategies have been focused only on passing the tests without making accurate inferences regarding what students know and can do in reference to content domains that are tested (Perlman, 2003). These test-specific strategies can artificially inflate scores and decrease test validity. The effects of tests may also result in unethical test preparation. According to Haladyna and Downing (2004), test preparation can be identified as a source of construct-irrelevant variance which threatens validity. While literature exists concerning ethical test preparation in classrooms generally (Popham, 1991), there is little research regarding test preparation in cram schools, including information about what a test taker actually does to prepare for a given test.

Second, even before the recent increase in this social phenomenon, test takers were in control of test preparation which had high cost implications. Now, the fact that these test results have life-defining effects on individuals, the stakes are even higher. Test takers spend their time, energy and money on English test preparation, which may take several months or even over one year. As the use of high-stakes English tests increases, test preparation has come to dominate individuals’ lives even more. Test takers perform the required practice procedures during their preparation. The tests may also create candidate anxiety including a sense of fear or failure until a required score is achieved (Shohamy, 2001). While it is true that candidates have varied experiences during exam preparation, a problem is that we do not know exactly what these experiences involve, including the impact of test preparation on a test taker’s identity. In the field of education, identity studies of learners have been widely discussed with regard to the effects of teaching and learning on identity. This is because learning is “not just the acquisition of memories, habits, and skills, but the formation of an identity” (Wenger, 1998, p. 96). In addition, this concept can be applied to test takers in the language
testing arena, which means that a test taker’s preparation for a test does not just involve acquiring the required knowledge and skills for the test, but also results in constructing an identity during the process of preparation. However, while studies of test impact on teaching have been widely discussed in the field of language testing, identities of test takers have been of less concern.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how test takers prepare for a targeted English speaking test from a test taker’s perspective. In addition, this study explores how test takers construct identity as test preparation starts, and how their identity is influenced by test preparation over time.

1.2 Research aims and questions

The objective of this study is to investigate how Korean test takers prepare for English speaking tests, and how the act of test preparation affects test takers’ identity. My concern for test taker identity in test preparation relates to personal experiences of test preparation. In the past, I prepared for high-stakes English tests in order to make a life-defining choice. I tried to find a quick and easy way to achieve a required score and studied in cram schools. I learned memorization and test taking skills. I joined in on group-study and studied by myself. As test preparation continued it dominated my life. I became alienated from others and at the same time I suffered from intense anxiety. Since I started to study in the field of language testing, I have found that there are many studies related to test impact. However, there has been no research, to my knowledge, about the reality of test preparation and its impact on a test taker’s identity. We know that language tests have influenced individuals, education systems, policies and society. This is especially the case for English tests: because English is used in worldwide communication, tests given in English have been and are considered to be high-stakes tests (Shohamy, 2001). As the use of high-stakes English tests increases, it has life-defining effects on individuals’ lives such as their university entrance, graduation exams or employment opportunities. Some studies in language testing have indicated that a high-stakes test can lead to a test taker experiencing a sense of failure or success, depending on test results. However, relevant studies have not explored how test takers construct their identities in the context of test preparation. According to Dewey (1888),
personal identity is to address individuals’ values related to society, which “holds that the spirit of personality indwells in every individual and that the choice to develop it must proceed from that individual” (p. 191). It is important to view a test taker using theories of identity because this makes it possible to see a test taker as an individual with personal original values.

It has been suggested that “the true role of education is to liberate, not to control” (Fulcher & Davidson, 2008, p. 410). If we view test preparation from an educational perspective, a test taker becomes a learner, which can lead us to ask questions such as: What happens in the long term in test preparation? What does a test taker learn from test preparation? How does a test taker view oneself in the experiences? Is a test taker influenced by test preparation? If so, how is a test taker influenced? All of the questions raised above lead to an essential question related to the role of education: Does a test taker experience personal growth as test preparation continues? Ultimately, all of these questions relate to understanding an individual’s identity construction.

Nevertheless, the literature of language testing has no answers to these questions. High-stakes test preparation has become ubiquitous in modern societies. However, there has been less concern for test taker identity, compared to studies of learner identity in the field of education. Therefore, this study aims to identify relationships between test preparation and a test taker’s identity, examining South Korean test-takers’ preparation for tests of English speaking proficiency from the test-takers’ perspectives and investigating how the act of test preparation impacts identity.

In order to do this, this study has the following main research questions:

1. How do Korean test takers prepare for a test of English speaking proficiency under TOEFL–iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking and OPIc test preparation?
2. How do test takers construct their identities during test preparation?
3. How does test preparation impact test takers’ identities?

In order to address these main research questions, the following specific research questions are posed:

- What does each group preparing the TOEFL–iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking and OPIc test do for test preparation?
Are there differences in preparation according to test purpose (e.g., use in academic or workplace setting) and delivery mode (indirect or direct mode)?

Under the four conditions, what effects does each type of test preparation have on a test taker’s identity?

Are certain groups of test takers influenced negatively or positively by test preparation?

1.3 Significance of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Korean test takers prepare for English speaking tests, and how those practices influence the test-takers’ identities during the process. Therefore, this research provides the following original contributions to the field of language testing.

First, this research provides new knowledge about how test takers prepare for a targeted test from the test takers’ perspectives. It is based on the voices of test takers, meaning it presents the narratives of real test takers. Unlike previous research, which has been concerned primarily with teachers’ views, this study provides emergent aspects of test preparation from test takers’ perspectives. Second, this study provides new insights about cram schools. Access to cram schools has been a challenge in previous attempts at fieldwork. For this reason, there is little known about cram schools. However, this study compares three test preparation classes related to three high-stakes English tests. There is no previous literature that documents test preparation in cram schools. Finally, this study reveals the relationships between test preparation and test taker identity. In the field of language testing, this is the first attempt to identify how a test taker is influenced by test preparation using theories of identity.

1.4 Structure of the study

The remaining five chapters of this study are organized as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to high-stakes tests, test preparation and identity that is specifically linked to the proposed aim and research questions of the study. Chapter 3
discusses the methodology used in this thesis and describes detailed information related to the methods used to collect and analyse the data as well as ethical issues related to this research. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data and discusses test preparation practices related to the first research question of this study. This chapter identifies test preparation contexts and describes what test takers do in those contexts, providing the context for further investigation in the following chapter which investigates how the context and its features impact identity. Chapter 5 identifies relationships between test preparation and test taker identities, and describes how test takers construct their identities in the given test preparation contexts in order to answer the research questions of this study. In particular, this chapter provides stories of individual test takers in three emergent phases of test preparation, discussing how test preparation influences test takers’ identities. Finally, Chapter 6 provides conclusions, implications and recommendations for further study.
Chapter 2    Literature review

This chapter reviews the literature related to high-stakes tests, test preparation and identity that is specifically linked to the proposed aim and specific research questions of the study. The review then narrows down the definition of identity construction to include identity in life-defining choices, English-mediated identity in practices, and self-conflicts over time.

This chapter is organized into three main sections. First, the uses of high-stakes tests are reviewed in order to establish the conceptual framework for this study. Second, test preparation will be reviewed critically in relation to this conceptual framework, outlining key test preparation research on courses and materials, and test takers in test preparation. Finally, the concept of identity is explained, narrowing down the proposed key definitions to be used in the study with regard to the conceptual framework.

2.1 High-stakes tests

Tests are categorized into high-stakes and low-stakes, defined by the extent of impact the test has on the individual and the society. According to Fulcher (2010), high-stakes tests are defined as follows:

When they are used to certify an ability to perform at a specified level, or to compare and contrast the performance of schools, educational districts, or even countries. We refer to such tests as being high-stakes. Failure for individual learners may result in the termination of their studies. Or they may not be able to access certain occupations. (p. 3)

In particular, a high-stakes language test has a powerful impact on the individual’s life if a test taker fails to pass or to achieve the required scores. Test takers would not be able to sustain their studies and access employment and educational opportunities. On the other hand, achieving a good score on tests means that an individual may be able to
attend a high-ranking university or to get a well-paid job. In addition, high-stakes language tests are not just neutral, but are used within a social context (McNamara & Shohamy, 2008). McNamara and Roever (2006) state that “social values and attitudes fundamentally determine the use of tests” (p. 3). Within high-stakes situations such as immigration or citizenship, language tests are also used to determine individuals’ access to or membership within society, limiting human rights as they affect social opportunities (McNamara & Roever, 2006; McNamara & Shohamy, 2008).

Therefore, high stakes tests can negatively influence test preparation (Spolsky, 1997). High-stakes tests tend to encourage attempts to raise scores and this pressure leads learners to engage in specific test preparation practices (Mehrens & Kaminsky, 1989). According to Spolsky (1997, p. 243), the word, “cram”, appeared for the first time in the English dictionary in 1815, giving examples of memorizing items and answers on a test. In addition, in the 19th century there already existed “crammers” to teach to a test and the “crammist” who engaged in this distorted test preparation (Spolsky, 1997, p. 243). Now, cram schools prepare students for high-stakes tests (Zeng, 1999). For example, in South Korea, many elementary and secondary school students take the TOEFL in order to get admission for higher schools. They search for a well-known cram school in order to raise a score. However, cheating on the test by instructors or cram schools, in order to leak questions on the actual test, has been problematic in many societies (The Korea Times, 2013). The questions are also used for instructor-made materials, which play an important role in test preparation. Students are required to memorize the questions and sample answers in the materials, and overemphasize test-taking skills. In addition, Shohamy (2001, p. 15) argued that the use of tests has a negative impact on test takers as the test results produce “winners and losers, successes and failures, rejections and acceptances”. McNamara and Roever (2006) suggested that the experiences of successes and failures in test preparation create a test taker’s sense of self.

Therefore, in this work, I propose a conceptual framework to generate new theoretical insights into high-stakes test preparation for a test of English speaking proficiency from a test takers’ perspective, as shown in Figure 2.1. This original framework explains the interrelationships between high-stakes test, test preparation, and test takers’ identities. The term, ‘a test taker’, implies a particular role, in the same way that ‘a student’ or ‘a teacher’ implies a particular role in a class. When a person decides to prepare for a high-stakes test, he or she tries to find effective ways to increase their
score. At the same time, the person becomes a test taker within a high-stakes test preparation context. This differs from learning something as a learner (Xie & Andrew, 2013). Within the high-stakes context, the test taker is under pressure to achieve a high score rather than engaging in learning simply for the joy of it. This pressure affects their test-preparation practice method. In addition, the test taker is constructed by the test preparation. Therefore, in the study, test preparation refers not only to activities but also a context in which test-takers are being and becoming a kind of person as they experience test preparation.

![Conceptual framework for a study of impact of English speaking test preparation on Korean test takers’ identities](image)

**Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework for a study of impact of English speaking test preparation on Korean test takers’ identities**

### 2.2 Test preparation

Lumley and Stoneman (2000, p.52) stated that “it is true that when tests do exist, they are usually accompanied by test preparation of some sort”. Generally, test preparation has various meanings. According to Perlman (2003, p. 3), “Test preparation includes teaching general strategies, teaching content from the domain being tested, and practicing with items in various formats”. Haladya and Downing (2004, p.20) take a
broader view. They describe test preparation as “giving advice to parents, instructing students based on the curriculum represented by the test, providing examples of different test item formats, motivating students to do their best, and teaching testwiseness”. In essence, test preparation is defined as “the utilization of an aid or tool by a test taker to acquire information and techniques for the purpose of attaining the highest score possible on a test” (Stockwell, Schaeffer & Lowenstein, 1991, p. 3 cited in Scholes & Lain, 1997, p. 3).

Research on test preparation has been divided into two main issues, “intervention” and “outcomes” (Dimova, 2005, p. 14). Intervention includes types of preparation, and outcomes refer to the effects of test preparation on test scores and test validity. Anastasi (1981) described three types of test preparation. The first is “short orientation and practice sessions” (p. 1087), which include familiarity with the structure of the test and common test items as well as practice using former tests or those parallel in structure to commercial test preparation materials. The second is “coaching programs that include intensive, concentrated drills or cramming on sample test questions” (p. 1089). Coaching focuses on test-specific strategies in order to acquire the highest score possible on a test rather than content domains that are tested. The third is instruction in broad cognitive skills as they pertain to broad skill development.

In addition, test preparation has been discussed within washback studies (Green, 2007; Lumley & Stoneman, 2000; Zhan & Wan, 2014). The term washback can be defined as the effect of a test on teaching and learning, such as how a test affects instruction, the curriculum and materials used in a classroom, or test preparation by a student (Green, 2007). The concept of washback also refers to the effect of a test on participants involved in the test preparation process, such as test takers, teachers, or material/program developers (Green, 2007). Therefore, research on test preparation has focused on how teachers prepare their students for tests within the context of the classroom, what kinds of materials are used, and how teachers and their students perceive test preparation (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Andrews, Fullilove & Wong, 2002; Cheng, 1997; Green, 2007; Smith, 1991; Wall & Horak, 2011).

In the literature, test preparation varies from practices by a test taker to instruction by a teacher depending on the purpose, duration and method of test preparation. As a way of organizing types of test preparation, it is suggested that one is for familiarity with items, and the other is to increase the score by focusing on test-taking skills rather
than improving a test taker’s competence (Fulcher, 2010, p. 288). In addition, types of test preparation in the literature can be categorized into test preparation courses and materials, which were discussed earlier in terms of washback studies as how teachers teach their students for test preparation within the context of the classroom, and what materials are used in test preparation courses. An expanded discussion is noted below.

### 2.2.1 Test preparation courses

There are a considerable number of washback studies on test preparation courses in language testing. Types of test preparation courses include intervention in regular classrooms and coaching programs. Typically washback studies have sought to find out if tests influence teaching and learning in classrooms. These studies use the ‘washback hypotheses’ (Alderson & Wall, 1993) as their starting point, and focus on how the test influences curriculum, materials, teaching methods and learning. The main concern is how teachers teach their students for test preparation and how the teachers perceive their teaching for test preparation (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Andrews, Fullilove & Wong, 2002; Cheng, 1997; Smith, 1991; Wall & Horak, 2011).

For example, Alderson and Wall (1993, p. 127) conclude from their Sri Lanka study that “the examination has had virtually no impact on the way that teachers teach English”. They suggest that this result may be the result of the fact that the teachers might not know what test preparation is adequate for their students. This study shows that “the exam itself does not and cannot determine how teachers teach” (p. 127). Cheng (1997) investigated the impact of the revised Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in Hong Kong English high schools. The results showed that the exam did not change the teaching method itself, even though teachers employed use of discussions and role plays through the test. Likewise, Andrews et al. (2002) studied the impact of a newly designed oral test for Hong Kong secondary schools regarding students’ spoken English performance. The findings demonstrated that the exam partially improved students’ performance but made students overemphasize specific skills such as memorization and familiarization with test-format. However, they concluded that the washback is indirect and unpredictable because the test does not influence teaching and learning directly. Even though Wall and Horak (2011) found that
there were changes such as more speaking activities and practices since the new TOEFL test was launched (e.g., TOEFL-iBT speaking classes in Eastern and Central Europe), these changes varied between teachers. As Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996, p. 296) argued, “the existence of a test by itself does not guarantee washback, either positive or negative”. Rather it depends on types of test preparation such as test preparation materials and instruction by teachers (Andrews et al., 2002). Therefore, there is a need for further investigation of the impact of test preparation carried out in different types of test preparation. Even though test-makers are trying to build a valid and reliable test, if the test preparation in learning contexts remains unchanged and continues as rote learning and memorization, it would be impossible to expect positive washback in learning contexts.

However, the washback research of test preparation courses seems to have some limitations. First, this work tends to limit test preparation to classroom activities or test taking skills and strategies which are taught in classroom settings rather than to explore test preparation as a context where test takers actually prepare for a test. In this sense, most washback studies are based on Alderson and Wall’s (1993) 15 washback hypotheses regarding the impact of tests on teaching. The studies have focused on the teachers’ teaching to the tests and the perceptions of the test and the preparation. In addition, their context is limited to the classroom, as their main concern is that “a test will influence teaching” (Alderson & Wall, 1993, p. 120). They have addressed how high-stakes tests influence the teachers’ teaching and their attitude towards teaching and tests. Even Wall and Horak’s (2006, 2008, 2011) longitudinal studies in Central and Eastern Europe, the most extensive test impact research to date, were also conducted in classroom settings, in particular, less high-stakes test preparation contexts with similar research aims. The prevailing research seems to have a simplistic view of a context where test preparation takes place. They tend to focus on test preparation activities and teaching in classroom settings. However, depending on the context where test preparation takes place, such as in public schools, language schools or test preparation centers including cram schools, high-stakes contexts could be defined by the extent of impact the test has on the individual and the institution.

It might also be relevant to point out that the teaching methods in these institutions could differ. For example, coaching programs include more high-stakes contexts. Most studies of coaching programs have discussed effects of coaching in the area of general aptitude testing such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the Graduate Record
Examinations (GRE) (Dimova, 2005; Powers, 1993; Scholes & Lain, 1997; Zuman, 1988). Powers (1993) reviewed studies of coaching for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and discussed their findings. These studies compared the score gains of coached students and uncoached students, and reported that there were no significant differences in score gains between the two groups (Smyth, 1990; Whitla, 1988; Zuman, 1988 cited in Powers, 1993). The studies view the effects of coaching or cramming as a negative impact of test preparation as Fulcher (2010) mentions:

We can therefore say that test preparation, other than for familiarisation, is not only a waste of time, but actively detrimental to learners and the educational system. I doubt however, that the argument and evidence will have a significant impact upon the test preparation industry, which will always seek to find the quick, easy, ways to improve scores even if there is no significant change in competence. (p. 292)

However, compared to the test preparation studies in the classrooms there has been little research in cram schools (Matoush & Danling, 2012). The most extensive research about cram schools was Zeng’s (1999) comparative case study of cram schools preparing students for university entrance exams in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. The study analyzed cram schools for the entrance exams in the three countries into features of classroom and students’ attendance rates, what was taught, and how the teaching was organized. The findings revealed that there was a “craze” for cram schools, and students tended to lose learner autonomy because test preparation in cram schools became dominant in their learning.

Second, washback studies seem not to make explicit that teaching may impact learning. Even though the relevant studies concluded that washback is indirect and unpredictable because the test does not influence teaching and learning directly, the indirect teaching effects are not made explicit, and they have not been investigated. If a test could cause a chain reaction in testing-relevant contexts, then high-stakes tests might indirectly influence teaching and teaching methods; thus, learners in the classroom could be influenced by the teaching.

Last, washback studies of test preparation courses seem to regard the main participant of test preparation not as test takers, but teachers. Studies regarding test takers in language testing discuss test takers’ reactions and perceptions under two headings: construct validity and washback. For construct validity, there are studies of
test takers’ perceptions of tests, test format or tasks. Researchers have suggested that test takers’ perceptions of tests are necessary as a crucial source of evidence for construct validity in test development and revision (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Brown, 1993; Messick, 1989; Zeidner, 1990). However, in the area of washback, teachers’ perceptions of test preparation have been relatively widely studied compared to test takers (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Bailey, 1999). Even though there are large groups of test takers who prepare for a high-stakes test, we do not know what actually happens in their test preparation. However, the test preparation experience could be critical in impacting an individual’s life. Until now, we have not known why and how learners prepare to take tests, nor how they construct their identities as test takers, or are constructed by the test preparation. Therefore, it is important to allow students’ voices to be heard.

2.2.2 Test preparation materials

A type of test preparation is also presented in test preparation materials which include “exam-related textbooks and past papers” (Spratt, 2005, p. 10). Studies of test preparation materials discuss the use of materials in test preparation courses, and teachers and test takers’ perceptions of materials (Andrews et al., 2002; Cheng, 1997; Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Lumley & Stoneman, 2000; Wall & Horak, 2006, 2008, 2011). Hamp-Lyons (1998) analyzed the content of five TOEFL preparation textbooks and found that the textbooks heavily rely on test-taking skills and strategies. It was suggested that test preparation textbooks should be produced with ethical appropriateness. Lumley and Stoneman (2000) studied the reactions of teachers and students to a learning package used as preparation material for a newly designed test for Hong Kong universities. The learning package included speaking and writing practice. It was intended not just for test preparation, but also for promoting language learning and language use for both self-study by students and use in the classrooms by teachers. It was found that students saw the materials only as a way to become familiar with the test-format. Students did not consider pedagogical concerns regarding the use of textbooks. On the other hand, it was found that teachers positively viewed the materials as a teaching package. In addition, regarding the use of textbooks, Wall’s (1999, 2005
cited in Wall & Horak, 2011) studies found that teachers in Sri Lanka tended to use test preparation text books rather than make their own materials. This finding is consistent with Wall and Horak (2006, 2008, 2011)’s studies about the impact of TOEFL on materials in Central and Eastern Europe. Teachers heavily relied on the use of the course books in classes. These studies reveal that teachers in classroom settings trust test preparation course books and textbooks rather than their own materials. This might also mean that the content of the materials is problematic. However, the limitation of this research is it has mainly focused on materials that were designed to be used in classroom settings. For this reason, it is important to explore what types of test preparation materials are used in other setting such as cram schools, if the materials play an important role in these settings, and how test takers use them in the test preparation.

2.2.3 Test takers in test preparation

Recently, in the field of washback research, there has been a change to perceiving test takers as key participants involved in the test preparation process (Cheng, Andrews & Yu, 2011; Green, 2007; Huhta, Kalaja & Pitkanen-Huhta, 2006; Weir, 2005; Xie & Andrews, 2013; Zhan & Wan, 2014). For example, Weir (2005) indicated characteristics of test takers as a key focal point for test validation, providing various methods for identifying individual test takers’ views, strategies, skills and experiences of test performance. Green (2007) studied relationships between test design characteristics of washback direction, participant characteristics and values of washback variability, and participants’ perceptions of the test of washback intensity, using quantitative and qualitative methods. The study compared IELTS preparation courses with university language courses, exploring teachers and students’ perception of test use, test results and preparation. The findings revealed that test results depended on students’ goals and beliefs about tests rather than test preparation courses and content.

In addition, Cheng et al. (2011), and Xie and Andrews (2013) investigated the impact of test on test takers’ test preparation: The purpose of the Cheng et al. study (2011) was to understand students’ and parents’ views on school-based assessment (SBA) in relation to its impact on learning of English in Hong Kong secondary schools, and to explore the relationship between the perceptions of these two stakeholders. The
study used two questionnaires for 389 students and 315 parents in the Hong Kong educational context. The findings revealed that test impact on students depended on the students’ perceptions of their competence. Students who viewed themselves as a competent English learner tended to be more actively involved in test preparation compared with those who viewed themselves as incompetent English learners. The findings were consistent with Xie and Andrews’ (2013) study, which investigated test takers’ perceptions of the CET 4 test design. They used two questionnaires for over 800 university students in Guangzhou, China. The findings revealed that students with higher self-efficacy to English skills tended to engage in test preparation as compared to those with lower self-efficacy to the relevant skills. However, the limitation of both of these studies lies in their quantitative method—students’ voices were not allowed to be fully heard.

In contrast, Zhan and Wan (2014) investigated test takers’ sense of self in test preparation, using qualitative methods. The study explored the CET 4’s test impact on learning practices over time as it related to test takers’ motivation. The qualitative methodology adopted to investigate these issues included 96 diary entries and 20 post-diary interviews with two participants in China. Using inductive analysis, the data was interpreted into self-theory. The findings revealed that the test influenced test preparation practices over time and that test takers developed self-concepts as they proceeded in their test preparation. What these three studies have in common is that they attempted to add new insights into existing washback studies by focusing on test takers’ beliefs and self-views in test preparation.

Compared to the relevant research in language testing, in the field of education, qualitative research about test preparation by test takers has been more widely explored in areas such as test takers’ self-study processes, strategies or perceptions of test preparation (Huhta, Kalaja & Pitkanen-Huhta, 2006; Kitsantas, 2002; Vanetten, Freebern & Pressley, 1997). These studies show how crucial the role is that test takers play in test preparation, and how much test takers can become agents in the preparation. Kitsantas (2002) studied self-regulatory processes on test preparation and performance from a sociocognitive perspective using a structured interview to investigate 62 college students in a psychology class. The findings show that high test scorers tended to be more autonomous and self-disciplined when compared to low test scorers. This study is important because it attempts to understand the experiences of test takers in test preparation. Likewise, Vanetten et al. (1997) studied 142 college students’ test
preparation process from a self-regulation perspective. This study used an unstructured interview compared to Kitsantas (2002)’s structured interview. These studies reveal that students are capable of reflecting on their role in the test preparation process. The students believed that effective test preparation needs motivation for studying, efficient strategies for the preparation, and support of external factors (e.g., instructors, previous exam experiences, social environment, physical environment and study contents). These two studies are helpful for understanding how test takers as main agents prepare for a test. However, they do not mention how or where the students acquired and learned the test preparation practice and how the practices influenced their identities. In addition, the context of these studies was academic areas in universities and it would be useful to know how these results apply in other high-stakes test preparation contexts.

Therefore, this study investigates what types of test preparation test takers are doing in the process of preparation and how preparation influences test takers’ identities in the context of high-stakes test preparation.

2.3 Identity

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Korean test takers prepare for English speaking tests, and how test preparation influences the test takers’ identities during test preparation. This research provides several important contributions to the field. First, there is no research about test takers’ identity in test preparation. The number of Korean test takers preparing for high-stakes tests is increasing. However we do not know how they are preparing, or how this preparation impacts their identities. Second, this research is based on the voices of test-takers—it tells the stories of real test takers. In the field of language testing, test takers have been traditionally viewed from psychometric perspectives, which assume that test takers’ perceptual, cognitive, and affective characteristics may affect test performance (Shohamy, 2001). However, Shohamy (2001, p. 385) argues that these characteristics have been defined not by test-takers but by testing professionals. By considering test takers’ voices, we can learn how a person becomes a test taker through doing practice, constructing identity, and being influenced by test preparation.
Various definitions of identity are found in social sciences such as psychology, social psychology, sociology, education and SLA studies. These notions of identity depend on the understanding of the self. There are generally two explanations of the self, one being the autonomous self, and the other being the self reflecting society (Hitlin, 2003). The former is about personal identity and focuses on individual autonomy, and the latter is about social identity and focuses on social roles and groups (Hitlin, 2003). According to Hewitt (1997, cited in Hitlin, 2003, p. 118), personal identity is:

a sense of self built up over time as the person embarks on and pursues projects or goals that are not thought of as those of a community, but as the property of the person. Personal identity thus emphasizes a sense of individual autonomy rather than of communal involvement.

According to Dewey (1888, p. 191), personal identity refers to individuals’ values related to society, which “holds that the spirit of personality indwells in every individual and that the choice to develop it must proceed from that individual”. As the core of identity, personal identity links with value as a unique self, these links are discussed in self-concept theory such as self-efficacy, self-discrepancies, self-esteem, self-belief and motivation (Côté, 2009). For example, self-efficacy refers to self-view of competence regarding relevant skills, tasks and activities (Eccles, 2009). Self-discrepancies refer to conflicts between selves, such as actual self and ideal self or ought self (Higgins, 1987).

What they have in common regarding defining personal identity is that values are focal features of understanding personal identity. Individuals’ values are very personal and socially constructed (Hitlin, 2003). Values allow us to understand personal identity within a social structure. Furthermore, values have been explored to understand the essence of self and links between individuals and society (Dewey, 1939; Kluckhohn, 1951; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992, cited in Hitlin, 2003). According to Schwartz (1994, p.21 cited in Hitlin, 2003, p. 119), values are “desirable transsituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity”. They are motivational and enduring goals. In addition, values have five features (Hitlin, 2003, p. 119): They are "(1) concepts or beliefs, (2) they are desirable end states or behaviours, (3) they transcend specific situations, (4) they guide selection or evaluation of behaviour and events, and (5) are ordered by relative importance”. That is, values refer to continuous beliefs as the basis for goals. Depending on the importance
of values, individuals’ choices or selections when doing something can be affected. In addition, in accordance with what kinds of values individuals have in their life, their life practices can be influenced. According to Gecas (2000, p. 96 cited in Hitlin, 2003, p. 122), when “individuals conceive of themselves in terms of the values they hold”, their identities reflect their values. Therefore, personal values construct individual identity.

In the field of language learning, this notion of identity has been discussed in motivation theories (Dornyei, 1998). Motivation refers to “the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained” (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002 cited in Barker, 2004, p. 75). According to Gardner (1985, p. 10), “Motivation in the present context refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language” (cited in Barker, 2004, p. 75). Related to second language learning, Barker (2004, p. 72) argued that “the motivation to learn a language is closely tied to a person’s sense of self identity.” Early identity studies in SLA were focused on Gardner and Lambert (1972)’s motivation theory (Ricento, 2005). This theory is divided into two types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. Early research tried to investigate which kind of motivation influences language learners’ learning and language proficiency. However, this distinction was questioned by some researchers, and the theory was modified (Au, 1988; Graham, 1984 cited in Ricento, 2005). For example, Graham (1984) argued that integrative assimilation could be divided into integrative and assimilative motivation.

Some research has been conducted to explore the impact of testing on students’ motivation for learning (Harlen & Crick, 2003). Harlen and Crick (2003) reviewed 19 studies regarding students’ motivation for learning and testing. The review shows high-stakes tests have a negative impact on motivation for learning in terms of focusing on raising scores and narrowing down teaching and learning in classroom. In their study, motivation was defined as “intrinsic and extrinsic motivation” (Harlen & Crick, 2003, p.169). However, Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) suggested that this dichotomy is problematic because motivation is more complex. For these reasons, Dornyei (2005) drew from the psychological theories of selves including possible selves (Markus & Nurius 1986) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins 1987), and developed the ‘L2 Motivational Self System’. It refers to “the representation of the attributes that someone would ideally like to possess (i.e. a representation of someone else’s sense of duty, obligations or responsibilities)” (cited in Ushioda & Dornyei, 2009, p. 3). If someone would like to possess proficiency in the target language, it encourages the learner to
learn the language for becoming one’s ideal or “ought-to” self. The above studies assume that learners’ identities represent their self-concept, self-belief and motivation for language learning. However, they examine motivational, affective, and cognitive processes to understand learners’ learning, which focuses on the individual’s personality related to motivation without considering the individual from socio-cultural perspectives.

Regarding test-takers, motivation has been investigated as personal and affective characteristics of test-takers. In particular, significant amounts of motivation research have been undertaken in relation to test anxiety. Test anxiety refers to “an unpleasant feeling or emotional state that has physiological and behavioural concomitants, and that is experienced in formal testing or other evaluative situations” (Dusek, 1980, p. 88). It is a type of anxiety caused by the fear of failure in a testing situation (Horwitz & Young, 1991). Test anxiety relates to test-takers’ doubts about their abilities and their insecurities in test-taking situations (Dusek, 1980). It shows the affective factors that influence their learning and test performance (Harlen & Crick, 2003; In’nami, 2006). In particular, Haladyna and Downing (2004) identified motivation and test anxiety as sources of construct-irrelevant variance to threat validity. Hill and Wigfield (1984, p. 106) define test anxiety as: “… one of the most important aspects of negative motivation and has direct debilitating effects on school performance.” In the field of language learning, there is a great deal of literature regarding language anxiety. Within this body of work, speaking anxiety relates to oral communication with people (Horwits, Horwits & Cope, 1986). It is an anxiety that is related to whether people understand a speaker, or if the speaker understands the people’s responses. However, test anxiety research examines motivational, affective, and cognitive processes to understand learners’ learning, which focuses on the individual’s personality related to motivation without considering the individual from socio-cultural perspectives. As compared to identity and motivation research in SLA, motivation research in testing is not related to identity research.

The other explanation of the self is about social identity, which is about the relationship between an individual and the social world. In the fields of social psychology and sociology, there are a number of theories of identity: identity theory, social identity theory, and stigma theory. Each theory deals with links between individuals and society based on the self with many social identities. Generally, identity theory focuses on individual roles, which consist of two perspectives. According to
Stryker and Burke (2000, p. 285), the first is to focus on “how social structures affect the structure of self and how structure of the self influences social behaviour”, and the other is to focus on “the internal dynamics of self-processes as these affect social behaviour. These theories accept Mead’s self notion, which is a socially constructed self (Stryker & Burke, 2000). It assumes that the self is multifaceted depending on social roles, and identities are expected roles. On the other hand, social identity focuses on social categories. Within this view, identity is defined as “commonalities among people within a group and differences between people in different groups” (Hitlin, 2003, p. 120). Each has memberships according to a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, gender, status), and each membership is constructed in the individuals’ beliefs as a social identity. These two theories, identity theory and social identity theory, deal with the relationship between society and self. The self is socially constructed, and the identities are internalized in social roles and groups (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). However these two theories have limitations in that they do not deeply discuss personal identity as an autonomous self with a core and unique identity (Hitlin, 2003, p. 120). Rather it focuses on intergroup relations and the group, and identity theory focuses on the relation with individual roles and how individuals perceive themselves.

However, research on social identity influenced early identity research in the field of SLA and led to an understanding of individual identity as membership of a social group which contrasted with previous motivation studies that only focused on personal identity. For example, recent approaches to identity in SLA research have used socio-cultural approaches. These studies tend to reflect an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating research from social theory and other areas. Among them, Norton (2000) investigated how language learner identity affects learning motivation and SLA through qualitative research investigating five female immigrant learners in Canada. In particular, she criticized SLA theorists for not having integrated language learner identity into the language learning context. For motivation, her study suggested that the reason language learners struggle with speaking is not from their lack of motivation but from learning contexts. SLA researchers who are interested in the role of motivation in language acquisition have focused on individual differences such as individual personality, learning strategy and endeavour. However, Norton suggests that a learner’s social background is just as important as cognitive factors.

The other theory of social identity is stigma theory (Goffman, 1963): Stigma is defined as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (p.3). Stafford and Scott (1986, p. 80)
define stigma as "a characteristic of persons that is contrary to a norm of a social unit". Crocker, Major and Steele (1998, p. 505) mention that "stigmatized individuals possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context." People have negative stereotypes such as physically or mentally disabled people and minority groups (Crocker & Major, 1989). Research into stigma has discussed stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination against minority groups (Dinos, Stevens, Serfaty, Weich, & King, 2004; Link & Phelan, 2001; Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Riessman, 2000; Zola, 1993). However, as Link and Phelan (2001) suggested, definitions of stigma have been studied in various circumstances, and the study is multidisciplinary in psychology, sociology, anthropology, and so on. For example, Crocker and Major (1989) studied relationships between social stigma and self-esteem, and suggested that stigmatized groups tend to have low self-esteem. Oyserman and Swim (2001) propose that it is important to have an insiders’ view of stigmatized groups. In particular, Riessman (2000) suggested that Western stereotypes about Indian women are problematic and need to be reconsidered from an Asian perspective.

The above studies address the self as an autonomous identity or social identity. Therefore, the two perspectives of self allow us to understand integrated identity. From the perspective of multifaceted identities, Wenger (1998, pp. 145-146) explains the notion of identity as following:

The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual…it avoids a simplistic individual-social dichotomy without doing away with the distinction….Talking about identity in social terms is not denying individuality but viewing the very definition of individuality as something that is part of the practices of specific communities.

This integrative identity includes relationships between individuals and the world where individuals live (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). The concept of integrative identity has also been studied in identity formation, as noted below (Côté, 2009).

2.3.1 Identity formation

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Theories of identity formation have seen identity as having individual and social meaning in terms of the relationship between individual and society, which is the connection between a sense of self and the world where individuals live (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). In particular, Erikson’s (1959, 1963, 1968, 1975) views on identity have been recognized as the foundation of identity formation in the field of psychology. According to Erickson (1963, 1968), identity is “a developmental phenomenon, characterized by qualitative change as expressed in a series of stages, the order of which is invariant and as a balance between that which is taken to be self and that which is considered to be other” (Lavoie, 1994, p. 18).

From the developmental framework, Erikson (1963, 1968) proposed a life course model of identity formation, as shown in Table 2.1 (Keenan & Evans, 2009, p. 28). This model takes a stage approach, construction of self in each stage, as the developmental process of identity formation over a life course (Lavoie, 1994). A person grows and develops as he or she faces a series of crises through childhood to adulthood. The term ‘crisis’ means “a decisive or critical turning point which is followed by either greater health and maturity or by increasing weakness” (Munley, 1977, p. 262). As a child grows, he or she interacts with others and the society where the individual lives. This interaction with people and the environment leads to a series of crises or challenges that individuals must face over their life course. Depending on how an individual resolves a crisis in each stage, it negatively or positively influences the further development of “particular attitudes toward oneself, one’s world, and one’s relationship to one’s world” (Munley, 1977, p. 262). The unsuccessful or incomplete resolution of the crises at the previous stages will affect the achievement of the next stage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of development</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust vs. mistrust</td>
<td>Birth to 1 year</td>
<td>Developing a sense of trust in caregivers, the environment, and one’s self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy vs. shame</td>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>Developing a sense of one’s autonomy and doubt and independence from the caregiver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative vs. guilt</td>
<td>3 to 6 years</td>
<td>Developing a sense of mastery over aspects of one’s environment, coping with challenges, and assumption of increasing responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry vs. inferiority</td>
<td>6 years to adolescence</td>
<td>Mastering intellectual and social challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity vs. identity diffusion</td>
<td>Adolescence (12 to 20 years)</td>
<td>Developing a self-identity, that is, diffusion knowledge of what kind of a person one is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy vs. isolation</td>
<td>Young adulthood (20 to 40 years)</td>
<td>Developing stable and intimate relationships with another person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generativity vs. stagnation</td>
<td>Middle adulthood (40 to 60 years)</td>
<td>Creating something so that one can avoid feelings of stagnation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity vs. despair</td>
<td>Old age (60 years +)</td>
<td>Evaluating one’s life by looking back; developing a sense of integrity through this evaluative process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In specific terms, this model of identity formation includes trust versus mistrust (birth to 1 year), autonomy versus shame and doubt (1 to 3 years), initiative versus guilt (3 to 6 years), industry versus inferiority (6 to 11 years), identity versus identity diffusion (adolescence), intimacy versus isolation (young adulthood), generativity versus stagnation (middle adulthood), and ego integrity versus despair (old age). In the first stage, a child in infancy develops a sense of basic trust versus mistrust regarding their environment. The child who fails to develop a sense of trust gains a sense of mistrust. In the second stage, the child develops a sense of autonomy. However, the child who fails to develop a sense of autonomy gains a sense of shame and doubt. In the third stage, the child develops a sense of initiative, which means controlling its environment. However, if the child has hostility or lack of responsibility, it develops a sense of guilt. In the fourth stage, the child develops a sense of industry through
learning. However, if the child faces failures, it gains a sense of inferiority. In the fifth stage, the adolescent tries to find who it is, which is self-identity. If the adolescent fails to discover its own identity, and if parents or others determine its identity, the adolescent goes through identity diffusion.

In the sixth stage, the young adult develops a sense of intimacy with previous resolved crises such as developing a sense of trust, and social relationships with friends. However, the adult who cannot develop this intimacy becomes isolated. In the seventh stage, the adult develops a sense of generativity by creating something important in order to reveal one's self, such as having children, a career or creating art. If the adult fails to have achievements, it feels a sense of stagnation. In the last stage, the senior adult reflects and assesses his or her life. If the senior adult assesses his or her life as successful, he or she feels a sense of integrity. However, if he or she reflects upon his or her life as unsuccessful, he or she feels a sense of despair.

Furthermore, Erikson’s model of identity formation has been elaborated upon by Marcia’s identity status model (Marcia, 1966). From Erickson’s view, Marcia identified two central processes of identity formation, which are exploration and commitment: Exploration refers to individual consideration of various commitments in relevant identities. Commitment refers to “forming a strong investment in a specific set of goals, values, and beliefs that then provide a sense of direction to one’s personal future” (Waterman et al., 2013). Within the perspectives of exploration and commitment, Marcia (1966) suggested four identity statuses (Meeus, 2011, p. 75): First, it is “identity diffusion”, which refers to a state of not having made a commitment about a certain developmental task. In identity diffusion, individuals have a lack of interest in commitments of task. In addition, they may or may not have explored alternatives. Second, it is “foreclosure”, which refers to a state of having made a commitment without previous exploration of alternatives. In foreclosure, parents or other adults may involve individuals’ choices. Third, it is “moratorium”, which refers to a state of active exploration without significant commitment. Last, it is “identity achievement”, which refers to a state of finished active exploration and commitment.

Marcia’s identity status model has been used in the field of adolescent development from adolescence to adulthood, exploring their identity formation with developmental changes (Meeus, 2011). It shows that there are relationships between identity formation and motivated choice. Early research on identity formation focused on comparing the four identity statuses formation (Meeus, 2011). It was tested, using measurements to
determine whether identity development follows the four identity statuses such as from identity diffusion to identity achievement. It focused on how identity is changed, comparing each identity status.

Recent research on identity formation has been expanded into links between identity formation and well-being or psychosocial problems, using Marcia’s identity status model (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Waterman, 2007; Waterman et al., 2013). For example, Kroger and Marcia (2011) indicated psychological or emotional problems as being the focal points involved in identity formation process. Waterman (2007) investigated the relationships between identity status and three concepts of well-being: subjective, psychological, and feelings of personal expressiveness (eudemonic). The study used measures of the three conceptions of well-being for 217 college undergraduates. Its findings revealed that identity achievement status was positively correlated with all three concepts of well-being. The students who were on identity achievement status tended to view themselves on well-being status compared with those who were on identity diffusion status. What these studies have in common is that they attempted to identify negative or positive identity formation by focusing on students’ emotional or psychological problems including their goals, choices, beliefs and self-views during identity formation. However, the limitation of the studies lies in their quantitative method—students’ voices were not allowed to be fully heard.

In addition, these models of identity formation including Erikson’s life course and Marcia’s identity status, have some limitations (Keenan & Evans, 2009; Flum & Kaplan, 2012; Meeus, 2011). First, they are difficult to test empirically because the relevant concepts of identity formation are somewhat difficult and abstract to define and understand. Second, they do not clearly explain how developmental movement occurs, and how individuals move forward to the next stage.

Despite these limitations, these theories provide useful assumptions, including that the notion of identity may be an integrated developmental status between individuals and social, cultural and historical contexts. In particular, they allow us to understand an individual in learning contexts (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). Flum and Kaplan (2012) suggested that their understanding of identity formation may tell us the process about how students learn knowledge, skills and values from peers or teachers in the classroom, developing their identities within educational settings.
2.3.2 Identity formation within a learning context

Identity formation and learning are connected in that learning involves becoming a kind of person (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Learning is “not just the acquisition of memories, habits, and skills, but the formation of an identity” (Wenger 1998, p. 96). According to Wenger (1998, p. 96), identity refers to who we are by “the ways we participate and reify ourselves; our community membership; our learning trajectories (where we have been and where we are going); the ways we reconcile our various membership into one identity; the ways negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and of manifesting broader styles and discourses”. When a person becomes a member of a group it means that he or she now belongs to a community of practice, which are groups of people who learn and share knowledge, beliefs, values and skills in the communities (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger (1998) suggested communities of practice to explain identity in practice. According to Wenger (1998), a community of practice is defined as having the following three characteristics: First, it is about “mutual engagement”, which is about membership in a community of practice (p. 73). This membership is “not just a matter of social category, declaring allegiance, belonging to an organization, having a title or having personal relations with some people” (p. 74). Second, it is about “joint enterprise”, which is “defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it. It is their negotiated response to their situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control” (p. 77). Third, it is a “shared repertoire”, which includes “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice” (p. 83). That is, in daily life we are involved, interact, share with each other, and come to have a membership in communities. The community refers to the shared practice, which is going through the learning process. Indeed, learning is central to a community of practice because “learning is the engine of practice, and practice is the history of that learning” according to Wenger (1998, p. 96). Figure 2.2 shows Wenger’s components of “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5).
In particular, newcomers learn the practice in communities and this participation is called “legitimate peripheral participation (LPP)” by Lave and Wenger (Wenger, 1998, p. 100). The more the newcomers participate in the community, the more their access to the practice increases. That is, they are moving from peripheral toward central participation in the community of practice. It allows the new comers to become full members of a community of practice. In addition, in the process of this participation, identity is constructed. As Wenger (1998) suggests, there is a relationship between identity and practice:

Developing a practice requires the formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants. As a consequence, practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context. This negotiation may be silent; participants may not necessarily talk directly about that issue. (p. 149)

However, Haneda (2006) argued that there were some limitations to this theory. First, the notion of community does not include the struggles and challenges that community members experience by doing practice. In addition, it limits community members to old members and new members rather than identifying different types of participants in a community of practice. Second, the concept of participation could be
problematic in the context of classroom practices because it does not critically examine what types of practices are learned. Rather, all types of learning are simply regarded as participation. Despite these limitations, this theory provides useful assumptions such as that there may be a relationship between identity and test preparation. A test taker belongs to test preparation communities of practice through participating in test preparation courses, using the material and sharing the test preparation information with others. It means that a test-taker’s preparation for a test does not just study the required knowledge and skills from the test, but constructs his or her identity in a process of preparation depending on conditions of test preparation and test-taker characteristics.

In this study, identity formation refers to a process of becoming a person in the context where a person lives. In addition, a test taker’s identity may be a developmental phenomenon, including exploration and commitment to a specific set of goals, values, beliefs and choices regarding one’s personal future. A test taker’s preparation for a test does not just involve acquiring the required knowledge and skills for the test, but also results in forming an identity, as the test taker faces a series of challenges during the process of preparation. As one prepares for a test, he or she interacts with others and the surrounding environment, which leads to a series of crises of challenges. The term, ‘test preparation’, therefore, refers not only to activities but also to a context in which test-takers are becoming a type of person as they experience test preparation. From this perspective, this study will discuss and present relevant aspects of a test taker’s identity construction, within the context of test preparation and with regard to the conceptual framework as shown in Figure 2.1.

2.3.3 A test taker in test preparation

A test taker could be defined as a person who prepares for a test in a test preparation context. Studies regarding test takers in language testing discuss test takers’ reactions and perceptions in two areas, which are construct validity and washback. For construct validity, there are studies of test takers’ perceptions of tests, test format or tasks. Researchers have suggested that test takers’ perceptions of tests are necessary as a crucial source of evidence for construct validity in test development and revision (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Brown, 1993; Messick, 1989; Zeidner, 1990). The other
research is related to washback. However, as explained earlier, teachers’ perceptions of test preparation have been relatively widely studied compared to test takers (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Bailey, 1999). In addition, studies of test takers assume that test-takers’ perceptual, cognitive, and affective characteristics may affect test performance. Furthermore, test preparation in the literature has been limited to test taking skills, practices or instruction to be familiar with test items or to increase scores, rather than understanding as a context where test takers construct their identities. There is no idea about links between identity and test preparation such as why or how a person selects test preparation as a life defining choice, how the person achieves or resists knowledge, skills, and shared thoughts from his test taker community, how the person struggles with the preparation, and how he constructs his test taker identity in a process of test preparation. Identity formation is the processes that are involved as a person struggles with multiple identities between their personal construction and their social construction of identities (Tsui, 2007). Becoming a test taker means a process of exploration and commitment to a specific set of goals, values, beliefs and choices regarding one’s personal future. As the test taker interacts with others and the surrounding environment, he or she faces a series of challenges during the process of preparation, forming an identity. From this perspective, this section will discuss and present relevant aspects of a test taker’s identity construction: (1) identity in life-defining choice, (2) identity in speaking activities, and (3) identity over time.

- **Identity in life defining choice**

This section will explain the first concept of identity in life-defining choices. This is highly relevant to test-taker identity construction because it deals with test takers’ values and motivation regarding test preparation selection. As explained in Section 2.3.1, identity formation is the process, including exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1966). For example, adolescents or young adults make an educational or vocational decision, exploring their possibilities in terms of goals, values and beliefs, and are then committed to the choice, developing their identities (Eccles, 2009; Marcia, 1966). This decision shows relationships between identity formation and motivated choice. In this sense, this section introduces identity in life-defining choice (Eccles, 2009).

According to Eccles (2009, p. 79), two sets of identity are involved in a life-defining choice. One includes self-views concerning relevant skills, tasks or activities in order to achieve a goal. The other one includes self-views related to a goal, such as what
one would like to be. Based on their identity sets, individuals anticipate success to accompany their values and underlying choices that construct their identities, including relevant skills, tasks and activities. In the process of life-defining choice, values also affect our judgements and perceptions, and guide us to most-desirable decisions (Hitlin, 2003). Values construct individual identity, as explained in Section 2.3.

In addition, influences on values include biology, race, ethnicity, gender and social structure (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004). Among them, social structure is about social class, occupation and education (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004). Social class influences formation of parental value and affects children’s values. Occupation also involves values. Depending on supervision, routinization and complexity of work, each job value is different (Kohn & Schooler, 1983). For example, people whose work involves a low level of supervision and routine value autonomy and creativity, whereas people whose work involves a high level of supervision and routine value conformity (Kohn & Schooler, 1983). Educational factors also construct individuals’ values systems. Learning and knowing is not neutral but mediated through social context. Therefore, individual values include personal and social meanings.

Based on one’s value system, individuals construct their identities, including personal identity, as an autonomous self and collective/social identity as a communal self over a life time (Eccles, 2009, p. 80):

(a) the social and psychological experiences individuals have as they are growing up and moving through adulthood; (b) their own agency in both interpreting and creating social roles and experiences that serve to reinforcement, redefine, or undermine particular personal and social identities; and (c) the co-construction of the content, meaning, and salience of various personal and social identities by the individuals themselves in conjunction with the people with whom they interact each day and over time.

For example, high-stakes test results are used for a life-defining choice such as university entrance or employment. A test taker’s decision about starting test preparation acts as a motivated choice in their lives, relating to questions about identity such as what do I want to achieve from this test preparation? What would I like to be? What am I? Who am I? What is my goal in my life? According to expectations, test takers choose an English-speaking test preparation and certain types of test preparation
practices such as cram schools, test preparation programmes, or group study. While they are involved in situations of test preparation practices, they learn, shape, adopt and change the practices, knowledge and values in their situations, reflecting themselves related to their goals and required skills. In that test preparation is a goal-oriented process of reflecting and evaluating themselves in test preparation activities, they construct themselves and are constructed by the goal-oriented activities. In the literature, test preparation includes practices by a test taker or instruction by a teacher. There is no idea about links between identity and test preparation such as why or how a person selects test preparation as a life defining choice. However, a test taker's decision about starting test preparation includes their personal and social meanings that form their identity in terms of goals, values and beliefs. Test preparation may not be only individual choice, but also include commitment as identity formation. Therefore, becoming a test-taker means that a person makes a decision about starting test preparation based on a goal, selects a type of test preparation, and is then committed to the choice.

- **Identity in speaking activities**

  English-mediated identity is highly relevant to test-taker identity in speaking practice because it shows how test-taker identity is constructed in a context of English-speaking practice as test preparation starts. After a test taker selects a certain method of test preparation, they start to prepare for a test in a selected study mode. This aspect of identity relates to links between speaking activities for test preparation and a test taker’s identity. In order to understand English-mediated identity in language learning, this section introduces language learner identity including Lazaraton and Davis’ (2008) language proficiency identity, Block’s (2009) English-mediated identity, and Tsui’s (2007) identity in EFL contexts.

  Language learner identity has been linked to motivation theory insofar as learners’ identity represents their self-concept, self-belief and motivation for language learning. Most motivation studies in SLA explained that learners who did not succeed in target language learning did not have the motivation to learn the language. Their authors questioned whether a learner was motivated or not to learn. However, recent approaches to motivation in SLA have been studied into broader contexts such as culture and learning contexts. For example, Norton (2000) investigated how language learner identity affects learning motivation and SLA through qualitative research investigating
five female immigrant learners in Canada. In particular, she criticized SLA theorists for not having integrated language learner identity into the language learning context. She suggested that the reason language learners have difficulty with speaking is not from their lack of motivation but from learning contexts. Norton (2000)’s research shows that we need to understand a learner from a more sensitive context, rather than using a limited perspective such as being motivated or not being motivated.

For example, language proficiency identity refers to how test takers position themselves as competent or incompetent regarding speaking tests (Lazaraton & Davis, 2008). A number of studies regarding links between language and identity argue that learners construct their identities from their proficiency. Lazaraton and Davis (2008) suggested that a test taker carries a language proficiency identity on a test task, which the identity is constructed in the performance. In the study, they found that test takers who were proficient speakers performed more collaboratively and interactively in the talk, and the test-takers perceive themselves according to language proficiency and in the way they talked to each other. Barnawi (2009) studied how students construct their identities in second language classroom and found out that the weaker proficient students formed their identities as anxious, less confident speakers.

Compared to research about language learner identity in ESL contexts, there are a few studies about identity in EFL contexts (Block, 2009). For this reason, Block (2009) explored English-mediated identity in practices in order to find how learner identity is constructed in English activities. According to Block (2009), English-mediated identity is about how learners develop English in their learning context, and how they construct their attitude and affective factors toward English. He investigated adult EFL learners in Barcelona in order to discover English-mediated identity in EFL test preparation classrooms compared to Norton (2000)’s research about ESL learner identity. He interviewed six students for ten weeks who were enrolled in a language school and focused on the case of one student, Silvia, and connected her experiences to English-mediated identity using Bourdieu’s (1984, 1991) symbolic capital, which includes economic, cultural and social factors. He found that EFL is not an appropriate context for English-mediated identity construction because the context does not provide naturalistic English situations as ESL contexts. He argues that activities in EFL classrooms do not act as critical experiences to influence identity (Block, 2009). His study is noteworthy because it indicates that learner identity in EFL contexts does not work the same as in ESL contexts. On the other hand, English-mediated identity in EFL
contexts could work through activities such as practices in limited English situations such as in a classroom or in the workplace. However, his study was conducted during a shorter term than the study reported in this thesis, and the context did not seem to show high stakes test preparation. In this sense, we still do not know how test taker identity works in more high-stakes test preparation contexts, especially those that are longer term. This work also highlights the need to focus more on being context-sensitive rather than simply follow the identity research trend in SLA.

Tsui (2007) investigated identity formation through a narrative inquiry of the professional identity of an EFL teacher, Minfang, in China. This study was conducted using the narrative-inquiry methodology suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (1999 cited in Tsui, 2007). In particular, the method draws its data from stories. Tsui (2007) collected data through face-to-face conversations and diaries over a period of 6 months. The data was sorted according to identity conflicts repeatedly shown in the data and analysed according to Wenger’s (1998) framework. It was found that communicative language teaching (CLT) as a practice in his community influenced Minfang’s identity formation through struggle and conflict with his individual identity and institutional identity: CLT is a required practice in his community, but he believed the traditional method (TM) was more useful for students. However, CLT is not just a teaching method but a required practice in order to be an English language teacher in his community. CLT represents a shared value and belief in his community. In order to achieve his goal, he tried to acquire the practice. However, he struggled with conflicts between his own values and required values through identity formation. After being an EFL teacher, he “was disgusted by his dual identity as a faked CLT practitioner and a real self that believed in eclecticism” (p. 673). In addition, he thought that “CLT had been elevated as a religion in his institution rather than an approach to learning”. At the end of his teaching, he started to question which methods were the most appropriate for teaching and left his institution with this question still unanswered. From this study we see that individuals can be influenced by the values and practices required in a community, and that this process of struggle can lead to complicated identity formation. Tsui (2007)’s study has implications for the current research in that a required practice in a classroom may have an impact on learner identity formation through struggle and conflict.

These two studies have a number of common features. First, they employed qualitative approaches. Using these approaches, they described the emerging features of
identity after analysing the data rather than defining constructs of identity before collecting data. Second, they explored English-mediated identity in practices in order to find how learner identity is constructed in English activities. Therefore, they provide information about learner identity in practice which relates to this study. They are useful in exploring relationships between test preparation activities and identity in that they explore what a learner learns in a particular study mode as well as how that learning influences identity.

- **Identity over time: Self-conflict**

  Self-conflict is highly relevant to test-taker identity over time because it shows how test takers respond to test preparation, construct themselves and are constructed by the test preparation they experience as test preparation continues. This aspect of identity relates to links between challenges or struggles a test taker faces through test preparation, as well as a test taker’s identity. In order to understand this concept of self-conflict, this section introduces the concepts of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987) and alienation (Seeman, 1959).

  In the social sciences, including psychology, social psychology and sociology, the links between a sense of self and internal conflicts have been discussed in terms of self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) and alienation theory (Seeman, 1959). First, self-discrepancy theory explains how individuals respond to challenges or tasks which they wish to achieve or need to resolve, reflecting and constructing oneself between actual self, ideal self and ought self as they interact with others and their environment (Higgins, 1987). According to Higgins (1987), there are three facets of the self. First, “actual self” means “a kind of person an individual believes he or she actually is or a kind of person others think he or she actually is” (Higgins, 1987, p. 320). Second, “ideal self” means “a kind of person an individual would like to be or a kind of person others would like an individual to be” (Higgins, 1987, p. 320). Last, “ought self” means “a kind of person an individual believes he or she should be or a kind of person others think he or she should be” (Higgins, 1987, p. 321). In particular, this theory describes how conflicts among ‘selves’, including actual self, ideal self and ought self, induce emotional problems, in order to explain individuals’ reactions to what they wish to achieve or ought to do (Higgins, 1987). For example, self-conflict occurs when actual self does not match ideal self or ought self, which can result in depression (Higgins, 1987). He does so by discussing the types of discrepancies that can arise when notions of actual self, ideal self
and ought self are not aligned. Among the three selves, there could be four types of conflicts. Self-discrepancy can cause two types of depression including “dejected depression” and “agitated depression” (pp. 322-323):

1. Actual/own versus ideal/own: If a person possesses this discrepancy, the current state of his or her actual attributes, from the person's own standpoint, does not match the ideal state that he or she personally hopes or wishes to attain. This discrepancy then represents the general psychological situation of the absence of positive outcomes (i.e., nonattainment of own hopes and desires), and thus the person is predicted to be vulnerable to dejection-related emotions. More specifically, the person is predicted to be vulnerable to disappointment and dissatisfaction because these emotions are associated with people believing that their personal hopes or wishes have been unfulfilled. The motivational nature of this discrepancy also suggests that it might be associated with frustration from unfulfilled desires.

2. Actual/own versus ideal/other: If a person possesses this discrepancy, the current state of his or her actual attributes, from the person's own standpoint, does not match the ideal state that the person believes some significant other person hopes or wishes that he or she would attain. This discrepancy, then, again represents the general psychological situation of the absence of positive outcomes (i.e., nonattainment of a significant other's hopes or wishes), and thus the person is again predicted to be vulnerable to dejection-related emotions. The person will be vulnerable to shame, embarrassment, or feeling downcast, because these emotions are associated with people believing that they have lost standing or esteem in the opinion of others. Most psychological analyses of "shame" and related emotions have described them as being associated with the standpoint or agency of one or more other people. The motivational nature of this discrepancy suggests that it might also be associated with concern over losing the affection or esteem of others.

3. Actual/own versus ought/other: If a person possesses this discrepancy, the current state of his or her actual attributes, from the person's own standpoint, does not match the state that the person believes some significant other person considers to be his or her duty or obligation to
attain. Because violation of prescribed duties and obligations is associated with sanctions (e.g., punishment), this discrepancy represents the general psychological situation of the presence of negative outcomes (i.e., expectation of punishment), and thus the person is predicted to be vulnerable to agitation-related emotions. More specifically, the person is predicted to be vulnerable to fear, sadness, feeling threatened, because these emotions occur when danger or harm is anticipated or impending. Most psychological analyses of these emotions have described them as associated with external agents, in particular the standpoint or agency of one or more other people. The motivational nature of this discrepancy suggests that it might also be associated with feelings of resentment (i.e., resentment of the anticipated pain to be inflicted by others).

4. Actual/own versus ought/own: If a person possesses this discrepancy, the current state of his or her attributes, from the person's own standpoint, does not match the state that the person believes it is his or her duty or obligation to attain. This discrepancy, then, again represents the general psychological situation of the presence of negative outcomes (i.e., a readiness for self-punishment), and thus self-discrepancy theory predicts that the person is vulnerable to agitation-related emotions. More specifically, the person is predicted to be vulnerable to guilt, self-contempt, and uneasiness, because these feelings occur when people believe they have transgressed a personally accepted (i.e., legitimate) moral standard. Most psychological analyses of guilt have described it as associated with a person's own standpoint or agency. The motivational nature of this discrepancy suggests that it may be associated with feelings of moral worthlessness or weakness.

This theory enables us to understand how individuals construct themselves, and are constructed, by tasks in terms of goals, values and beliefs, as they struggle with multiple identities between real self and what they would like to be/ought to be. It also suggests that discrepancies between selves may lead to emotional or motivational problems from a clinical psychology perspective, describing the links between types of self-discrepancies and types of depression. Therefore, this framework is useful for understanding individuals’ reactions to tasks through processes that are involved as individuals perform tasks and develop their identity in their context.
Second, in the field of sociology, this concept of self-conflict has been discussed within the model of alienation suggested by Seeman (1959). According to Seeman, alienation is a state of conflict or discrepancy between an individual’s actual self and ideal self or ought self in terms of goal, belief, and expectancy, which is in turn associated with depression, frustration or disappointment. There are five types of alienation (Seeman, 1959): powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement: First, powerlessness means “the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks” (Seeman, 1959, p. 784). Second, while powerlessness refers to “the sensed ability to control outcomes”, meaninglessness refers to “the sensed ability to predict behavioural outcomes”, which is when individuals are unsure of the expectancy of success. Third, normlessness refers to a state of alienation when “social norms have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behaviour” (Seeman, 1959, p. 787). When norms have no effect on people and society, they can lead to negative feelings such as disappointment or depression (Durkheim, 1997). Fourth, isolation is a state of distance from society or popular culture. Last, regarding self-estrangement, when an individual uses oneself as an instrument of achievement, the individual becomes self-alienated. For example, when an individual has no intrinsic satisfaction in work or activity, the person is in a state of self-estrangement (Seeman & Anderson, 1983). When related to education, the concept of alienation allows us to understand how students are influenced by their learning experience or contexts. Students may become alienated by negative experiences with peers or teachers, by classroom activities, or by failed academic achievement (Barnhardt & Ginns, 2014).

According to Barnhardt and Ginns (2014, p. 793), alienation within educational settings may include “student alienation as a psychological state” and “alienation as a sociological process.” The former refers to “a sense of disconnection between one’s self and the task of meaningful learning”. The latter refers to a sense of discrepancy between “what a student believes to be an appropriate level of challenge and what he or she perceives to be the actual level of challenge” (p.794). In particular, these concepts include three notions of alienation among Seeman’s (1959) five types of alienation, in order to interpret student alienation (Barnhardt & Ginns, 2014, p. 794): powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement. Student alienation as powerlessness is a sense of inability to achieve academic outcome. Meaninglessness is a sense of inability to predict academic outcome, while self-estrangement is a sense of loss of intrinsic
motivation or meaning about learning activities or required academic practices. From this perspective, learners expect success with values and beliefs regarding relevant skills, tasks or activities when making choices in educational settings (see Section 2.3.3). However, as they experience discrepancies between their goals, values and beliefs in their academic contexts, they may experience conflicts between what they are, what would like to be, or what they ought to be in terms of identity. The discrepancy also may be a gap between their actual self and required course tasks or activities. Ultimately, they may become alienated and depressed by doing academic practices over time.

For example, most Korean students initially prepare for English tests in cram schools. They search for a famous cram school renowned for students who attained a high score within a short time frame. Of course, some students try to prepare for the test by themselves. However, they come to realize that self-study for test preparation takes longer and is an ineffective way to raise their score. They therefore go to a famous cram school.

This process of test preparation is general in Korea. English test preparation has become a large commercial business serving a large market. The value, in terms of test preparation, is to raise the examinee’s score. By doing test preparation practice, test takers may face challenges or struggles, and come to realize differences between what they are and what they believe/would like to be or ought to be in terms of goal, values and beliefs.

Therefore, these two theories provide information about how individuals respond to challenges or tasks through processes that are involved as they practice in order to achieve their goals and develop their identities within an educational context. For these reasons, they are used for analysis and interpretation of the data in order to see how a test taker is changed by test preparation. In the study, data were analysed to identify observable variables that were indicators of the psychological state of the test takers. Through interviews it was possible to identify whether a specific test-taker was subject to the emotions associated with particular categories as outlined in the theoretical framework.

In this study, the term, ‘identities’, refers to a sense of self in both personal and social contexts as multifaceted identities. A sense of self was adapted from Higgins’ notions of self (1987), which includes actual self, ought self and ideal self. Figure 2.3 shows a graphic representation of the identity construction framework that I developed in this study. It is suggested that we can explain this identity construction of a test taker.
in three phases of test preparation: (1) identity in test preparation choice, (2) identity in speaking activities, and (3) identity over time: Self-conflict. To accomplish this exploration, I additionally adapt Eccles (2009)’s identity in choice, Higgins (1987)’s self-discrepancy and Seeman (1959)’s alienation.

![Diagram showing the relationship between test preparation choice, a sense of self, self-conflicts, and speaking activities.](image)

**Figure 2.3 Identity construction of a test taker**

Even though I have set out the theoretical framework, identity is difficult to define, and theoretical frameworks are in their infancy. Therefore, it is difficult to operationalise these frameworks in terms of actual behaviours that reflect aspects of identity and changes in identity. However, if this is not attempted, we are not able to make the first steps from the existing literature that is mostly theoretical, to understanding identity and change in real-world contexts. Therefore, this research is starting to take these first steps towards operationalization because lenses of identity are useful for understanding how real people behave, feel, and make choices, in contexts where they are making life-changing decisions like preparing for a high-stakes test.
Chapter 3  Methodology

This chapter explains and justifies the research paradigm, design and methods that were used in this study. This chapter also provides a detailed explanation of logistics, including what the problems were, and what decisions were made to overcome them. The original plan is outlined as well as how it changed because of the reality of the situation on the ground. For example, one key issue for this study was how to gain access to test takers and test preparation classes in cram schools. Facing many challenges with the data collection and logistics, I kept records of each challenge and how it was managed. The chapter therefore includes information that tracks the learning process that I experienced, and how the methodology evolved in response to the demands of the fieldwork.

This chapter is organized into six main sections. First, the chosen research paradigm in the study is outlined. Second, the research design that was used to answer the research questions, including the research approach and logistics, is provided. Third, data collection, including the methods that were used, the altered logistics and ethical considerations related to the study are explained. Fourth, the data analysis procedures are presented. Last, limitations of the chosen methodology and methods are explained.

This chapter provides a starting point for test preparation research in that there has been no study doing this type of research in the field of language testing.

3.1 Research paradigms

This study was designed to investigate how Korean test takers prepare for tests of English speaking proficiency and how test preparation influences their identities during that preparation. Regarding this objective, there are two key focal issues: English speaking test preparation and test taker identity. As explained in Chapter 2, this is a relatively new research area in the field of language testing. This means that speaking test preparation and test taker identity need to be explored in the context in which they occur. Even though the English speaking test preparation market includes online and
offline cram schools, and the market for test preparation textbooks and materials is growing rapidly, it is still not completely known how cram schools prepare learners for tests and how learners prepare for tests. In addition, while identity studies of language learners have been widely discussed in the field of EFL/ESL teaching and learning, test takers have not received the same attention in the field of language testing.

In this study, social constructivism and interpretivism provide the most useful paradigm within which to investigate the issues at stake. Social constructivism refers to an ontological orientation that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2004, p. 18). In addition, interpretivism refers to an epistemological orientation that supports subjective meanings of social action (Bryman, 2004, p. 13). Therefore, the current paradigm makes it possible to focus on the context of test preparation, exploring what the test takers are actually doing during their test preparation and to access the voices of test takers.

Using this framework, the most suitable methodology for this study is a case study designed to select an instance from phenomena. A case in qualitative research can be defined as individuals, a role, a small group, an organization, a community or a nation (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 26). In this study, a case is defined as a small group of individuals preparing for an English speaking proficiency test. According to Nunan (1992, p. 76), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”. Therefore, this methodology makes it possible to investigate test takers’ test preparation and their identities in contexts and to draw on multiple data sources including participants’ diaries, interviews, interview notes, participant observation, and field notes.

3.2 Fieldwork-preparation

This section briefly explains the original plan before fieldwork commenced.
3.2.1 Original plan

In order to investigate the impact of English speaking test preparation on Korean test takers’ identities, it was proposed to study test preparation groups under two conditions within the context of high-stakes speaking testing. Figure 3.1 shows a graphic representation of the case design in this study.

![Case-study design](image)

**Figure 3.1 Case-study design**

In this study, a case means a test preparation group. In order to design a case study, TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, and OPIc-preparation groups were selected as the high-stakes speaking test preparation groups in Korea. Then, each group was categorized by two conditions, test purpose and delivery mode. It was hypothesised that test preparation groups with different test purposes and delivery mode conditions would experience different test preparation practices, and in turn there would be a differential impact on test taker identities. The test purpose includes whether the test would be used for academic or workplace settings. For example, the TOEFL and IELTS are used in academic settings: The TOEFL-iBT measures a “test taker’s ability to use and
understand English at the university level. And it evaluates how well a test taker combines a test taker’s listening, reading, speaking and writing skills to perform academic tasks” (ETS, 2014). The total time of test performance is four and a half hours. The delivery mode of the test is internet-based. The speaking section includes 6 tasks, a test taker is asked to answer the first two questions for 45 seconds per question after having 15 seconds for preparation. Then, the remaining four questions require a test taker to answer for less than 30 seconds after having 60 seconds for preparation, integrating reading and listening skills into speaking skills. The IELTS measures four English skills including listening, reading, writing and speaking (IELTS, 2014). The total time of test performance is approximately two and a half hours. Compared to the speaking section on the TOEFL test, the speaking section on the IELTS is a 14 minute, face-to-face interview that includes three parts designed to assess English communication. For the workplace setting, the TOEIC-Speaking and OPIc are used: The TOEIC-Speaking test assess English speaking skills for business. The total time of test performance is approximately 20 minutes, and includes 11 questions (ETS, 2014). Like the TOEFL test, the delivery mode of the test is internet-based. The OPIc test measures a test taker’s oral language proficiency using computer mediated semi-direct procedures (OPIc, 2014). During 40 minutes, a test taker selects a language, topics and proficiency levels of tasks. Then a test taker is asked to answer between 12 and 15 questions. Therefore the groups were categorized into test preparation groups depending on whether the test was for academic admission or work. The delivery modes included internet-based, TOEFL, TOEIC and OPIc, and face-to-face interview, IELTS.

In the original plan for this research, one of the key steps was to gain access to test takers enrolled in institutions that provide test preparation. It was assumed that such institutions are geared towards preparing students to take high-stakes tests, and that access to test preparation classes would not be problematic. The following briefly explains the data collection plan.

- **Phase 1**

  I planned to contact key informants in the field in an overt way, as is common in ethnography (Bryman, 2004). Having key informants in the institutions would make it possible to recruit test takers. In addition, it was expected that the legitimacy of the research and willingness to participate would be enhanced by the connection between test preparation institutions and the researcher. Project information would then be
posted at test preparation institutions in Seoul, South Korea. It was expected that the institutions would send invitations to newly enrolled students who were in the target test preparation courses to join the project. In addition, I planned to survey students at the institutions in order to identify participants for the cases study. It was expected that test takers would be asked to fill out a questionnaire at their test preparation classes (see Appendix 1 for an original copy of the questionnaire). The questions were designed to elicit general information about test takers, their education, and their experiences with target tests.

- **Phase 2**

  The original plan was to recruit 10 to 15 participants from each condition and include an equal number of male and female participants: a group preparing for the TOEFL speaking section, a group preparing for the IELTS speaking section, a group preparing for the TOEIC Speaking, and a group preparing the OPIc. Once potential participants were identified, they would be sent an information package containing a letter of invitation and consent form (see Appendix 2 for a copy of the information package).

  In order to address each research question, I planned to draw on multiple data sources including participants’ diaries, interviews, interview notes, classroom observations, and field notes. The following provides a brief explanation of each.

- **Diary study**

  In the original plan, diary study was to be a main research method because it is useful in exploring test preparation from a test taker’s point of view and would provide information about the impact of test preparation on test takers’ identities. This method allows learners to reflect upon their learning and discover problems related to it (Nunan, 1992). In addition, using this method would make it possible to focus on the voices of learners. For those reasons, I planned to ask participants to keep a diary concerning their test preparation in their first language at least once a week during test preparation. They would write in their first language because that would allow them to focus on what they think, feel and do in the context of test preparation without linguistic inconvenience. In addition, depending on their preference, the type of diary would be oral, video or
written (Cohen, 1984). Ultimately, however, this method was not feasible. A detailed explanation of why is included in Section 3.3.2.

- **Interview**

  The purpose of the interviews would be to clarify comments participants made in their diaries and ask questions based on their diaries in order to address the research questions. The interviews planned would use a semi-structured format, occur during various stages of the test preparation period and be conducted in the participants’ first language. This would enable me to focus on their voices in each mode of study and trace that to their identity construction. The process of the interviews in the fieldwork is discussed in Section 3.3.

- **Class observation**

  I planned to observe test preparation courses which participants attended once a week. This method is useful because it allows a researcher to understand the experience of learners in the classroom including classroom process, teaching and learning (Nunan, 1992). Related to the research questions, this method helps a researcher to see what happens in test preparation classes. I planned to use an observation scheme derived from Wall and Horak (2006).

- **Field notes and photos**

  I planned to create field notes after classroom observations and interviews because it would make it possible to reflect on what occurs in the research contexts. to describe them from the researcher’s point of view and to find problems with the data collection in the research contexts. In addition, photos would be included because they would help to understand the context of test preparation with visible descriptive information.

### 3.3 Fieldwork

This section explains logistical differences of the fieldwork before and while it was conducted. Because not everything planned was possible, this section provides
information about how the original plan was changed and modified for the sites, including challenges, solutions and limitations. Figure 3.2 shows a summary procedure of the fieldwork conducted.

Figure 3.2 A procedure of fieldwork

The purpose of Phase 1 was to contact key informants in order to gain access to test takers. This was done from August 2011 to April 2012. Phase 2 was to observe the class and participants, from November 2011 to April 2012. Phase 3 was to interview participants and undertake documentation, from October 2011 to June 2012. Last, Phase 4 was to review data and finish fieldwork during early July 2012. Each phase in the revised plan is explained below.
3.3.1 Participants

One of the key steps in this research was to gain access to enrolled test takers in institutions of test preparation. Before conducting the fieldwork I expected that it would be possible to gain access to key informants in the field. As explained in Section 3.2.1, I planned to post project information at test preparation institutions because I expected institutions to send invitations to newly enrolled students in the target test preparation courses to join the project. However, establishing this access became a challenge in that I quickly discovered that most test preparation institutions were highly secretive and were reluctant to cooperate. First, this section explains how I contacted the institutions, the reasons they refused access, and solutions to overcome these problems. Second, this section describes the profiles of participants. All names used in this study are pseudonyms.

- **Phase 1: Contact with key informants in the field (From August 2011 to April 2012)**

Contact with key informants in the field began in August, 2011 and lasted until April 2012. I used all contacts including formal and informal contacts that may have helped with the research. Regarding the formal contacts, I searched for large cram schools on the internet, directly contacted and visited them. However, they did not permit the access I was requesting because they were very sensitive to class observation, including access to students by a researcher: They are only open to enrolled test takers. Even though a high-level staff member in an institution allowed this access, informed consent from instructors and students was required in advance. However, this prior consent was impossible because instructors strongly disagreed to having their classes observed by a researcher, saying that it would make them and their students feel uncomfortable. Instructors were concerned that it would also raise complaints from students. The instructors were very sensitive to class atmosphere in that their students were preparing for a high-stakes test. In addition, institutions were very sensitive to the potential leaking of information regarding test preparation methods because competition to increase enrolments was intense. Institutions said that there was no reason to take the risks this access would cause unless a benefit would be provided to the institutions,
including instructors and students. Finally, in this study, the formal contacts did not provide any opportunity to access institutions.

On the other hand, personal contacts provided more opportunities to obtain access to the institutions. However, only a few contacts made it possible, and most of them did not end up being successful. For example, one of my professors in graduate school introduced me to his colleague who taught a TOEFL-speaking class at a university. This teacher allowed me to observe her weekly two-hour class at a university in Seoul, in October, 2011. However, the teacher was worried about potential complaints from students because the university provided strict guidelines for class observation and student interviews. For this reason, access to students was under the teacher’s control. Meanwhile, I sought permission to voice-record a class. The instructor strongly disagreed and prohibited any further research related to the class.

In another instance, one of my friends introduced me to an instructor who taught a TOEFL speaking and writing class in a cram school in Seoul, in January, 2012. The instructor allowed access to the class and students but he required me to receive the cram school principal’s permission. I met the principal but she prohibited it because she feared that it would lead to test preparation information being leaked. This institution was well-known as a TOEFL-preparation institution for young learners who wish to go to university or international school. She wanted to protect their contents of test preparation and was very reluctant to open the cram school to any outsider. The above experiences provide a lesson in that institutions are a closed setting where security is very tight. What they had in common was being sensitive to class observation and recording by a researcher. Teachers and administrators thought that their classes could be negatively influenced by them. Without practical benefits, they disagreed on having research done by an outsider. Even though access through personal contacts was often refused during meetings, this personal contact made it possible to meet high-level staff or an instructor in comparison to formal contacts.

Finally, I used two concurrent solutions at the same time in order to seek participants; I focused on personal contacts rather than formal contacts, and repeatedly emailed, called or visited those who may have helped with the research. Three months after starting the fieldwork, the professor again introduced me to an instructor in November, 2011. Ms Joy was teaching a TOEIC-Speaking class in one of the large cram schools in Seoul. During the meeting, I introduced this study and asked for permission to have access to her class and students. After listening to me, she accepted
the research plan including audio recordings and observation. It was a very surprising result compared to the above cases. She did not care about recording and did not fear possible complaints from students revealing the research to the institution. Several reasons provide explanations for her permission: She was a well-known instructor in the field, who took pride in her teaching. She had no reason to fear recording. In addition, she held a position as a high-level instructor who, because of her fame, increased enrolments and profit in the cram school. There was no need to receive permission from the institution. Therefore, TOEIC-Speaking class observation was allowed in her class, in Seoul, starting in November, 2011. Fortunately, three months later she started to teach an OPIc class in the institution and that class observation was conducted starting in February, 2012.

Regarding access to an IELTS class, one of my friends introduced me to a high-level staff member and instructor at an IELTS-preparation institution in Seoul, in November, 2011. During the meeting, I introduced this study to Mr. Lee and asked for permission to have access to his class and students. After listening to me, he also accepted the plan and I started to conduct the study in that institution. Gaining permission in this case was easier compared to other settings for the same reasons as it was in Ms. Joy’s case. It was related to his position in the institution. As a high-level staff member, he was the institution’s owner and also taught a class as an instructor. He had no need to ask permission from the institution or other instructors. I have learned that a main factor to make it possible to access institutions is having a relationship with an institution and an instructor. This means that if the institution is more powerful than an instructor, everything in the institution is under the control of a principal and it is impossible to gain access.

Access to TOEFL test takers, including class observation, was the largest challenge over six months. After being denied access to the TOEFL class at the university in October 2011, it was impossible to gain access to any TOEFL test takers or prep-class until after finishing data collection for the three other test preparation cases. Meanwhile, a key-informant introduced four TOEFL test takers to me. However, one student opted not to take part in the study after the initial interview. Another student stopped test preparation one month later. Finally, only one student took part in the study. This challenge needed to consider the role of this case for the entire study. The questions that were posed included: What would I lose if I did not have case 1 (the TOEFL study)? Do I need case 1 in order to contrast/compare it with something else? What happens if I
lose that comparison/contrast? Would it significantly affect the results of the study? After reflecting on these questions, I decided to seek more participants for this research without class observation, as this was the only way to obtain the necessary data to answer my research questions. Finally, with the help of a key informant, I posted an advertisement on the online community notice board of a university in April, 2012 seeking TOEFL participants. This board was useful to seek participants because it was only used by students as opposed to other boards that were more general and open to all. As a result, two students chose to take part in this study because they had an interest in this research. Although they were self-selecting, there was no reason to suspect that they were in any way atypical of the test preparation population. Meanwhile, some of my friends introduced two TOEFL test takers to me. Additionally, some TOEFL-participants in the study introduced friends who were preparing for the test to me. Accordingly, seven TOEFL test takers took part in the research.

- **Ethical concerns**

  Generally, social research follows four ethical principles (Diener & Crandall, 1978 cited in Bryman, 2004, p. 479): The first one is about “whether there is harm to participants”, which means researchers should not give any physical and mental harm to participants during the study. The second is about “whether there is a lack of informed consent, which means research participants should be given information to make a decision about whether they wish to participate in research. The third is about “whether there is an invasion of privacy”, which means anonymity of participant information should be kept confidential. The last is about “whether deception is involved”, which means researchers should not limit participants’ understanding of research in which they participate. In order to meet the above ethical principles, each participant in this study was given an information package. It included information on this research, the rights of participants, a consent form, and anonymity and confidentiality of participant information guarantees. Participants were asked to fill in the consent form, and return it to the researcher.

- **Profiles of participants**

  In total, twenty two Korean test takers, including sixteen females and six males, participated in the study as shown in Table 3.1. All participant names are pseudonyms. Their age ranged from 20 to 32 years old. They were grouped into four groups
depending on test purpose including academic admission (TOEFL-prep group and IELTS-prep group) or employment (TOEIC-Speaking prep group and OPIc prep group). Among them, the TOEFL-prep group was enrolled students from different classes. However, the IELTS-prep group, the TOEIC-Speaking group and the OPIc prep group were enrolled students in the observed classes. Their type of test preparation included cram school, self-study or group study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Targeted test</th>
<th>Type of test prep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ann</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>-Cram school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jung</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>-Cram school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Young</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>-Cram school -Self-study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>-Coaching program -Cram school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hye</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>-Self-study -Cram school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Tae</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>-Self-study -Cram school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sang</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>-Group-study -Online-program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sunny</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>-Cram school -Group-study -Online-program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Min</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>-Cram school -Group-study -Self-study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>Exam Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Su</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>IELTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Suk</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>IELTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Eu</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>IELTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Hyun</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>IELTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Euen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>TOEIC-Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>TOEIC-Speaking, OPIc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Won</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>TOEIC-Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Jin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>TOEIC-Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Jong</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>TOEIC-Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Kuem</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>OPIc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Rae</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>OPIc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Sujin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>OPIc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>University Graduate</td>
<td>OPIc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.2 Data collection

Data are comprised of interviews, observations including classroom and group-study, documents and field notes. In addition, I originally designed a questionnaire. However, once I started the fieldwork I realised that the questionnaire was a duplication of effort. Therefore I do not report on this separately. Each phase in the revised plan is explained below.

- **Phase 2: Class & participant observation (From November 2011 to April 2012)**

The purpose of phase 2 was to observe a class in order to select case study participants and for the study of a test preparation class in a cram school. In this study, observation data were used for answering the first research question linked to the mode of test preparation. Table 3.2 shows the classes observed in this study: Cram schools were located in Jongno and Gangnam in Seoul where large English test-preparation cram schools are common. All classes consisted of one-month programs. The TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc classes were taught by one female instructor. The period of observation for each class was slightly different depending on the test-prep class. Data collection continued over 4 months. All classes were audio-recorded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Place of Cram school</th>
<th>Class time</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Period of Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>Gangnam, Southern Seoul</td>
<td>Speaking Class : 50 minutes-day time four weekdays class</td>
<td>Instructor (Male)</td>
<td>From Nov 2011 to Feb, 2012 (Term-time program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC-Speaking</td>
<td>Jongno, Northern Seoul</td>
<td>Speaking Class : every 60 minutes-day time five-weekdays class</td>
<td>Instructor (Female)</td>
<td>Nov 2011 (one month program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPIc</td>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking Class : every 60 minutes-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 2012 (one month program)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- **Observation scheme**

I adapted the observation scheme used in Wall and Horak (2006)’s study because it provides more detailed information for classroom observation. However, this tool was not helpful for “ongoing access” to students in a class (Bryman, 2004). Although I gained access to test preparation classes, I still did not have access to participants (Bryman, 2004). Access to the institutions in phase 2 did not mean access to the people in the setting. I needed to take part in classroom activities rather than using the observation scheme. For example, when I first attended the TOEIC-Speaking class, an instructor introduced me as a PhD student and briefly explained that I was seeking research participants from the class. Some students were interested in this new person. I participated alongside the students and took part in the classroom activities, observing the class with the observation scheme. One problem was the seating arrangement, which was in a circle. We sat next to each other so it was possible to see what the person sitting next to you was doing. I placed the observation scheme on my desk, and started to check and make notes. However, the student next to me looked at it, and during the class break, asked about it. After listening, she looked uncomfortable, saying she would be more nervous practising English speaking because she was being observed. I then realized that the use of the observation scheme could be problematic, as it caused uneasy feelings for some. In addition, I realized that rapport was needed in each site to seek participants. Therefore after the first class, I did not use the observation scheme but took observation notes. This experience was instructive in that the use of a tool may be modified in dynamic field work. In addition, I have learned how a researcher negotiates and communicates with people in the field.

- **Participant as observer**

In order to gain access to students in each class, I also changed my role from observer into participant as observer (Bryman, 2004). Participant as observer means that a researcher participates in the daily activities in a setting and people in the setting know the researcher’s identity as a researcher (Bryman, 2004). Students in the classes knew that I was a researcher. In order to be able to talk to students about their test-prep
activities and rationales, I took part in the class activities the same as students, chatted with them during breaks and had lunch after class.

However, the researcher understood that access to students in each class had to differ depending on features of cram school and class activities. For example, my class observation was undertaken in three classes at two cram schools. Among them, the TOEIC-Speaking and OPIc classes were taught by one female instructor in the same cram school. I therefore started attending the TOEIC-Speaking class from November, 2011. This cram school has large-sized buildings. In the lobby there were reception desks for registration and leaflets to advertise classes and instructors. Even though this cram school had guards inside of the buildings, they did not require a registration card to a visitor. In addition, the lobby and classroom were located on different floors. In order to enter class, a registration card must be shown to an instructor during the first class for identification. Therefore, entry to the cram school itself was easier with one than the other. Furthermore, the classes provided group study options for enrolled students after class, so I joined in the group study and had more opportunities to communicate with students after class. While adapting to people in the setting, I visited the other cram school for an IELTS-preparation class observation in the middle of November, 2011. This cram school is small and is used only for IELTS preparation. In the lobby there was a reception desk for registration and leaflets to advertise classes and instructors, and several seats. Compared to the above cram school, the reception desk for registration played the role of gatekeeper in that visitors had to be guided by staff at the reception desk. Furthermore, classrooms on the same floor were not far from the reception desk. Staff at the desk could see who came in or went out and even who entered which classroom. During break time, some students had seats in the lobby and chatted, while for staff it was a place to see who visited. When I first visited the cram school, an instructor introduced me as a PhD student to staff and briefly explained that I was seeking research participants from the class. After then, whenever I visited the cram school, I said ‘hello’ to staff and then entered the class. The differing entry process, in turn, had me think about the need for space in order to access students. Even though some were resting in the lobby, access to them was difficult because the distance between their seats and the reception desk was close, so staff could hear what they were saying.

In addition, different features of class activities helped me think about access. For example, in the first visit, I had an opportunity to attend an IELTS-Speaking class for
advanced learners. Less than 10 students had seats in a circle seating arrangement. Their main class activity was to answer a question when an instructor pointed to a student. They had neither pair work nor break time during the class. While attending, I realized I had no real opportunity to access students, so I decided to attend class more in order to do so. Fortunately, the IELTS-Speaking class for intermediate learners had pair-work and break time to communicate with students. However, the class had no group study afterwards, which meant that opportunities to access students were limited to direct participation within class itself. This experience provides a lesson in that the process of seeking participants may be modified in dynamic field work. In addition, I learned how a researcher negotiates with people at each different site.

What follows below is a determination of how to seek participants in each class.

- **Identifying a potential participant**

  In order to seek participants in each class, at least for two or three weeks, I focused on building rapport with students, participating in classroom activities, and identifying the atmosphere of the classroom and students in each class. I also tried to identify a potential participant who may have had enough time to take part in the study (Spradley, 1979). It was important to select a participant who met the criteria for research because the study was planned to draw on participants’ diaries and interviews during their test preparation. However, it was not easy to find such a participant because students were in a high-stakes test preparation. I had not anticipated this. Therefore, among those who had rapport with me, those who showed interest in the study were selected through meetings and other forms of communication. However, as noted earlier, it took longer to build rapport in the IELTS class as there was no group study afterward. Therefore, I joined in pair work with students and asked those willing to speak with me whether they would like to participate. I also asked the instructor to nominate potential participants. Finally, the IELTS, TOEIC and OPIc groups were completed for Phase 2 to begin. The overall experience gave a lesson as to how recruitment of volunteer students can vary at each site.

- **Phase 3: Interviews (October 2011 to June 2012)**

  The purpose of phase 3 was to conduct interviews according to the following four steps. I adopted Spradley’s (1979) process because it provided useful guidelines for
interview skills and techniques. Twenty-two Korean test takers, including sixteen females and six males, participated in the interview study. Before starting the interviews, an information package was given to the students. The information package contained a letter including an invitation and a consent form. After completing the consent form, each participant was informed about the purpose of the research.

Unlike the original plan, the diary study was not possible because participants rejected it. They said that it may be time-consuming and that they did not have enough time to do it. A diary study was not acceptable in the context of high-stakes test preparation. This caused a problem for exploring test preparation from a test taker’s point of view and understanding what impacts test preparation has on test takers’ identities. As in the modified observation scheme cited in the previous section, this experience also provided a lesson in that the use of a method may have to be changed in dynamic field work. Even though the diary study is useful by focusing on the voices of learners, allowing learners to reflect upon their learning and to discover problems related to it, the writer has learned that application of the method may depend on its context. In order to overcome this problem, the interview study became a focal method, whereas in the original plan, the interview study was intended to ask questions based on student diaries, in order to clarify comments participants made. However, in the fieldwork, the interview study was used for exploring test preparation from a test taker’s point of view and the impact of test preparation on test takers’ identities.

- Step 1: Initial interview

The first step was to decide on the timing of the initial interview, in terms of rapport with a participant. It is important to build rapport with participants because rapport encourages a participant to talk about one’s experience (Spradley, 1979). Without first building rapport before the initial interview, a participant may feel more uncomfortable or anxious during this interview, and withdraw from the study. For this reason, it is important to build rapport and inform them of the potential benefits of their participation. Regarding the benefits, I learned a lesson from three IELTS test takers. At the first contact, they asked me, “What are the benefits of my participating in your research?” They required a practical benefit such as my help with their test preparation. In addition, test takers who prepared for studying abroad expected useful information from me about studying and living in a foreign country. Once participants made the
decision to participate in the interviews, we met in a quite cafe as it provided an informal atmosphere and a secure setting.

The interviews began according to the initial interview schedule as shown in Table 3.3. Participants were first asked to answer questions about general information including their age, academic or career background, test preparation experiences with a targeted test. The questions were designed based on the research questions and conceptual frameworks in this study. What I intended to elicit was their personal experiences and stories about test preparation. That was, in their daily life, what they are doing as a test taker, what challenges they are facing, how they understand their test preparation including their self view within this preparation, and what changes they experience as test preparation continues, focusing on a sense of self—their identity. During the recorded interviews, interesting or salient points were written down. In addition, timetable for future interviews, methods of communication and data collection appropriate to each participant were negotiated.

### Table 3.3 Initial interview schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process/ Research question</th>
<th>Interview themes/ Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>✓ Study background and aims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General information</td>
<td>✓ General background:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Place, date of birth, age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Academic background or Career background:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools, major, general work history, changes of job, types of job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would like to know your daily life as a test taker. Please tell me your daily activities including test preparation practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ Reasons for test preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why are you preparing for this test?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓ How do you prepare for this test?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could you explain how you enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in this class? Why did you choose this class?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you satisfied with this test preparation class?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. How do the test takers construct their identities during preparation?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Personal identity and test-taker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you explain what this test preparation means in your life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you explain yourself before starting this test preparation, now while doing it and in your future?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had any experiences (good or bad) that stood out to you during your speaking test preparation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, what are those experiences?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Test preparation impact on the test takers' identities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has this test preparation impacted your personal life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you view yourself as a test taker?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think you have been changed since preparing for this test?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so what are those changes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any challenges or problems as you prepare for a test?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so what are they?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Any other comments?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Follow up meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Thank interviewees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, initial interviews were not always successful in that they generally make both a researcher and participants feel uncertain and anxious in a process of rapport (Spradley, 1979). Even though I tried to build rapport with participants until making a decision regarding the timing of the initial interview, participants’ reactions to the initial
interviews were different, depending on the participant. For example, at the first contact, some students seemed willing to talk with me. They seemed to be eager to take part in the study. However, during these first interviews, some looked uncomfortable and nervous, answering my questions only briefly. They worried about whether they could help me, saying that “I am not sure if my answers to your questions are helpful for your research”. One of them refused to be recorded during the interview because it made him feel more anxious. Another participant was defensive to questions and reluctant to talk about her personal experiences.

In order to reduce their uneasy feelings during the first interviews, I explained the explicit purposes of the study and the interviews, saying that I had an interest in his or her experiences as a test taker, and would like to listen. I tried to make the participant feel worthy of participation during the interview. However, I realized that it was difficult to keep a participant talking in the initial interview, while I needed to accept the challenge that it is common to have tension and uncertainty during the initial interview (Spradley, 1979). This experience provides a lesson in maintaining relationships with participants as being very important to conduct ongoing interviews.

- **Step 2: Creating codes**

In this study, there was cyclical movement between data collection and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley, 1979). For example, this study followed a combined coding procedure between deductive and inductive approaches (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The deductive approach includes a top-down process. This means that a theoretical framework and hypotheses are created at the outset of the research. Then, data are collected based on the theories posited. In contrast, to the deductive approach, the inductive approach is a bottom-up process. Data collection occurs first, and then a theory or model is made from the data results. The following shows the coding process used in this research.

Constructing a coding scheme requires a conceptual map from conceptual frameworks or research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To do this, I created an initial code list for all data as shown in Table 3.4, using conceptual frameworks and research questions. When attempting to make this list of a-priori codes, one of the challenges was to construct codes of a test taker identity. Before starting data collection, it was very hard to make a specific construct of test taker identity. Acknowledging this,
after a thorough literature review, ‘identity’ was defined as a sense of self. This definition was used in part because the research design was intended to investigate how test takers construct, understand and define themselves during the test preparation, rather than testing theories about identity.

**Table 3.4 Initial code list**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
                                  1.1 Purpose of test-prep  
                                  1.2 Types of test-prep  
                                  1.2.1 Cram school  
                                  1.2.2 Group-study  
                                  1.2.3 Self-study  
                                  1.3 Differences in preparation  
                                  1.3.1 Test purpose  
                                  1.3.2 Delivery mode |
| -What practice does each group preparing TOEFL–iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking and OPIc tests do for during test preparation? |  
| -Are there differences in preparation according to test purpose (ex: use of academic and workplace setting) and delivery mode (indirect and direct mode)? |  
| 2. How do the test takers construct their identities during test preparation? | 2. Identity in test preparation/English speaking  
                                  2.1 A sense of self within the context of test preparation  
                                  2.1.1 A sense of self in English speaking practice  
                                  3. Test-prep impact on the identity  
                                  3.1 Changes over time  
                                  3.1.1 A sense of self within the context of test preparation over time |
| 3. How does the test preparation impact test takers’ identities? |  
                                  1) Under the four conditions, what effects does each type of test preparation have on test takers’ identities?  
                                  2) Are certain groups of test-takers influenced negatively or positively by test preparation? |
- **Step 3: Interview coding**
  After each interview, the audio recording was downloaded and transcribed using a transcription software program, Express Scribe, with a transcription tool to make transcribing fast and efficient, VEC Infinity USB Transcription Foot Pedal. Each completed transcription was put into a Microsoft Word document, and then coded into categories of the initial code list. Interesting or unclear comments from participants were highlighted for follow-up interview. In addition, marginal notes were made in the coding process. Table 3.5 shows an example of the initial coding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding sample</th>
<th>Data extract</th>
<th>Coded for</th>
<th>Marginal notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q: Why do you prepare for the TOEIC Speaking test?</td>
<td>A: While trying to get a job, I came to know that most companies require applicants to have passed the TOEIC Speaking test. Without the required score, I cannot apply to the company I want to work at. So, I decided to prepare for the test in this cram school.</td>
<td>1. Test-preparation</td>
<td>1.1 Purpose of test-prep 1.1.1 For work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: Well…how are you preparing for the test?</td>
<td>A: The only thing I do is go to class and join the group study as a follow-up class activity.</td>
<td>1.2 Types of test-prep</td>
<td>1.2.1 Course in a cramschool 1.2.2 Group study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I need to know more about the activities.
Q: Have you ever tried to prepare for the test by yourself?
A: No…because I do not know how to do it. Before I had a plan to prepare, using a test-prep textbook by myself without going to a prep-course. But, I am poor at English speaking, and I thought I could not improve my English skills without help.

***interesting participant comment
She has not thought about self-study for test preparation.

Is she satisfied with the test-prep class? I need to ask this in the 2nd interview.

---

**Step 4: Ongoing interviews**

The purpose of step 4 was to clarify comments including interesting or unclear comments that participants made in the previous step. In order to do so, descriptive and structural questions were used mainly in follow-up interviews (Spradley, 1979): Descriptive questions lead a participant to talk about his or her experiences, culture or life, from a participant’s view. Structural questions make it possible to identify additional information or comments from participants. Through the initial coding, as shown in Table 3.5, I needed to know about activities on which a participant commented. Based on comments in the previous interview, I prepared questions for the next interview and then conducted it.

The following shows an example of interview data used in this study, including descriptive and structural questions.

**Researcher:** You commented that you prepared for the IELTS in cram school and then joined in group study. What kinds of activities do you do for the test preparation? (Structural question)

**Participant:** Yes, we do reading aloud, spontaneous speaking, and practice in pair work.

**Researcher:** Could you describe a typical class activity? What do you learn at the class? (Descriptive question)

**Participant:** As the IELTS-speaking class started, the instructor handed out the day's materials. Next, students were asked to brainstorm the topic for
several minutes. Then, he explained it. After that, we practise with each other but no one comments on our speaking performance. This class does not require students to memorize answers from handouts like other classes do. Rather this class gives enough time to practise English. In this sense, this class is good for speaking practice. However, the class does not give information about speaking skills, whereas test preparation classes in cram schools tend to provide information about how to speak or how to raise a score. Also, this class does not provide instructor feedback on student speaking performance and we do not know if our speaking is correct or not.

As the interviews proceeded, some challenges began to emerge. The first challenge concerned a participant’s changeable attitude to interviews. In this study, participants prepared for the high-stakes tests, and most were full-time test takers. Due to the context of high-stakes preparation, their behaviour or attitude to a meeting tended to be influenced by test results. For example, in the first interview a participant was very cheerful and eager to talk about her experiences of test preparation because she had gained higher scores than she expected. During the interview, she greatly welcomed the interview questions and kept talking. However, in the next meeting, she was calm and looked uncomfortable. She was reluctant to answer questions initially because she was depressed by other test results. It was not easy to help her focus on the interview.

In addition, one of participants seemed to enjoy talking during the first interview. He talked about his personal experiences of test preparation including difficulties. However, he suddenly stopped attending class from the middle of the course, and avoided my contacts. I wondered what had happened in his life, and later I heard he gave up on test preparation. This experience provided a lesson in that participants may have different reactions to each interview, and then cancel their participation in the study without any notice. I have learned that things may happen or be changed in dynamic fieldwork.

The second challenge concerned how many cases could be conducted at the same time by myself. This study has four cases. Each case had its own environment and context: each had a different place, teaching method, time and people. Each case was conducted in phases. The phases often overlapped. This required me to cross over each case. For example, I proceeded with interviews of the TOEIC-Speaking prep group, and
separately observed the IELTS-Speaking class. Soon after interviews of the IELTS-Speaking prep group were conducted. This work was difficult in that it required focus on each different participant in each case.

The third challenge concerned how many participants in each case could be interviewed. There were limitations to interviewing a large number of participants in each case. As explained in Section 3.3.2, in total, twenty-two test takers, including sixteen females and six males, participated in the study. Depending on participants’ test preparation duration, the average interview at each setting was over four hours per person. In total, 89 hours of recording were completed. Mostly, there was a time gap between the initial interview and follow-up interviews. The key issue was how to maintain my relationship with participants until the follow-up interviews could be conducted. Because participants were preparing for a high-stakes test, they were sensitive to spending their time on this research. I have learned that an interview method requires not only interview skills but also maintaining a relationship with participants for purposes of on-going research. It was apparent that there is a large gap between theory and practice. Therefore, I tried to contact them regularly via phone or instant message for follow-up interviews.

The last challenge concerned researcher involvement. After attending the first TOEIC-Speaking class, I changed my role from observer into participant-as-observer, as explained in Phase 2. It is true that the participant-as-observer role allows a researcher to understand people through participating in their daily activities (Bryman, 2004). After changing my role, it was useful to have access to participants and to build rapport during field work. However, it also carries a potential risk of losing a sense of being a researcher, as the researcher gets closer to the people in the setting (Bryman, 2004).

In order to have access to the students, I participated in the class activities the same as students. They in the classes knew that I was a researcher. I had conversations with them, having a coffee or lunch after class. In addition, I was concerned about my language, attitude and clothing in order to get close to them. Less than one month since I started the TOEIC-Speaking class observation and interview study, I recognized that I enjoyed the class activities and group study with the students. I had to remind myself that I was not in class to prepare for the test, but to conduct this research, keeping my field notes after class. However, as interviews proceeded, some participants freely talked about their challenges and struggles during test preparation, asking for my advice.
This allowed me to understand them better as test takers. However, as I listened to them discussing problems, I also realized I was involved with them because of my own test preparation experiences in the past. As explained in Chapter 1, I had prepared for the same high-stakes English tests as my participants were now preparing. As I communicated with participants, I empathized with their comments, reflecting on my own test preparation in the past. However, I had to bring myself back to my role as a researcher.

Around that time, I visited the IELTS cram school for class observation, which made it possible to compare the two sites and to address the problem I faced earlier. Ultimately, it was resolved as field work proceeded. I conducted the four cases by myself, as explained below, which required focus on each different participant in each case and allowed me to maintain appropriate involvement within each context. In addition, the field notes made it possible to find problems with the data collection in the research contexts, and to deal with them in the next case based on lessons from the previous case.

After each interview, the audio recording was transcribed as indicated earlier in Step 3. Each transcription was then coded into categories of the initial code list, identifying emerging features in order to revise it. Interesting or unclear comments from participants were highlighted for follow-up interviews. In order to discover a new category or domain, I used domain analysis (Spradley, 1979): First, it began with semantic relationships, following Spradley (1979, p. 111).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Strict inclusion</td>
<td>X is a kind of Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Spatial</td>
<td>X is a place in Y, X is a part of Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cause-effect</td>
<td>X is a result of Y, X is a cause of Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Rationale</td>
<td>X is a reason for doing Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Location for action</td>
<td>X is a place for doing Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Function</td>
<td>X is used for Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Means-end</td>
<td>X is a way to do Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sequence</td>
<td>X is a step (stage) in Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Attribution</td>
<td>X is an attribute (characteristic) of Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second, I selected related comments from participants, based on these semantic relationships. The comments were then highlighted, with notes indicating which type of relationships. A third step was to find folk terms that were suitable for each semantic relationship. ‘Folk term’ means actual terms or words that a participant has spoken during the interviews (Spradley, 1979). The term that may fit the semantic relationship, in turn, consists of a code list (Spradley, 1979). The last step was to make structural questions for each category, which was also preparation for structural interviews.

Table 3.6 gives an example of domain analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data extract</th>
<th>Semantic relation</th>
<th>Domain (Code)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant: We do class activities. We do reading aloud, spontaneous speaking and practice in pair work.</td>
<td>X is a kind of Y</td>
<td>Types of class activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6 Example of domain analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q: Are there any other kinds of class activities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This process was repeated during the interview study. A series of interviews were then conducted.

- **Phase 4: Review data and finish fieldwork (Early July 2012)**

In early July 2012, I completed the fieldwork that had commenced in South Korea in September 2011. It took 10 months. This time brought many unexpected events and challenges in the fieldwork which required solutions. This was a long journey of becoming a researcher. Even though my research focused on test takers’ identities, I also faced questions about myself as a researcher, who I am and what I am doing in the relationships with the participants, instructors and people in the sites. As I communicated with participants, I sympathized with their comments, reflecting on my test preparation experiences in the past. When I returned home after conducting fieldwork in the crams schools, I asked myself, "What is my role as a researcher?"
Most participants were in their twenties and early thirties and goal motivated. As test preparation continued, some repeatedly commented how they struggled with test preparation. Some commented how they were afraid of their uncertain status as a full-time test taker. Some achieved their goals, but others failed the test and left the cram schools. As I listened to their stories, it made me think about the reality of test preparation, asking myself, “How should I address their voices as a researcher?” Thus, the next task was to analyse the data in order to address what I had seen and what participants had told me.

3.4 Data analysis

After data collection, all data were gathered. Twenty-two test takers in total took part in the interviews, which included 89 hours of recording in total. The transcripts totalled 565 pages. The data were entered into NVivo 9, which is qualitative data analysis software. It was used to organise, analyse and display the large amount of data from the study. One of the key steps in this stage was to operate the NVivo program to analyse multiple cases. While learning the uses of Nvivo 9, data generated from this study were analysed using Bryman’s qualitative analysis (2004), and Miles and Huberman’s (1994) coding procedure. Data analysis in this study can be defined as a process of repeated coding and recoding, revisiting literature and reframing conceptual frameworks, as shown in Figure 3.3. Data analysis began in August 2012 and lasted in December until 2013. This section discusses the process.
Stage 1: Searching for key terms

The purpose of Stage 1 was to look for emerging themes. To do so, I used sequential analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, all data including transcribed participants’ interviews and the volume of field notes were read and reread line by line, underlining key words such as repeated or important comments from participants. Later, key phrases were restated as codes into Nvivo 9. The field notes, serving as a reflective journal, were also made while conducting the interviews, observing the classes and participants, and analysing data. The codes were then grouped into smaller sets based on interconnections. They were then reduced in number to make pattern codes, which include similarities and differences among comments, such as what participants said in common or giving varying responses regarding research questions and topics (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example as shown in Table 3.7, comments from one participant were underlined in the text with regard to his response to a question, “How does this test preparation influence you?”

Underlined key terms were restated into key phrases. Then, relationships among phrases were reviewed and made into categories. Last, and in order to reduce codes in number and to create pattern codes, I analysed what participants had said in common or
different regarding research questions and themes. The above process was repeated several times in order to code all responses correctly.

Table 3.7 A process of coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Underline key terms in the text</th>
<th>2. Restate Key phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R: How does this test preparation influence you?</td>
<td>-Test prep shaking my identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: It is shaking the very foundation of my identity… it is making me feel humiliated…. in my life for the first time I have experienced humiliation and frustration with myself. When I worked for seven years, I was a competent person. But since I started test preparation, I feel terrible. Damn it! I have pride in my past work experience. But when it comes to test preparation I am not self-disciplined. But I am in my thirties. That means that I am not a child. But my real self is not an adult. I know what I should do during this time but I am like a child. I am used to working with people. I have failed to manage my time and myself…. I am very ashamed of myself and feel guilty ….</td>
<td>-Test prep making feel humiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-in the past work,</td>
<td>-Test prep making feel terrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-a competent person</td>
<td>-in my past work experience,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-I have pride</td>
<td>-I am not a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-in test prep,</td>
<td>-real self, not an adult,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-not self-disciplined</td>
<td>-a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organize the codes</td>
<td>4. Create pattern codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Before test prep</td>
<td>- Impact of test prep on identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-in the workplace</td>
<td>-Before test prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-a competent person</td>
<td>-While test prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-I had pride</td>
<td>-Discovering oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-What I am</td>
<td>-What I would like to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Impact of test prep on identity</td>
<td>-Changes over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-shaking my identity</td>
<td>-Positive impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-making feel humiliated</td>
<td>-Negative impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-making feel terrible</td>
<td>-Emotional problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Discovering my real self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-not self-disciplined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-not an adult/a child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout this analysis, a test taker’s sense of self was indicated by chronological order, such as before starting and during test preparation, or changes recorded following the test. It was possible to identify how the test taker constructed himself, and what was constructed by tasks or challenges as he/she struggled with multiple identities between real self and what he/she would like or ought to be. In particular, three phases of test preparation were identified in identity construction, and are shown in Figure 3.4. These are: (1) test preparation choice before starting the preparation; (2) speaking activities during test preparation, and (3) long-term test preparation related to changes over time.

![Figure 3.4 Identified three phases of test preparation](image)

- **Stage 2: Revisiting the literature**

  In this study, I reviewed the relevant research on identity on the basis of key themes, in order to analyse and interpret data. As explained in Chapter 2, the term ‘identities’ refers to a sense of self in both personal and social contexts as multifaceted identities. This definition was used in the initial code list as shown in Table 3.4 because the research design was intended to investigate how test takers construct, understand, and define themselves during test preparation, rather than testing theories about identity. Throughout the data analysis, it was possible to identify how a test taker’s sense of self was constructed in the three phases of test preparation, as explained in Stage 1.

  In this study, data were analysed to identify observable variables that were indicators of a test taker’s sense of self. It was possible to identify who/what they are, or believe what they would like to be, or what they should do in terms of goals, values and beliefs. Throughout this stage, it was found that facets of self could be supported by Higgins’ notions of self (1987), which includes actual self, ought self, and ideal self.
This framework is relevant to a test taker’s identity construction because it specifies a test taker’s sense of self that had been used as the concept of identity in the initial code list, and because it incorporated initial data.

To interpret data from the identified phases of test preparation, as shown in Figure 3.4, I additionally adapted Eccles’ self-views regarding goals, values and identity: According to Eccles (2009, p. 79), two sets of identity are involved in a life-defining choice. One includes self-views concerning relevant skills, tasks or activities necessary to achieve a goal. The other includes self-views related to a goal, such as what one would like to be. This framework supports how a test taker’s identity acts as a driver in the identified phase of test preparation choice, and how the test taker’s identity is constructed by English speaking activities during test preparation. Throughout the data analysis, it was possible to identify a test taker’s self-views, what/who they (actual self) are, what they would like to be (ideal self), or what they should do (ought self). In that test preparation is a goal-oriented process of reflecting and evaluating oneself in test preparation activities, test takers construct themselves and are constructed by goal oriented activities.

In order to analyse and interpret the remaining phases, studies in self-conflict (Higgins, 1987) and a theory of alienation (Seeman, 1959) were considered in order to see how test takers respond to themselves and during test preparation, and how they are changed. These frameworks enable us to understand how internal conflicts between ‘selves’ may lead to emotional or motivational problems as individuals perform tasks and develop an identity within their own context. In the study, data were analysed to identify observable variables that indicated the psychological state of the test takers. Through interviews during and after test preparation, it was possible to identify whether a specific test-taker was subject to the conflicts, alienation or emotions associated with particular categories, as explained in Chapter 2.

These theories, therefore, enable us to understand how individuals construct themselves and are constructed, by tasks in terms of goals, values and beliefs, as they struggle with multiple identities between real self and what they would like to be/ought to be.
- **Stage 3: Revising codes**

  Throughout the data collection, the above initial list of codes was reviewed and needed to be revised during data analysis. Therefore, this step was a process of reconstructing the coding scheme as a conceptual map from conceptual frameworks or research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To do this, I reviewed all codes using data and revisited the literature. Following the process, the revised coding scheme was made, as shown in Figure 3.5.
In the above coding system, a code, “Types of test-prep method”, was established in order to answer research question 1: How do Korean test takers prepare for a test of
English speaking proficiency under TOEFL–iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking and OPIc test preparation? The first research question focuses on identifying contexts of test preparation with descriptions of test-preparation practices. It deals with what kinds of test preparation methods were selected by test takers and what kinds of practices they learned within a given context and setting of test preparation. Therefore, the code had three sub codes, “Cram school, group study and self study” as test preparation methods. The three codes were categorized into codes: “Duration of study, classroom environment, class procedure, teaching style, student work mode and materials”.

In order to answer research question 2: How do the test takers construct their identities during test preparation? and research question 3: How does the test preparation impact the test-takers’ identities?, a code, “Test taker identity” is categorized into three codes according to time order, including “Before starting test prep: in test prep choice”, “While doing test prep: in speaking practice”, and “Changes over time: self conflicts”. A code, “a sense of self” was made under the three time order codes, which had three sub codes, “actual self, ought self and ideal self”. In particular, the second question explores test taker identities based on the first question. It focuses on how their identities are constructed in the identified test preparation. To answer this question, interviews and observations were mainly used. The last question narrows the identity construction from the second question to test preparation impact on test taker identities, integrating the above two questions. Therefore, the code, “Changes over time: self conflicts” had three sub-codes, “Actual vs ideal self”, “Actual vs ought self”, and “Alienation” in order to answer the last question. As explained in Stage 2, in order to analyse them, three theories of identity were derived from theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987; Seeman, 1959). Therefore data in this study were analysed in terms of how identity construction of a test taker developed during test preparation.

- **Stage 4: Coding and recoding**

All data were coded into the above revised coding scheme. As analysis proceeded, codes were developed based on research questions and data results. For example, each individual test taker’s data were categorized into groups based on whether test takers were preparing for TOEFL–iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking or OPIc. In order to analyse links between test preparation and identity, an individual’s data set was analysed by phases of test preparation from beginning to end, focusing on identity characteristics in relation to test preparation and changes over time. In particular, three phases of test
preparation were evaluated in terms of a test taker’s identity construction: (1) test preparation choice before starting; (2) speaking activities while doing test preparation, and (3) long-term test preparation related to changes over time.

Regarding the first phase of test preparation, data related to ‘test preparation choice’ were coded by how a test taker’s identity was involved in terms of goals, values and beliefs regarding one’s personal future. This is because a personal decision regarding the start of test preparation relates to a set of individual values comprising identity. In this phase, identity was analysed and then placed into one of two sets, one including a sense of self as ‘ideal’ self related to a goal, and the other as ‘actual’ self related to relevant skills, tasks or activities necessary to achieve it, as explained in Stage 2.

Regarding the second phase, in order to identify links between speaking activities and identity, I focused on identifying test preparation contexts, what test takers do in those contexts, and how they finally respond to the contexts and test preparation practice. Using chronological order, an individual’s test preparation was initially coded into ‘choice of study mode’, because this is the test taker’s first encounter. Related data were then coded into ‘types of study mode’, ‘how study modes are used’, ‘why and how they are chosen’, and ‘a test taker’s reaction to study mode’. In addition, the test taker’s activities in their given study mode were coded into ‘duration of study’, ‘study/classroom environment’, ‘study/class procedure’, ‘teaching style’, ‘student work mode’, and ‘materials’, as shown in Figure 3.5. This was also done in order to answer the first research question, namely, how do Korean test takers prepare for a test of English speaking proficiency under TOEFL–iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking and OPIc test preparation?

While analysing a test taker’s test preparation activities, I focused on identifying how the test taker responds to skills, tasks or activities within a given context, and the setting of test preparation as he or she interacts with others and their environment. Relevant data were then analysed by consideration whether a test taker’s reaction to speaking activities, relevant skills or tasks was done according to actual self, ideal self, and/or ought self within a given context of test preparation.

Regarding the last phase of test preparation, I focused on identifying how the test preparation context and its features impacted a test taker’s identity. Using chronological order, each individual test taker’s data were analysed according to how the test taker’s identity construction was changed during test preparation. For example, I compared each individual’s data set in terms of identity and choice before test preparation, with
regard to identity and speaking activities during preparation, and by self-conflicts, isolated problems and emotional problems involving actual, ideal and/or ought self. In addition, each individual's data set was analysed according to how a test taker responded to challenges or tasks in a given context of test preparation and whether the features changed the test taker’s sense of self within the three phases of test preparation.

After each individual test taker’s data analysis, individual data were compared within each group of test takers for TOEFL-iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking and OPIc, in terms of commonalties and differences during preparation. As shown in Figure 3.3, the process of coding was repeated: searching for key terms, revisiting literature, and reframing conceptual frameworks.

Table 3.8 shows an example of coded data, with an explanation of the meaning of the data in terms of answering the research questions (see Appendix 3 for an extended coded transcript).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data extract</th>
<th>Coded for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R: How does this test preparation influence you?</td>
<td>Changes over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: It is shaking the very foundation of my identity…it is making me feel humiliated….in my life for the first time I have experienced humiliation and frustration with myself. When I worked for seven years, I was a competent person. But since I started test preparation, I feel terrible. Damn it! I have pride in my past work experience. But when it comes to test preparation I am not self-disciplined. But I am in my thirties. That means that I am not a child. But my real self is not an adult. I know what I should do during this time but I am like a child. I am used to working with people. I have failed to manage my time and myself….I am very ashamed of myself and feel guilty ….</td>
<td>1. Actual self vs ought self 1.1 Emotional problems 1.1.1 Agitation-related emotions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data meaning explanation:

His test preparation was “shaking the very foundation of his identity” and “humiliating”
him as shown in his comments and his reaction to test preparation was to feel a sense of guilt, self-contempt and uneasiness. In terms of Higgins’s self-discrepancy (1987), this reaction can be interpreted as “agitation-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, “Actual self versus ought self” (Higgins, 1987, p. 323): His actual self is a test taker who was used to 7 years of working collaboratively with colleagues in the workplace, hanging around with them after work, and watching TV or using the internet until he went to bed. He had pride in himself as a competent manager in the workplace. In contrast, his ought self was a test taker who needed to fully focus on test preparation. For several months from the start of the test preparation, he really tried to focus on test preparation by changing his study environment and avoiding contact with friends. However, as test preparation continued, he found that he was not used to studying in the context of test preparation. Also, he found out that the context is different from his workplace because it is an isolated environment. He became addicted to watching TV or using the internet. As his actual self did not match his ought self, his addiction became worse and his emotional reaction to this self discrepancy became serious.

Throughout the analysis, it was possible to identify how a test taker’s identity was constructed based on test purpose and time spent on preparation. By doing test preparation practice, test takers faced, and realized that differences between what they are and what they believe/would like to be or ought to be in terms of goal, values and beliefs. As they interacted with others and their environment, they reflected and constructed oneself within the test preparation contexts.

As presented in Table 3.9, themes were established throughout the analysis. Themes regarding test preparation practice will be discussed in Chapter 4. Themes involving identities and individual narratives will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.9 Themes identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test preparation practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of study mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Test taker identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voluntarily unemployed</th>
<th>Academic admission applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Goal, choice and identity)</td>
<td>(English-mediated identity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job seekers</td>
<td>(Changes over time: self-conflicts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5 Limitations

There were some limitations in the methodology. Table 3.10 summarizes what was not possible: First, the access plan to institutions before field work was not feasible. Most institutions prohibited access. It caused a large amount of time and energy to be spent on gaining access to test takers during the fieldwork, and caused data collection to be extended. In addition, this limitation made it impossible to seek out large numbers of test takers. Because research is practically limited by time and budget, possible access plans should have been seriously considered before the fieldwork. Second, the diary study was not possible because participants rejected it. They said that it would be too time-consuming to maintain a diary. Therefore only the interview study was used to explore participants’ identities. As the diary study was declined, interview skills were more important because they were critical to ensuring that participants told their personal stories of test preparation and identity. Because of a lack of skills and experience, I was challenged by this task. In addition, it was not possible to conduct multiple codings by inter-coder due to expense and logistic reasons. While in a much larger (funded) study this might have been desirable, it is not routinely possible in doctoral research. As a result, the interpretation is that of the researcher, and the coding system may usefully be further investigated in future research.

Although there are limitations to this research, this work provides contributions to the field by interpreting test preparation behaviours in terms of theories of identity.

#### Table 3.10 Fieldwork logistical problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before fieldwork</th>
<th>During fieldwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I planned to post project information at test preparation institutions. The institutions would send invitations to</td>
<td>Most institutions prohibited access. Until finishing the data collection of the other cases, I could not gain access to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
newly enrolled students in the target test preparation courses to join the project.

-I planned to collect data through diary study, observing test-prep classes and interviewing participants for 6 months.

I planned to ask participants to keep a diary concerning their test preparation in their first language at least once a week during test preparation.

The diary study was rejected by the participants because they saw it as too time-consuming to maintain a diary.
Chapter 4  Test preparation

This chapter provides the findings of the first research question of this study, namely:

1. How do Korean test takers prepare for a test of English speaking proficiency under TOEFL–iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking and OPIc test preparation?

- What practice does each group preparing TOEFL–iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking and OPIc test do for test preparation?
- Are there differences in preparation according to test purpose (e.g., use of academic or workplace setting) and delivery mode (indirect and direct)?

In order to address these questions, this chapter first identifies test preparation contexts and describes what test takers do in those contexts. For example, this chapter examines test takers’ views and experiences of test preparation, which preparation methods they chose to prepare for a targeted test, and what are the characteristics of test preparation according to type of test and study mode. Next, the results of the study are presented and discussed. I consider whether, and to what extent, there is a relationship between the test and study modes. Finally, the chapter provides a context for further investigation in Chapter 5, including how the context and its features impact one’s identity.

The results from this work make the following, original contributions. First, they provide new knowledge about how test preparation activities differ depending on type of test and study mode. This work represents the first attempt of comparing high-stakes tests and study modes. Most research regarding test preparation has only studied the test preparation of one single test. However, this study compares four high-stakes tests. Second, the findings elucidate test preparation practices in cram schools. As discussed in Chapter 3, access to enrolled test-takers in institutions of test preparation was a challenge in this field work. For this reason, there is little research about cram schools. However, this chapter provides more new knowledge about cram schools. Third, the
findings are based on test takers’ voices with regard to their test preparation. Unlike previous research which has been concerned primarily with teachers’ views, this chapter provides emergent aspects of test preparation from test takers’ perspectives. Finally, it provides a context that makes it possible to discuss how test preparation and its features impact test takers’ identities, the focus of Chapter 5.

In order to answer the research questions, several data collection methods were employed: class and participation observation, semi-structured interviews and documentary sources. The data were then analysed into coding scheme as discussed in Chapter 3.

In this study, twenty-two test takers were interviewed. Additionally, two cram schools were visited, and three speaking test-preparation classes in the cram schools were observed, as shown in Table 3.2. The cram schools are located in Jongno and Gangnam in Seoul where large English test-preparation cram schools are common. All classes consisted of one-month programs. The TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc class were taught by one female instructor. All classes were audio-recorded.

This chapter is organized into four sections. First, test takers’ choice of study mode is presented, including an explanation of what types of study mode exist, how test takers find a study mode, why they choose it and how the study mode is used. Information is provided about participants’ first activity when they started to prepare for a targeted test. Second, how much time participants spent on test preparation is presented, including an explanation of differences between the study modes and the test prep groups. This information is relevant because it is a factor that influences if their test preparation is high pressure or not. The lower the score one receives, the more time (both in terms of money and effort) they have to spend to get the score they need. Third, activities which test takers learn in their study modes are presented including a description of the study environment as well as an explanation of differences between the study modes and the test prep groups. In this section, I identify features of activities across modes related to the research question. It is shown that a high-stakes context is different from a general learning context. In addition, test takers’ actual test performance in testing places is presented, explaining students’ reactions to a type of test in testing places. Last, materials are discussed, identifying features of test prep materials across modes.
4.1 Choice of study mode

One important consideration is to identify test takers’ choice of study mode because that is a test taker’s first practice they encounter when they begin to prepare for a targeted test. This section provides new knowledge about what types of study modes exist, how study modes are used, why and how they are chosen, and how study modes are reacted to by test takers. Investigating test takers’ choice of study mode is also important in terms of understanding the context of test preparation from a test takers’ point of view.

In this study three types of study mode were used by test takers: cram school, group study, and self-study. Cram school mode involves test preparation that takes place at a specialized test preparation institution. In this study, group study mode includes two types: cram school-provided and student-generated. In the former type, materials and guidelines were given to the students as an optional activity after class. In the three observed classes, two classes (the TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc classes) provided group study options for students. In the latter type, student-generated group study was voluntarily organized by students with their friends or classmates. In these sessions, students discussed what materials to use, when and where to study, and how they would study. The final study mode investigated was a self-study mode, in which individual test takers studied alone using a textbook or online coaching programme. The online programmes were of two types: online lectures provided by a cram school and online speaking tutoring using an internet phone.

In this study, test takers used each study mode either as a main or supplementary mode. As shown in Table 4.1, most test takers across test prep groups chose a cram school mode as their main study mode. Test takers commonly enrolled in well-known cram schools for targeted test preparation. Then, they joined an optional group study provided by the cram school or elected an online speaking tutoring program for self study.
### Table 4.1 Choice of study mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of test prep</th>
<th>TOEFL-prep group (Total n=7)</th>
<th>IELTS-prep group (Total n=6)</th>
<th>TOEIC-Speaking prep group (Total n=5)</th>
<th>OPIc-prep group (Total n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cram school mode</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group study mode</td>
<td>Cram school-provided n=2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students-generated n=1</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self study</td>
<td>Online lecture n=1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online speaking tutoring</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, two participants in the TOEFL group used a cram school mode and also joined a group study provided by a cram school. In the TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc groups all the students who studied in a cram school also joined a group study provided by the cram school. In the IELTS group, only two participants who studied in a cram school formed a student-generated study group because the cram school did not provide this option. In addition, two persons in the IELTS group used the cram school mode and joined an online speaking tutoring programme at the same time. A self study mode was also used in two cases. First, it was used prior to a test taker’s selection of a cram school mode. Some test takers had experiences studying by themselves before selecting a cram school mode. Second, the self study mode was common just prior to a test taker’s taking an exam. They would review what they learned in cram schools after finishing a cram school mode. Because most students performed this type of study, the number was not reported in Table 4.1. The findings show there is no link between the type of test and choice of study mode in that most test takers across test prep groups chose a cram school mode as their main study mode.

Most students selected a cram school mode because they strongly believed that a cram school could raise their scores within a short period of time. Regarding how to
select a cram school or materials used in the test preparation, most test takers across test prep groups searched on the internet or asked friends about well-known cram schools or instructors for targeted test preparation. When choosing a course, test takers would carefully read information regarding instructors’ profiles and class curriculum taken from cram schools’ web sites or pamphlets. In particular, their choice was influenced by friends who enrolled in a cram school, or comments written by students on the internet about cram schools and instructors. The following are the TOEFL test prep group’s comments about selecting a cram school:

<TOEFL prep group>

Hye: I am familiar with the cram school B because I used TOEFL text books published by the cram school when I studied alone. Also, my friends enrolled and recommended the cram school for TOEFL test preparation. I think that the cram school is the best known for test preparation.

Tae: In the past, when I prepared for the TOEIC test, I enrolled in cram school B and received the required score. I trust the cram school for test preparation. Also, my friends prepared for the TOEFL test at cram school B and recommend it. My brother used TOEFL textbooks published by cram school B. That is why I am preparing for the test at cram school B. Because cram school B is well known for test preparation, I decided to study there.

Hee: I searched well-known cram schools for TOEFL preparation and two cram schools came up. They were cram school P and cram school B. So, I asked my friends about them. Some friends said that cram school B focuses on TOEIC and TEPS preparation rather than TOEFL preparation. Also, one of them was enrolled at cram school P before and recommended it. So, I decided to enrol in cram school P.

Jung: I think that most students seem to prepare for the TOEFL at cram school B. That is why they are crowded with students. But I do not like places bustling with people. Also, I heard that cram school B only focuses on memorization. So, I decided to enrol in another mega cram school.
From the TOEFL prep group’s comments, it was also found that cram school B is well known for TOEFL preparation among test takers. In particular, it was found that cram school B has their own features of test preparation such as memorization (Jung’s comments). It seems that information about cram schools was shared and was used for choosing a course.

Compared to the TOEFL prep group, this IELTS prep group mostly used comments written by enrolled test takers on the cram schools’ web sites in order to select a cram school because IELTS preparation was not as common as TOEFL preparation among students. For this reason, the number of cram schools was fewer than that of TOEFL cram schools. In addition, lists of IELTS cram schools were referred to in the students’ comments and shared with relevant people.

However, given that test takers choose cram schools based on web sites and pamphlets (and reported in interviews that they trusted the information provided), then it is also important to consider the reliability of the information provided in these documents. Many cram schools provide pamphlets advertising their instructors and courses. Oftentimes these materials guarantee high scores in a short period of time. However, these materials are created by the cram schools themselves. While conducting fieldwork, I interviewed one staff member at a prep school who stated that it is possible to fabricate profiles of instructors in order to enrol more test takers. In addition, the staff member added that the reasons for doing this were because parents and students really trust instructors who have graduated from high-ranking universities in Korea, have experiences studying abroad and accuracy rate of knowing questions on actual test. In addition, the staff member explained that good comments on the internet about cram schools and instructors are sometimes written by part-time workers who are employed by cram schools.

While the TOEFL prep group and the IELTS prep group tended to search for well-known cram schools for targeted test preparation, the TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc prep groups tended to search for well-known instructors. Many of the comments revealed that some of the instructors for these courses were infamous for being strict and humiliating students during class. The following are the TOEIC-Speaking prep group and the OPIc prep group’s comments:

Euen: I’ve heard that many well-known instructors for TOEIC-Speaking or OPIc test preparation discipline students in a very strict way. For
example, Ms. K says, “Do it again!” when a student hesitates to answer a question. But if the student makes the same mistake again, Ms. K repeatedly says, “Do it again, do it again!” to the student until she hears the correct answer. Some students were crying and left the class because the instructor humiliated them in front of other students. In this case, we hesitate to speak English not because we lack English skills but because we are in an unfamiliar or unfriendly context. Despite that, she controls and punishes students like a soldier. So, I really prefer a good teacher for speaking test preparation. In this sense, Ms. Joy’s class is well-known for good teaching among students. So, I decided to attend this class.

Jong: My friends strongly recommended Ms. Joy’s class for TOEIC-Speaking preparation. They said that she is a good teacher for students. So, I decided to attend this class.

Sujin: I searched on the internet for well-known cram schools for OPIc preparation and then I found out that there are many positive comments about Ms. Joy’s class. Many students recommended the class. So, I enrolled the class.

It was found that there was some humiliation caused by instructors in these cram schools. Even though students in the class seem to be silent, they know what negative or positive teaching is for improving English speaking skills.

In conclusion, one contribution of this work is that it demonstrates that there is no connection between the type of test a student is preparing for and the type of test preparation they select. The results indicated that participants across test prep groups chose a cram school mode as their main study mode. Another piece of relevant information relates to how test takers select a cram school. Students tended to trust information regarding instructors’ profiles and class curriculum taken from cram schools’ web sites or pamphlets. In addition, the shared information of targeted test preparation among test takers was involved in the choice of test preparation method: there exist lists of well-known cram schools including instructors for targeted test preparation among test takers. The features of a cram school’s test preparation method were used to choose a course. As explained by the TOEFL prep group and some of the
IELTS test takers, cram school B was noted to focus on memorization. Finally, it was found that some instructors humiliate students in class. Observations and personal histories of individual test takers will be presented in Chapter 5.

Ultimately, the choice of study mode by test takers provides important information about test preparation contexts that will be relevant for the next section which focuses on the features of the contexts.

## 4.2 Commitment of time

The second important consideration is to identify test takers’ commitment of time in regards to tasks related to test preparation because that involves a context of test preparation with a high cost implication. This section provides new knowledge about how much time is used on test preparation and how the commitment of time is used. Investigating test takers’ commitment of time on test preparation is also important in terms of understanding the context of the high cost implication on test taker identities which is discussed in Chapter 5. The longer the time spent on test preparation is, the higher the cost to the individual.

In this study, time used on test preparation was different depending on test prep group. As shown in Table 4.2, the TOEFL prep group spent the longest time, 8.7 months on average, on test preparation among all prep groups. Similarly, the IELTS prep group spent 7.5 months on average. Most students were full-time test takers and mostly used a cram school mode. However, the TOEIC-Speaking prep group and the OPIc-prep group spent less than two months on test preparation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of test prep</th>
<th>TOEFL-prep group (Total n=7)</th>
<th>IELTS-prep group (Total n=6)</th>
<th>TOEIC-Speaking prep group (Total n=5)</th>
<th>OPIc-prep group (Total n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total prep time</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cram school mode</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group study mode</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self study mode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The findings reveal that TOEFL and IELTS preparation involve high cost implications. We see this supported by some test takers’ comments below:

Min: I have prepared for the IELTS since February. Until this April, I studied all of the sections on the test in a cram school. Then, from May to July I received writing tutoring from an instructor at the cram school. Then, I enrolled in a speaking class at the cram school for three months. I spent nine months in total at the cram school. Because the tuition fee is expensive, I really tried to finish test preparation, but it took time to raise my score.

Hyun: I have prepared for the IELTS since June, 2010 (interview conducted in November, 2011). I used an online program produced by cram school B for several months. But it was not useful for my test preparation. So, I enrolled in a well-known IELTS cram school. But I stopped and then enrolled in this cram school in November, 2011.

In contrast, the TOEIC-Speaking prep group and the OPIc prep group spent less than 2 months on average. In fact, they seemed to have taken for granted that the targeted test preparation would be between one and two months. The following are TOEIC-Speaking test takers’ comments:

Jong: I plan to prepare for the TOEIC-Speaking for two months.
Researcher: Compared to other test preparation, that seems to be a short period of time.
Jong: Generally, we prepare for the test between one and two months. Also, before this test preparation, we spend between two and four months on TOEIC preparation. Then, we prepare for the TOEIC-Speaking for two months. Compared to the TOEIC, this test is a speaking test and takes less time. Actually, a two month plan for test preparation is enough because we repeatedly practice in order to be familiar with items. If I do this for two months, I may feel fed up with the practice.
Euen: I prepared for the TOEIC-Speaking test for a month and got level 7. I think that the maximum duration of test preparation is two months. After two months, it is really boring…we will be fed up with the practice. Also, it is not helpful to raise a score.

The differences of time spent on test preparation between groups may be explained by two factors: the number of skills measured on a test and the extent to which a required score was higher or not. For example, the TOEFL prep group and the IELTS prep group must prepare for four sections including listening, reading, writing and speaking. In addition, the required score was different depending on purpose. On the other hand, the TOEIC-Speaking prep group and the OPIc prep group only studied a speaking section and the required score was generally intermediate level. Therefore, they spent less time on test preparation compared to the TOEFL prep group and the IETLS prep group.

These findings of the difference between the groups are important because they demonstrate that a high-stakes test does not always equal high pressure test preparation. For the TOEIC-Speaking prep group and the OPIc prep group, test preparation did not seem to be high pressure. They took for granted that it takes two months to achieve their desired score because their requirements were for employment. However, time was an important variable for the TOEFL and IELTS prep groups because there were very high cost implications of test preparation, which have an impact on a test taker identity (discussed in Chapter 5). Relevant stories of individual test takers will be presented in Chapter 5.

4.3 Activities

The third important consideration is to identify test takers’ activities in their given study mode because they answer how to prepare for a test. What we learn from comparing the activities across modes is that the type of activity depends on the study mode. In particular, this section provides original findings concerning what and how test takers learn in cram school modes, including test takers’ reaction to instruction, and how they take a test and react to testing performance.
As shown in Table 4.3, the TOEFL group participated in reading and memorizing across modes. On the other hand, the other three groups mainly participated in spontaneous speaking practice in pairs or as individual work. The following provides details about these activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of test prep</th>
<th>TOEFL-prep group</th>
<th>IELTS-prep group</th>
<th>TOEIC-Speaking prep group</th>
<th>OPIc-prep group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cram school mode</td>
<td>Brainstorming for the task</td>
<td>Brainstorming for the task</td>
<td>Brainstorming for the task</td>
<td>Brainstorming for the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Reading aloud</td>
<td>-Reading aloud</td>
<td>-Reading aloud</td>
<td>-Reading aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Memorizing</td>
<td>-spontaneous speaking</td>
<td>-Pair work</td>
<td>-Pair work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ss’own answers</td>
<td>-practice in pair work</td>
<td>-Individual speaking performance</td>
<td>-Individual speaking performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group study mode</td>
<td>Instructor s-guided</td>
<td>No provided</td>
<td>- Spontaneous speaking practice in pair work</td>
<td>- Spontaneous speaking practice in pair work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Presenting prepared answers</td>
<td>No provided</td>
<td>- Spontaneous speaking practice in pair work</td>
<td>- Spontaneous speaking practice in pair work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Watching online program</td>
<td>-Spontaneous speaking practice in pair work</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Reading a text book</td>
<td>-Speaking</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>-Watching online program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Memorizing</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self study mode</td>
<td>-Reading a text book</td>
<td>-Speaking</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>-Watching online program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Memorizing</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4.3.1 Domination of instructor talk

One feature of the cram school mode is instructor talk in test preparation classes. This aspect is important because instructor talk relates to presence or absence of student talk in a class. The more the instructor talks, the less the students talk. In order to identify domination of teacher talk, the three observed classes were analysed for the percentage of time and amount of time of teacher and student talk as well as the use of teacher talk time. Generally speaking, when we consider the language used in this mode, the teachers mainly talked in Korean when explaining about a topic while they used English when performing answers of speaking tasks. The following are features of the observed classes.

- IELTS-Speaking class in cram school C

This cram school is small and only for IELTS preparation. Even though there was no guard or CCTV like the other cram schools in this study, a reception desk for registration played the role of gatekeeper. Access to classrooms was only possible for enrolled students as it was not open to the public.

This IELTS class had around 40 students. The seating arrangement was in rows. The class had interaction between the instructor and students. There was also more student activity in pairs which meant there was more interaction between students. This class did not provide a group study option for students after class. However, some of the students voluntarily organized group study sessions after class.

- Less explanation vs more pair work

Compared to TOEIC-Speaking and OPIc classes, there was less instructor talk but more student talk as shown in Table 4.4. As can be seen, the instructor talk in the class occupied less than 40% of class time. They spent 20 minutes of the total class time. In contrast, the student talk occupied over 50% of class time. One main feature of the class was to require the students’ own answers instead of having them memorize answers.
**Table 4.4 Instructor talk in the IELTS class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inr talk (as % of class time)</th>
<th>Amount of time on Inr talk</th>
<th>Ss talk (as % of class time)</th>
<th>Amount of time on Ss talk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IELTS class</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>20min/55min</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>30min/55min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ss = Students, Inr=Instructor*

As the IELTS-speaking class started, the instructor handed out the day’s materials. Next, students were asked to brainstorm the topic for several minutes. Then, he explained it for 20 minutes. After that, students worked in pairs for 30 minutes to practice questions from the materials. They practised using spontaneous speaking. In addition, they only once read aloud the answers at the end of class. This IELTS class also had much student laughter. The teacher usually gave funny examples when explaining the topic and the students often laughed. Students also asked questions often related to the tasks. However, the class had no speaking assessment and the students had no opportunity to receive feedback on their speaking performance.

- **TOEIC-Speaking and OPIc classes in cram school D**

This large-sized cram school is well known to TOEIC relevant test preparation including speaking tests. In the lobby there were reception desks for registration and leaflets to advertise classes and instructors. One noticeable feature of this school was that there were many kinds of pamphlets for advertising instructors on every board in the school. It appeared that there was competition between instructors for enrolling students. This cram school also had guards inside of the buildings. In order to enter classes, a registration card must be shown to an instructor during the first class for identification.

These two classes were taught separately by one instructor. Compared to the IELTS preparation class, the TOEIC and the OPIc preparation classes had a seating arrangement in a circle as shown in Figure 4.1. It included a white board at the front of the classroom, a projector on the ceiling, and an instructor’s desk with a computer, microphone, and chair.
The number of students in the observed classes was around 15 in each class. Among the observed classes, these two classes had the most interaction with peers during class, including greeting and chatting between students before class started. The class activities were mainly accomplished in pairs with the circle seating arrangement. In these classes, the instructor sat with students making it easier for students to ask the instructor questions. These classes provided group study options for students after class.

- **Immediate speaking feedback vs spontaneous performance**

Among the observed classes, these classes had the least domination of instructor talk. As shown in Table 4.5, the class was 60 minutes and the instructor’s talk occupied 20 minutes on average, which is 33% of total class time. This meant that among the observed classes, these classes showed the highest percentage of student practice, around 60% of the total class time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.5 Instructor talk in TOEIC-Speaking class and OPIc class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inr talk as % of class time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC-Speaking class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPIc class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ss = Students, Inr=Instructor

Figure 4.1 Drawing of the TOEIC-Speaking classroom
The instructor taught these classes using the same class procedure: At the beginning of class, she handed out the day’s test-preparation materials, which she made herself. She briefly explained how to understand and answer the task. Then, she addressed a speaking task question and created the answer with students. After reading it aloud once, the students were asked to practise in pairs for ten minutes. Then, every student performed answers one by one and the instructor gave oral feedback. At the end of the class, the students were asked to read aloud some answers from the materials, and then class finished.

The main feature of her teaching was that she focused on spontaneous speaking practice. She asked that students not memorize the answer sheet because it was difficult to remember answers during actual test performance. Therefore, she required every student to perform their own answers as actual tests in every class. After each student’s performance, she gave spoken feedback to them. It made it easier for students to recognize what kinds of problems they had with their speaking. Compared to the IELTS class, only the TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc classes had this speaking assessment which included immediate instructor feedback on performance in every class. She also used the same class procedure in the two different test preparation classes. This seems to show that the type of test does not largely influence her teaching. Rather, the instructor’s teaching style seems to influence the type of test preparation activities. These findings are supported by the students’ comments from these classes:

Won: Compared to other classes, this class gives me many opportunities to speak in English. In particular, the circle seating arrangement shows the feature of this class. We can easily see other students’ performance and listen to it. This class focuses on students’ speaking practice rather than on instructors’ explanations.

Euen: Compared to other classes, this class does not make students feel shameful of their own speaking performance. Rather, this instructor of this class encourages students to speak in English. In particular, her feedback on students’ performance is really helpful for improving my English skills. I learn from classmates’ speaking performance and from her comments on it. The difference between group study and this class is whether we are provided with assessment by an instructor. Even though I
join in the group study, it only gives me an opportunity to speak in English without reliable assessment. In the group study, we do not give critical comments to each other because we are not qualified to assess English speaking. But an instructor can assess our speaking performance.

Most of the students in these classes commented that the features of the classes were to give opportunities to speak English and receive feedback from the instructor on speaking performance. The features of these classes were also observed in the group study sessions after class. Materials, guidelines and a study room were given to students. According to the guidelines, a team leader conducted the group study for one hour. Students worked in pairs and spoke their answers and gave feedback on the speaking performance in turns. Activities in the TOEIC group study and the OPIc group study were only to practice spontaneous speaking the same as in the classes. There were no assignments given during or in preparation of these group study sessions.

Another feature of the class was shown in the student-generated group study after class. Two IELTS test takers in this study voluntarily organized a group study with their classmates or through the online test preparation community, discussing what materials to use, when and where to study, and how they would study. For example, Sunny practised with classmates after class in pairs, the same as the in-class activity, using questions from the handouts. Min practiced with a peer on Skype, simulating the actual test. Their speaking practice was the same as pair work in class.

If we return to the research questions, the above findings show that activities in the cram school mode were different depending on the instructor and test type: The students in the IELTS class participated in pair work without assessment. The TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc classes participated in pair work and performed individual speaking tasks which were responded to with oral feedback from the instructor.

What the observed classes had in common was that their classroom activities were repeated in each class procedure. They tended to focus on familiarity with items, using repeated practice. For example, the IELTS class’s explanation and pair work mode were repeated in every class. The TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc classes’ activities were the same during each class.

These findings are important because we see that students’ test preparation was influenced by test preparation in the cram school. In particular, what the students learned from the classes continued in their group study and self-study activities. They
did the activities in the modes that they learned in the classes. In group study or self-study modes, TOEFL test-takers did not practise spontaneous speaking. Instead they read sample answers or memorized them. In contrast, IELTS, TOEIC-Speaking, and OPIc test-takers did not memorize sample answers. Instead they practiced in pairs or individually, using their own answers. This feature of repeated activities in cram schools was a variable to make some test takers who studied over 3 months tired of test preparation practice. I return to this discussion in Chapter 5, presenting personal histories of individual test takers.

4.3.2 Actual test performance

Across modes, test takers took an actual test during test preparation. Depending on test prep groups, the test takers took the tests a variable amount of times. For example, the TOEIC Speaking group and OPIc group took a test twice on average. The TOEFL prep group and IELTS prep group took a test at least three times on average.

One feature of actual test performance is that test takers react to the test environment of a specific test in different ways. For example, the IELTS-speaking test is a face to face interview test. During approximately 14 minutes, an examiner asks questions to a test taker. Most IELTS test takers in the study were sensitive to an examiner’s reaction to their answers. The following represents their comments:

Hyun: During test preparation, I took the IELTS test three times. In most of the speaking section on the IELTS, I have found that an examiner’s reaction depends on my answer. For example, questions about sports were asked by an examiner. But this topic was difficult for me to answer. While answering, the examiner looked unhappy and I became nervous because of his reaction. At the same time, I thought that my answer must not be going well.

Researcher: How did you recognize it?

Hyun: As I repeated a simple answer, he did not look happy with my answer. But when I described using a wider variety of expressions, he appeared to be interested in my response. So, when he looked unhappy, it made
me think that I was speaking something wrong. I am influenced by an examiner’s reaction to my answer.

Suk: In the speaking section of the IELTS, I am easily influenced by an examiner’s reaction to my answer and his pronunciation. When an examiner asked me a question, I could not understand his question because his accent was very strange to me. At least, he didn’t seem to be British or American. So, I felt confused with his accent and several times I asked him to repeat the question. Then, I started to feel more nervous. Basically, taking a test in and of itself is nerve-wracking. But depending on an examiner, anxiety can be increased. For example, in another speaking test on the IELTS, I took the test in the late afternoon and the examiner looked very tired. From the beginning of the test, he seemed to want to finish the test quickly. I was sensitive with his reaction and felt more anxious. But in the other speaking section on the test, the examiner reacted to my answers with kindness, so I could speak with confidence. Depending on the examiner, my anxiety level is different.

Compared to the IELTS test takers’ comments, most of the TOEFL test takers and the TOEIC-Speaking test takers commented having a distracting testing environment related to the delivery mode of a test. The following are TOEIC-Speaking test takers’ comments:

Euen: The most difficult thing in the actual test is the speaking of the person sitting next to me. It bothers me and makes it difficult to answer. Sometimes I cannot focus on my speaking. I can hear their speaking.

Jong: The testing environment was really noisy. So, it is not easy to focus on my speaking. Even though there were partitions between test takers, it was useless because I still heard the other test takers speaking their answers. Some of them answered really loudly. It really made me crazy.
The TOEFL test includes four sections, and the starting and ending of each section depends on an individual. In this sense, TOEFL test takers were easily distracted by other test takers’ speaking performance.

Jung: The most terrible thing was that the person next to me started a speaking section on the test when I was completing a listening section or a reading section. While focusing on the test, the person’s answers to the speaking section really bothered me.

Tae: During the actual test, the most important thing is to concentrate on my testing performance because the testing environment is really bad. For example, when I was completing the reading section, the person next to me was doing a speaking section. It affected my concentration on the test. At that time I was really annoyed with the noise. This was especially because that test was my first test and I already felt nervous. But my anxiety increased because of the bad testing environment. Anyway, I really tried to focus on my testing performance but it was not easy.

The TOEFL prep group explained that the condition of the testing environment increased test taker anxiety. In addition, the condition of the testing environment was used for cheating by some test takers in the study. For example, Jung explained how she learned how to cheat from her class: It is to write down the person’s spoken answer while sitting next to them when she is hearing directions for the listening section of the test. She pretends to listen to directions on the listening test, but in actuality she is really trying to take notes about the person’s speaking answers. Jung’s comments were also supported by Young’s comments:

Researcher: Many test takers say that they learn a tip from test preparation to use the testing environment to raise a score. In your case, have you ever learned the tip from test preparation class in a cram school?

Young: I know it is very general in test preparation classes in cram schools. They teach practical tips for raising scores during the actual test. Even the tips can be easily found on websites for test preparation.
Young took cheating for granted. The method of cheating was taught in cram schools and the information could also be found on test preparation web sites. Even though it could be detected as a kind of cheating, Jung and Young commented that it was never detected during actual TOEFL test performance. They said that cheating on actual TOEFL tests is popular between test takers. Their stories related to cheating on actual test will be discussed in Chapter 5. Across test prep groups in this study, only the TOEFL prep group commented on cheating on the actual test. The distracting testing environment was used for efficient cheating with templates. In the following section, more detailed templates are discussed.

These findings are important because students’ speaking performance was influenced by the testing environment regardless of their test results. Their environment was not stable for speaking performance. These findings are also very important because they demonstrate that the TOEFL testing environment was used for cheating with templates, which was explicitly taught in cram schools.

4.4 Materials

The last important consideration is to identify features of test preparation materials across modes because test preparation materials play an important role in test preparation. What we learn from this section is that published textbooks were almost never used in class. Instead, materials created by instructors were mainly used. Students also trusted the materials. As shown in Table 4.6, there is only one TOEFL textbook, which was used only as supplementary material. The textbook includes an introduction to the speaking section of the test, useful expressions, advice for making outlines and note-taking, speaking questions, and actual tests. Compared to the instructor-made materials, this book does not include lists of actual past tests. Instead, it has more sections where students fill in the blanks of outlines and practice note-taking including Korean-English translation writing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (Title)</th>
<th>Collected Source</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Layout</th>
<th>Language type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL Class instructor 1</td>
<td>Interview student 1 in cram school B</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL Class instructor 2</td>
<td>Interview student 2 in cram school B</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL Class instructor 3</td>
<td>Interview student 3 in cram school B</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL Class instructor 4</td>
<td>Interview student 4 in cram school Y</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL Class instructor 5</td>
<td>Interview student 5 in cram school K</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL Class instructor 6</td>
<td>Interview student 6 in cram school M</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL Class instructor 7</td>
<td>Interview student 7 in cram school T</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Cho</td>
<td>Interview student 1,2,3</td>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Explanations, practice, questions and answers</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS-Speaking Class instructor</td>
<td>Observed class in cram school C</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Questions and Sample Answers</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC-Speaking Class instructor</td>
<td>Observed class in cram school D</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Questions, Sample Answers &amp; Useful expressions</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPIc Class instructor</td>
<td>Observed class in cram school D</td>
<td>Hand outs</td>
<td>Sample Answers &amp; Useful expressions</td>
<td>Korean &amp;English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructor-made materials are a type of handouts, which are regularly given to students in classes. The layout generally includes questions and sample answers written in Korean and English. Across the materials, distinctive features were found in the TOEFL materials: First is the use of templates and second are lists of past tests. The following are the details of the features.

### 4.4.1 Templates

Among the analysed materials, templates were found only in the TOEFL materials across the cram school mode. Regardless of different cram schools, they had similar templates. These templates play an important role in the TOEFL materials because they provide organization of sample answers. This means that the templates are structures of how to answer the TOEFL tasks. Each task on the TOEFL speaking section has a template as shown in Table 4.7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Topic Sentence)</th>
<th>I prefer Ving to Ving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First,</td>
<td>(I think A is better than B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be specific,</td>
<td>First,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To be specific,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second,</td>
<td>Second,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example,</td>
<td>For example,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For these reasons,</td>
<td>For those reasons,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school plans/offers/decided</td>
<td>According to the reading,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(According to the letter, the writer wants to v</td>
<td>(introduction of topic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The man/woman agrees/disagrees</td>
<td>In the lecture, the professor explains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First, he/she says that</td>
<td>First, the professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second, he/she mentions that</td>
<td>Second, the professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For these reasons, the man/woman believes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those are what the professor has said in the lecture.

According to the conversation, the man/woman’s problem is

The woman/man gives (The M & W discuss) 2 possible solutions. One solution is to (verb) and the other one is to (verb)

I think the 1st/2nd option is better for him/her. 1st, if he/she he/she can solve this problem 2nd, even if he/she For these reasons, I believe that the better choice for the man/woman is...

Each template was taught to students when each speaking task was introduced to them. Across different cram schools, the TOEFL materials had similar templates. Even Jung, who studied in a different cram school, commented that templates were taught in test preparation classes. Regardless of the different cram schools, most students were required to memorize similar templates in test preparation classes. The students also used these templates during the actual test as explained in section 4.3.2. The following are Jung’s comments:

Jung: One month later an instructor taught tips to raise one’s score in the testing environment. For example, there was another tip. In the testing place, two sheets are given to us. During the directions for the reading section, we write down speaking templates which we learned from our class: For the first question, “in my opinion, first of all”, for the second question, “I prefer A to B because of..”, for the third question, “According to the notice, school plans to…. (blank)...he agrees with…..”, for the fourth question, “The professor talks about…..”, for the fifth question, “In the conversation….she agrees with…..” for the last question, “In the lecture, the professor argues…..” When we finish writing the templates on the sheet, the directions for the reading section also finish. After the reading section, the directions for the listening section start. At that time, we fill
in the blanks between templates using the answers from the person sitting next to us, as I commented. After the listening section, there is a break. But sometimes the proctor takes away the sheets during the break. That’s bad luck.

These findings are important because they demonstrate that the TOEFL test was misused in the cram school mode. The students in the cram school mode were required to answer according to templates and to memorize sample answers. In addition, the use of templates as a cheating device was explicitly taught in cram schools.

### 4.4.2 Lists of past tests

The reason that students highly valued instructor-made materials is because questions in the materials are items on actual past tests. The instructors assembled collections of past actual tests. They were important resources for their test preparation. Among the materials, the TOEFL materials specifically provide lists of past tests, called ‘question banks’. As shown in Figure 4.2, these materials include item pools that have past question sets from actual tests in Korea or the USA. The questions were sorted under headings of actual test dates and locations.

![Figure 4.2 Lists of past actual tests](image-url)
Generally the success of an instructor in a cram school depends on the accuracy rate of knowing the questions on the actual test. As a result, they focus on selecting the question banks from exams and creating answers in the form of materials. Then, they teach these to students in class. Therefore, this feature seems to be excessively shown in the specific lists which include the dates and locations which only appear in TOEFL materials.

Regarding one feature of the TOEFL materials, materials published by cram school B were often mentioned in TOEFL test takers’ interviews. For example, students in self study or group study used textbooks, online programmes, or free website for TOEFL preparation produced by cram school B. Across study modes, relevant materials to cram school B were used by test takers in this study. Compared to the TOEFL test prep group, other test prep groups did not use materials published by one specific cram school or publishing company. This feature was only shown in the TOEFL prep group’s use of materials. In addition, these features of test preparation seem to be very common among test takers.

In conclusion, cram school mode across a type of test played an important role in test preparation in this study. As shown in Section 4.1, test takers tended to choose a cram school as their study mode. However, as shown in Section 4.3, their study environment tended to be different from a traditional learning environment. It was a closed, private space and only open to enrolled students. What students learned from the cram school mode depended on instruction: The three classes, the IELTS-Speaking, the TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc classes, included pair work that requires students to produce their own answers. However, most TOEFL test takers examined who studied the test in cram schools commented that instructors in cram schools overly depend on use of materials and memorization of sample answers. In particular, memorization of sample answers depended on the spoken level of English. Novice and intermediate learners focused on memorization, for example, whereas intermediate learners spoke spontaneously.

Another finding is that while the same instructor separately taught both the TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc classes the instruction was the same in both classes even though the test is different. These findings show that the type of test does not influence the study mode and test preparation activities. Rather it was the teaching methods that resulted in test preparation activities being different. Finally, the atmosphere of a class depended on the instructor.
However, what the observed classes had in common was that their classroom activities were repeated in each class procedure. They tended to focus on familiarity with items, using repeated practice. In addition, instructor-made materials across modes played an important role in test preparation. The questions in the materials are items on actual past tests, and they are more useful resources than textbooks. This result is not consistent with previous studies investigating test preparation materials. Wall (1999, 2005) explained that the teachers in Sri Lanka tended to use test prep textbooks rather than make their own materials. In addition, Wall and Horak (2011) studied TOEFL course books which teachers used in their classrooms because the teachers trusted the commercial materials rather than their own materials. However, in this study, templates from TOEFL materials were used by some students to cheat, which they learned to do in their cram schools.

These findings show that the cram school mode is deeply involved in test takers’ test preparation. Additionally, they provide important contexts that make it possible to discuss how test preparation and its features impact test takers’ identities in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5  Test taker identities

This chapter identifies relationships between test preparation and test-taker identities, and describes how test takers construct their identities in test preparation contexts in order to answer the research questions of this study, namely:

2. How do test takers construct their identities during test preparation?
3. How does test preparation impact test takers’ identities?

In particular, this chapter provides stories of individual test takers in three emergent phases of test preparation, discussing how test preparation influences test takers’ identities. The findings are illustrated by data, and are interpreted by theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987; Seeman, 1959). In order to answer the questions, class and participation observations were conducted, twenty-two test takers were interviewed and documentary sources were collected. All participant names are pseudonyms. The data were then analysed into coding scheme as discussed in Chapter 3.

These findings make original contributions to the field of language testing: They provide new knowledge about links between test preparation and test taker identities over time. As discussed in Chapter 4, this study identifies how the context and features of test preparation impact test takers’ identities. Through this analysis, test takers’ voices are heard.

This chapter is organized into three sections. Each section presents features of the three groups of test takers at the starting point of test preparation, in terms of goal, choice and identity. In addition, stories of individual participants are illustrated by the data, indicating how test takers constructed themselves in relation to speaking practices during test preparation, and were influenced by test preparation including changes over time. Last, it provides a summary of findings and discusses how test takers’ identities were changed.
5.1 Voluntarily unemployed

First, this section identifies what features voluntarily unemployed test takers had at the starting point of test preparation in terms of goal, choice and identity. Second, stories of individual participants, including those of Sunny, Suk, Hyun and Min, are presented by the data, identifying how test preparation fits into the life goals of the test takers, attempting to understand the place of test preparation in these stories, and the impact the test preparation experience has upon test takers’ identity. In particular, the section argues that a test taker’s identity relates to a test taker’s choice of test preparation, speaking practices, and changes over time. This is supported by the findings presented below, and interpreted by Eccles (2009)’s identity in a life-defining choice, Higgins’ (1987) notions of self and self-discrepancy, and Seeman’s (1959) alienation theory.

What we can learn from test takers’ voices is how their identity acted as drivers on their choice, related to speaking activities, and was influenced by test preparation including what they had in common or what differed with regard to the impact of test preparation on their identities.

This group of test takers had previously occupied highly-paid professional jobs but they decided to give up their jobs in order to prepare full-time for a language test. As shown in Table 5.1, the five test takers, Sunny, Suk, Hyun, Min and Eu, in the IELTS prep group prepared for the test in order to participate in career development by studying abroad. This is a very significant life-style choice, with high cost implications including time spent, financial expenditure and energy on test preparation. They chose test preparation because they strongly believed that the test preparation would be more valuable rather than working because overseas study would open doors for their futures. They select the IELTS cram school C through reviewing comments written by enrolled test takers on the cram schools’ web sites as described in Chapter 4. They would like to be more confident, skilled, and knowledgeable people in their fields by studying abroad. The higher the cost to the individual, the greater the sense of “powerlessness” or “meaninglessness” they experienced as test preparation continued. Among them, the four participants, Sunny, Suk, Hyun, and Min, constructed their identities as test preparation continued. Their stories will be discussed in the following sections.
### Table 5.1 Goals of test preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of test prep</th>
<th>TOEFL-prep group (Total n=7)</th>
<th>IELTS-prep group (Total n=6)</th>
<th>TOEIC-Speaking prep group (Total n=5)</th>
<th>OPIc-prep group (Total n=5)</th>
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<td>n=5</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 5.1.1 Sunny’s Story

Sunny was a 28-year-old single woman who had been a teacher in a public school for over 3 years after university graduation. She gave up her job, however, in order to prepare for the test. As a full-time test taker, she prepared for 11 months (from June, 2011 to April, 2012) in total: For the first four months she used an online program for learning basic skills, and then for the last seven months she moved from her hometown to a place near a cram school in Seoul in order to fully focus on test preparation. Her identity was constructed in three phases including test preparation choice, English-speaking practices, and changes over time. What the researcher learned from the case of Sunny is how her identities acted as drivers on her choice and were constructed by speaking activities, and influenced by test preparation over time.

- **Sunny’s goal, choice and identity: From part-time teacher to lecturer**

  It is important to understand why Sunny started test preparation because it provides information of how her identity acted as a driver on her choice at this stage. Sunny’s identity related to her job experience. She was a part-time teacher in a special education school for three years. While working, she had prepared for the teacher qualification exam in order to be a full-time teacher in a public school. However, she failed the exam and changed her goal to overseas study.

  Sunny: I really like to teach. That is why I prepared for the teacher qualification exam in order to be a full-time teacher in a public school. My major is special education. This area in Korea is not as developed compared to western countries. So, the job-market is very limited. My option in
Korea is to be a full-time or part-time teacher in a school or to get a job in a community centre. However, other than being a full-time teacher in a school, jobs are unstable and salaries are low. So, I prepared for the teacher qualification exam but failed the test several times. I needed to change my goal because I am 28 years old. I do not want to spend my whole life to prepare for the teacher qualification exam in order to be a full-time teacher in a public school. I want to get more opportunities through overseas study. I expect to get better jobs and to speak English well if I come back to Korea after studying abroad. Also, I could teach students in college.

When she started to prepare for the test, Sunny believed that her IELTS preparation was better than the test preparation for a public school teacher exam in that overseas study would give her more opportunities beyond becoming a teacher in a public school. In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), two sets of identity acted as drivers on test preparation: she viewed her actual self as a teacher, with her higher self-view devoted to relevant skills. Her ideal self is to be a more confident, skilled, and knowledgeable lecturer in her field. Through identity construction, she strongly believed that the test preparation would be more valuable than working because overseas study would open doors for her future. This finding is important because her choice of test preparation is a significant life-style choice, with very high cost implications. Her test preparation, however, became high-stakes. She became influenced by test preparation in later phases. She realized there were gaps between what she was and what she would like to be during very long test preparation.

Sunny’s English-mediated identity: From competent teacher to incompetent test taker

After setting a goal, Sunny selected the IELTS cram school. As explained in Chapter 4, her test preparation class did not require her to memorize answers or use templates, but to join in on pair work using their own answers. While preparing for the IELTS, the first challenge which she faced was with the speaking practice. As she practiced the speaking section with peers, she began to compare herself to peers and to perceive herself as related to the activity.
Sunny: After class, I decided to practise with three peers and do speaking practice in a group study for over one hour every day.

Researcher: How do you practise in group study?

Sunny: We use materials which the instructor gave us in class. We simply ask questions using the materials and give answers in the group. The goal of this study is to have opportunities to speak. However, my peers fluently speak English, but I do not. I compare myself to them, why can’t I speak well? We started in the same class and were familiar with each other. We all have seats together and practise English speaking together. Yesterday after class, we practised the speaking but I did not speak fluently and paused several times. I really felt ashamed of myself. Even when I tried to practise, I really felt annoyed with myself. Why can’t I speak English well?

Pair work mode was not only an opportunity to practise English; it was also a context within which she constructed her identity as a test taker. As she compared herself with her peers, she felt ashamed and embarrassed about her English speaking skills. Among the four sections of the test, she thought that speaking related to her identity. She believed that her lack of English speaking skill represented who she is. She therefore did not want to reveal herself --through the speaking of English-- to her peers.

Sunny: I think that speaking is to reveal who I am. So, whenever I practise English speaking with peers who speak better than I, it seems to say to them, “I am not good at speaking like you”. Except for on the speaking section, I do not need to show my real skills to peers. My pressure comes from the fact that I cannot hide myself when speaking to others. I really feel ashamed and frustrated with revealing myself as someone who does not speak well in front of people who do speak well. I do not want to make a fool of myself in front of my peers.

In terms of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987, p. 323), she experienced “dejection-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, “actual self versus ideal self”: She believed that speaking represents herself. The practice with peers made her reveal her actual self as being not able to speak well when compared to her peers. Sunny’s peer
group’s English speaking through the pair work constructed her ideal self. As her actual self did not match her ideal self, she felt ashamed. In the goal setting, she was a teacher in a school before starting test preparation and had never felt ashamed with her English speaking skills.

However, during test preparation, her actual self was changed from a competent teacher to an incompetent test taker with regard to speaking activities. As she prepared for the test, she compared herself in the past as a teacher and in the present as test taker, reflecting through her English-speaking practices. She seemed to recognize the gap between the two different identities.

Sunny: Before starting test preparation, I was a teacher. In front of students, I taught and helped them. Also, my major was not English and I had never spoken English with a peer before. I confidently talked to my students. This was my first time to use English. I see myself as one who does not speak well. Even when I really want to express my ideas, I pause and do not use the proper words. I know what to say in Korean but failed to speak English fluently.

Even though she had been under pressure when she practised speaking English, she studied hard. As she practised, she needed some help from the class instructor, who did not comment on her speaking performance. She just followed instructions without asking for feedback.

Sunny: This class provides many opportunities to speak in pair work. But the instructor does not assess our speaking performance. We just practise with each other but no one comments on our speaking performance. I think that the instructor needs to be involved in our speaking practice to provide feedback. He makes students feel happy in class but we need our speaking to be corrected.

After three months of test preparation, she moved to the advanced class and found that her classmates spoke very well compared to those in the intermediate class. The student-work mode in the advanced class was also different from that in the intermediate class, in which the instructor now pointed to a student at random and asked
a speaking question. The advanced class student was then required to answer the question quickly in front of peers.

Sunny: Starting this month, my speaking class was changed to an advanced class. Each class including basic, intermediate and advanced has a three months course. So, now I am learning in the advanced class. While the practice in the intermediate class is to speak with peers, in this advanced class we have a seat in a circle and the instructor chooses one of us and asks a speaking question. Then, the person should answer the question in front of their peers.

However, this new work-mode seemed to be an unfriendly environment that only increased her speaking anxiety. Even though she had been upgraded, she still compared herself with peers and struggled with the different work mode. Her sense of shame and fear became worse:

Sunny: For several days, I really hated this practice because I was not ready to answer. I was really pressured by this activity. I am still struggling with speaking. I am not ready to speak in front of peers. But the instructor just chooses anyone and the person should say something in order to answer. When taking a seat in the class, I always feel nervous and really tried to avoid eye contact with the instructor in order not to be chosen by him. Unfortunately, when I am asked to answer a question in front of my peers, I really worry whether the peers judge me through my English speaking because I am the worst speaker in the class. Others seem to speak English well when compared to me. Compared to the intermediate class, my classmates in the advanced class have experience about studying abroad. They speak fluently in English when they are asked to answer a question. But I have never been to a foreign country for to study English. So, it will take a long time for me to speak well.

She realized that the classmates in the new class were different from her in terms of their English educational background. They studied abroad before test preparation. She was more anxious and fearful when she performed. However, when she practiced with a
peer who seemed to have a similar speaking level to her own, she was not anxious about her speaking.

Sunny: In order to overcome my English speaking, I practice with my classmate who is much older than me. His speaking is very, very slow but he does speak fluently. He wants to get a score of 5.0 or 5.5. He does not need a higher score. I think that practising with him does not make me fearful.

Therefore, she continued her pair work with him until he finished his test preparation. This shows that she had different reactions to the proficiency of her peers. This classmate was the only one with whom she practised English speaking without negative feelings. However, the classmates in the advanced class seemed to speak very well from her point of view. Their English speaking constructed her ideal self in English speaking. Therefore, she wanted to return back to the intermediate class but was rejected from doing so by the instructor. He advised her to practise with the advanced peers in the class in order to improve her English speaking skills. She followed his advice and prepared for the class activity, making her own answers to questions and memorizing them. Even when doing that, the overall experience was still negative for her.

Sunny: So, I decided to go back to the intermediate class and asked the instructor if I could do so. But he advised me to stay in the advanced class because I would improve more if I practised with advanced learners. So, I did not move classes and tried to prepare for answering questions. I made my own answers and memorized them. But when I was asked to answer unprepared questions, I went blank. This practice time was really terrible time for me.

In order to minimize self-discrepancy, she prepared answers and memorized them. In terms of Higgins’ (1987) self-discrepancy, she thought that speaking reveals oneself to one’s peers. In addition, class activities including pair work acted as a context within which she constructed her English-mediated identity. During pair work, she assessed herself using the proficiency of their peers thus shaping her own self-image in English speaking. The ideal self in English speaking was constructed by their peers’ English
speaking. If she did not speak as well as their peers, she thought that the peer might also assess her speaking skill and judge her to be a poor speaker of English. Therefore self-discrepancy led the test taker to experience emotional problems.

- Sunny’s changes over time: Being “powerless in a prison”

As test preparation continued over several months, she repeatedly said that she was getting “fed up with test preparation” and she seemed to be “powerless in a prison”.

Researcher: As you continue to prepare for the test, have you noticed any changes about yourself?
Sunny: Yes, there is one. I am getting fed up with this test preparation. I feel pained…I feel like I’m being imprisoned. I always study in the cram school. I feel like I am powerless, in a prison. Even though no one in the cram school forces me to stay there, I seem to be in a prison. Whatever I do, I always say to myself that I should study harder and harder. So, I could not rest and enjoy my life. I am getting stressed and totally fed up with the test preparation.

This 29 year old single woman selected a very challenging task in her life in order to study abroad. She left her job as a part-time teacher and committed her life to test preparation in order to achieve her goal. She studied hard every day in the cram school as a full-time test taker. She came to class in the morning and studied until late at night. However, she began to compare her daily test preparation in the cram school to being imprisoned. She thought about her age and status as a test taker, recognizing the reality of test preparation. She was getting very tired and seriously depressed by the test preparation.

Researcher: What things make you feel “powerless”?
Sunny: This daily life in the cram school itself makes me depressed and powerless. I feel pained. I am locked in the test preparation. Whatever I do, I do not feel free from test preparation. Every day I come to this cram school in the morning and I leave late at night around 9:30 pm. I could not return home earlier than then even if I wanted to rest. My life is completely consumed by this test preparation. I started the test
preparation last year and continued it. So, now I am 29 years old. I try not to care about my age. But my friends seem to think my choice of test preparation is challenging compared to their choices. Because they work and make money, they think that I am very different from them. In particular, my friends are concerned about my getting married, but now I am preparing for the test as a single woman. I come to care more about my age and my status in test preparation.

Compared to her motivation during the first interview, it was a very distinctive change. For example, at the first meeting, she did not feel tired of test preparation nor showed negative feelings related to her daily life. Rather, she looked energetic, and responded that “this test preparation is everything to my life”:

Researcher: Since you started test preparation, do you think that it has influenced anything about yourself including in your life?
Sunny: Influenced? Hum…Simply speaking, this test preparation is everything in my life. In order to prepare for the test, I left my job. I left my hometown and moved to Seoul. I spend most of time on test preparation in the cram school from morning to late night.

Researcher: Can you tell me about a typical day in your life?
Sunny: Every day I come to class at 9 am and study listening for one hour. Then, from 10 to 2 pm I attend classes. After a one hour lunch, I do assignments and review what I have learned in the classes until about 10 pm. I go home at 11pm. Then, around 12 pm I go to sleep.

However, her change seems to have started after she took her first test: Around six months after starting test preparation, she took a test and found that the test preparation would take longer than she had originally planned. After that, she started to have doubts about her commitment to the test preparation:

Researcher: In the last meeting, you said that “test preparation is everything in my life”. Do you still have the same view of test preparation?
Sunny: Not now. I am thinking about pulling out of the test preparation. Since I left my job, I have been preparing for the test. It has been eight months.
But one week ago, I took my first test but found out that it would be impossible to get the required score within two or three months. I think that it will take longer and longer to get the score I need. If that’s the case, it might be better to teach again rather than continue preparing for the test.

After the first test, she had a short break and visited her hometown. In the interim, she considered stopping test preparation and teaching again. She identified gaps between what she believed and who she is in relation to the actual test preparation. She found that improving English skills through test preparation would take longer that she originally planned. Her parents also worried about her status as a full-time test taker.

Researcher: Why do you think that?
Sunny: After I took the first actual test, I visited my hometown. On my way home, I thought that there is a long way to go for achieving the score… My original plan was to finish the test preparation by spring. But I seem to be unable to achieve the required score within several months. Also, my father asked me if I can finish it soon but I could not answer. So, he is worried about the extension of my test preparation. As time goes by, my savings is reducing. So, I feel nervous about my current life situation. I did not expect that the test preparation would take this long because I tried to do my best since I started. I believed that I could gain the required score if I could study hard. However, I am not sure when I might be able to get the score I require. I cannot see my improvement even though I study hard every day.

She commented, “I lost my way”, and seemed to make a change regarding her test preparation:

Researcher: What do you think about your goal?
Sunny: If you asked me that a month ago, I would have told that I would like to study abroad. However, now I have lost my way. I do not know if I should continue to prepare for the test or not to teach or not.

Researcher: “You lost your way?”
Sunny: Yes, I lost my way. In the next month I might change to a different cram school or stop attending class.

Her results on her first test were an overall score of 5.0 (R/C 5.5, L/C 5, W/C 4.5, S/C 5). While her targeted score was 6.5 in total, she was disappointed with the first test results and with herself. However, she did not make any changes such as changing to a different cram school or having a break as she explained in the above comments. She kept preparing for the test in the same cram school. She seemed to study hard. However, she continued to have negative feelings.

Sunny: Since taking the first test, I have been fed up with test preparation.
Researcher: Is that because of the score you received?
Sunny: Not directly. Actually, after I took the test, I was disappointed in myself. I guessed that the test results would not be good.
Researcher: If it wasn’t the results, as you say, does the reason come from that fact that you cannot see your improvement?
Sunny: Possibly, the two things influenced me negatively at the time. But not now, my feelings are not the result of my test scores or my English skills. It is this daily life of test preparation. It has been nine months.

It had been nine months since she had begun test preparation. She felt very tired by this, and was negatively influenced by her peers’ leaving the cram school. Even though she had worked hard, she was still not sure when she might be able to get the required score. Her test preparation was making her “struggle with herself” and feel “powerless like in a prison”. She wanted to stop test preparation.

Researcher: Do you want to stop test preparation?
Sunny: I do, but I need to get a higher score. That is why I could not stop but I am really fed up with test preparation. I also really feel like I’m being imprisoned in the cram school but I am saying to myself that I should do it. Also, another important thing is that my peers in the cram school are leaving one by one as they finish their test preparation. So, I feel lonely when I’m at the school.
Researcher: How does the test preparation influence how you feel about yourself?
Sunny: It makes me struggle with myself. As I told you, I want to work hard and to do well. But I do not meet my expectations. Even though I study hard, still I find that my English skills are lacking. I still want to study abroad but I am fed up with this test preparation. I have no motivation for the test preparation even though I really wish to achieve my goal. Whatever I do in the test preparation, I could not feel free from it. That is why I feel powerless like I’m in a prison.

After the first test, she experienced “dejection-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, “actual self versus ideal self” (Higgins, 1987, p. 323): Her actual self is a test taker who did not perform well on the test but she gave up her job in order to fully focus on test preparation. She studied hard every day over eight months. What she wanted to be as her ideal self was to earn a PhD through studying abroad and to teach in University. However, she felt frustration and dissatisfaction with the test preparation and herself.

She also experienced meaninglessness (Seeman, 1959) in that she was unclear of the test results as an outcome of the test preparation. This was supported by her comment, “I lost my way in the test preparation”. As she experienced self-discrepancy between her actual self and her ideal self, her emotional problems became serious. However, the impact of the test preparation on her identity did not happen all at once. She seemed to experience gradual powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement (Seeman, 1959). The complexity of alienation was shown in her repeated comments, “I am getting fed up with the test preparation” and “I feel like I’m powerless, in a prison” as test preparation continued. Another reason for her feelings related to the cost value in her daily life during test preparation: She committed herself to test preparation but to feel that she lacked skills despite a heavy workload. She always tried to control herself under the test preparation, struggling with herself. At the same time she felt isolated as her peers left the cram school.

For those reasons, she took the second test as her final test: her scores were 5.5 in total (R/C 6, L/C 6, W/C 5, S/C 5). Compared to the first test results, 5.0 in total (R/C 5.5, L/C 5, W/C 4.5, S/C 5), she improved by 0.5 points. Even though there was slow progress, her targeted score was 6.5 and she decided to stop studying in the cram school. Ultimately, she started to teach again, preparing for the test by herself. In the final interview, she reviewed her test preparation. She had spent 11 months on test
preparation, convincing herself that her English skills had improved. However, she finally did not gain the required score, and repeatedly said, “I feel really sorry for myself”.

Sunny: Compared to the past, my English skills are improved during the test preparation. I did not study English before. I have spent 11 months on IELTS test preparation. Finally I could not earn the required score and I stopped studying in the cram school. Even though I increased my score compared to the start of test preparation, it was nothing. I really felt sorry for myself that I had not studied English before. If I had done it, I could gain the required score. Because my starting point of test preparation was lacking even basic English skills, I just believed that I could get the required score if I followed the instructions of the cram school and worked harder and harder. I believed that I could do this when I started to prepare for the test. However, it was my mistake. During the test preparation, I realized that test preparation generally needs more than basic English skills from the start. I did not consider that fact. I just set a goal of test preparation. I feel really sorry for myself. I spent my life on test preparation but I could not achieve the score I needed.

What she found during test preparation is that her actual self did not match her ideal self. In addition, the experience was “dreadful” as shown in her comments at the last meeting:

Researcher: Are you going to attend class in the cram school?
Sunny: No, Never. It is dreadful.
Researcher: What does that mean?
Sunny: Only that studying in the cram school is dreadful…I am fed up with being locked in the cram school preparing for the test.

However, she still wanted to achieve her goal. She therefore continued to prepare for the test by herself while teaching at a school. In the workplace, she tried to prepare during break times. After work, she tried to go to the library to study. However, it was difficult to focus on test preparation as a part-time test taker. In addition, she was
satisfied being a “teacher”, not a “test taker”. She loved to teach students and it made her feel valuable. She noted her desire to transit from an “incompetent test taker” to a “competent teacher”, and in the end finally abandoned test preparation to focus on teaching.

What we can learn from Sunny’s story is that the impact of test preparation experience on her identity was a devaluation of her sense of self as a test taker. She experienced self-conflict, with negative emotional problems. She viewed herself as insufficient during test preparation, finding that her actual self did not match her ideal self. Her test experience was “dreadful”, as she herself commented. In addition, throughout the test preparation, she explored her identities as a teacher and test taker in terms of processes of identity formation (Marcia, 1966). As she prepared for the test, she compared herself as a teacher in the past, and as a test taker in the present, reflecting through her English-speaking practices. She recognized the gap between the two different identities. Ultimately, while her test preparation not only acquired required knowledge and skills, it also resulted in discovering herself in terms of goals, values and identity, as she faced a series of challenges during preparation.

This last finding was supported by her decision to stop IELTS preparation. Later, she again prepared for the teacher qualification exam in order to become a full-time teacher in a public school. Even though she had failed the exam several times before starting IELTS preparation, she decided to re-commit herself in order to be a teacher. This is because she learned from the IELTS preparation that her identity as a test taker could not make a significant commitment to test preparation: She identified gaps between what she believed and who she was in relation to the actual test preparation. Rather, she discovered herself as a teacher in terms of goals, values and identity. Finally, a year later, she passed the exam and now works at a public school.

5.1.2 Suk’s Story

Suk was a 32-year-old single man who had worked for American international company for over 7 years after university graduation. As a full-time test taker, he prepared for six months (from November, 2011 to April, 2012). His identity was constructed in three phases: test preparation choice, English speaking practices, and
changes over time. What we learn from Suk’s story is how his identities acted as drivers on his choice and were constructed by speaking activities, and influenced by test preparation over time, during which he experienced self-conflict and emotional problems.

- **Suk’s goal, choice and identity: From an employee lacking in English to becoming a more confident professional**

Suk’s goal related to his job experience. He worked for an American international company for over 7 years after graduation. Even though he was a competent employee, he always felt he lacked English speaking skills and was ashamed of himself because his job environment required fluent communication in English. He wished to study abroad because he had no experience about studying abroad, such as being an exchange student.

Suk: I worked for an American international company and English communication was required. I should have communicated with foreign employees. I always felt uncomfortable when speaking English. If only I could speak more fluently, then I could achieve more. Also, I had no experiences of studying overseas like in an exchange student program. I always needed to negotiate with others but my speaking was limited. English is a required skill to survive in my field. Also, related to my job description I wish to study marketing in order to develop myself. I wish to be more confident in English speaking and more knowledgeable in the field of marking.

He planned to study abroad to improve himself, and studied at a cram school for two months. However, he could not continue test preparation while working, and therefore decided to leave his job in order to focus on test preparation. He then selected a well-known cram school by reviewing comments written by enrolled test takers on the cram schools’ web sites. Listed were some specific schools for helping him raise scores, and based on this shared information, he decided to enrol in the cram school.

Suk: For a long time, I planned to study overseas. At first, while working I enrolled in weekend test preparation class for two months. However, it
was really hard to work and study at the same time. I sought advice from my friends about how to solve this problem. Some of them recommended focusing on the test preparation. Therefore, I left my job and now I am doing it.

Researcher: How did you select a cram school?

Suk: I asked about well-known cram schools for IELTS preparation at a study abroad agency company because I could not find any friends who had prepared for the IELTS. They recommended three cram schools to me: cram school B, IELTS 1 and cram school C. Then, I searched on the internet for information about each cram school. Cram school B is the best known mega cram school for most test preparation. But I preferred a specialized IELTS cram school. So, I considered the other two cram schools and read comments from enrolled test takers, instructors’ profiles and class curriculum taken from the cram schools’ web sites. In particular, these comments influenced my choice of a cram school. Many test takers commented that this cram school raised scores during test reparation. Then, I decided to enrol the IELTS C cram school.

When he started to prepare for the test, Suk believed that overseas study would give him more opportunities for improving English. In addition, he believed that a cram school mode would be a fast and easy way to raise scores. Therefore, he willingly chose IELTS preparation full-time.

In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), two sets of identity acted as drivers on test preparation: first, his actual self (as a competent manger in his workplace who lacks English speaking skills). Second, his ideal self was to be more confident, skilled and fluent in English, so he has focused on his future achievement. Through identity construction, he strongly believed that test preparation would be more valuable than working, because overseas study would give him an opportunity to improve his English skills, and consequently future. This finding is important because his choice of test preparation is a significant life-style choice, with very high cost implications. However, his test preparation became high-stakes, as with the example of Sunny. He became negatively influenced by test preparation in later phases, realizing there were gaps between what he was and what he would like to become. His challenges are discussed below.
Suk’s English-mediated identity: “I pretend to speak well but am an idiot”

After setting a goal, Suk prepared for IELTS in the same cram school where Sunny studied. In the beginning course, he thought he did speak better than his peers, but when he moved to an advanced class, he recognized that he felt ashamed when he practised with a peer who spoke well. As with Sunny, Suk compared himself to peers, and he also reacted differently depending on the spoken English level of the peer.

Suk: I think that I am good at English speaking compared to other Korean students. Before starting the test preparation, I worked for an American international company for over 7 years after graduating from university, and I should have used English for communication in my work place. When I was in the basic IELTS class, peers told me I was very good at English speaking. Even the instructor gave me good comments about my speaking. After 3 months, I moved to the intermediate class where we were asked to practise with peers in class. However, in this class I did not seem to speak as well as I did in the basic class. I do not know why. What I was also very surprised at is that some of my peers who did not speak well in the basic class seemed to speak better than I did in this class. I think that they seemed to have improved. So I became aware of the proficiency of my peers when I practised with them. When I did not speak as fluently as my peers, I felt ashamed of myself.

When practising, he became anxious and developed a negative reaction to speaking, in part related to past job experiences in which he had to perform in front of colleagues, wondering whether they judged his relative lack of ability.

Suk: I pretend to speak well, but I am an idiot. When I worked for the international company, I always felt fear in revealing my real self who lacks English speaking skills. My colleagues seemed to assess my English skills were higher than my actual skills. But I know what I am. So, I really tried not to reveal my actual skills. When I practise pair work in the cram school, it reminds me of the experience. Also, I feel the same fear when speaking English.
In terms of self-discrepancy as defined by Higgins (1987, p. 323), he experienced “dejection-related emotions” due to “actual self versus ideal self”: He believed that speaking represented himself. He was really concerned that his actual self would be revealed to others while practising English. Compared to Sunny, Suk’s identity regarding English was constructed by his English speaking practices in the workplace. His ideal self, as considered by others, was being a fluent speaker of English. However, his actual self was pretending to be a speaker of English, “an idiot,” as he called himself. The self-discrepancies between his actual self, his ideal self, and his ought self, became serious as test preparation continued.

- Suk’s changes over time: From a proud man to a test taker addicted to TV

Suk was a 32-year-old single man who had worked for an American international company for over 7 years after university graduation. He took pride in his working experience but wished to study overseas in a postgraduate programme for professional development. He therefore gave up his job and prepared for the IELTS for six months in the same cram school where Sunny studied. Compared to Sunny’s alienation within the cram school during the test preparation, Suk experienced alienation outside of the cram school. However, in the first meeting, he did not report any alienation or negative feelings toward test preparation. He tried to study hard, attending classes and studying in a library. He responded that “my choice of test preparation is right”. At that time he had prepared for the test for over 2 months.

Researcher: You gave up your job to focus on test preparation. How do you prepare for the test? Can you tell me your daily schedule?
Suk: From the morning until afternoon I attend classes in the cram school. After lunch, I study in a library.
Researcher: Do you see any changes in yourself or have any difficulties with test preparation?
Suk: Not really. I do not have any difficulty. Even though I am an unemployed test taker, my friends and colleagues highly value my choice of completing this test preparation to achieve my goal. I think that my choice of test preparation is right. So, I try to study hard. But I am not used to prepare for the test as a full-time test taker. I am easily tempted by my friends. When I worked in the past, I was used to going out for a
drink with my colleagues or friends every night after work because it is a kind of opportunity to relax with your friends. But now I do not work anymore but my friends always call me to go out for a drink. I try to focus on studying but am very used to hanging out with them. But this temptation is not serious but it is not easy to control it. I need to take time to adopt myself as a test taker.

At that time he seems to be used to his previous work life. Even though he tried to focus on test preparation, he seemed to be tempted by his friends. However, he did not strongly notice the impact of test preparation on himself. As test preparation continued over three months, what he repeatedly said was “I am ashamed of myself” and “I feel guilty”. Four months after starting test preparation he took his first test and got the results. The results on his first test were an overall score of 5.0 (R/C 6.5, L/C 5.5, W/C 4.0, S/C 5.5). While his targeted score was 6.5 in total, he was not disappointed with the first test results and with himself.

Researcher: Did you take a test?
Suk: Yes, I did. It was very poor.
Researcher: When did you take the test? Can you tell me the test result?
Suk: Ten days after our first meeting. The total score was 5.0 (R/C 6.5, L/C 5.5, W/C 4.0, S/C 5.5).
Researcher: After getting the results, did it make you feel frustrated or demotivated?
Suk: No. I did not feel that because I took the first test just to experience what the actual test was like. I wished to experience what it felt like to take the test as part of my test preparation.

Compared to Sunny, he was not influenced by his first test results. However, after the first test, he stopped attending the cram school because of expensive tuition fees. In the interview meeting, it was not found that he had any problems after his leaving the cram school.

Researcher: How is your test preparation in the cram school?
Suk: I left the cram school because the tuition fee is really expensive, over 500,000 won a month (around 286 GBP). While studying in the cram school for 5 months, I found out that the curriculum and materials of classes overlapped. So, I thought that it is better to study alone, using the materials. I also enrolled in a one month writing class at a different cram school.

Researcher: Now that you’ve stopped attending the cram school, did you discover any problems?

Suk: No, not yet. I think that I can study it alone.

When he left the cram school, he did not seem to consider how his daily life would influence him. However, afterwards, he could not manage his time well. Most days, he was in his room and watched TV programs. Even though he really tried to control himself, he failed. He felt ashamed and afraid for himself.

Researcher: After you stopped attending the class, you discovered these problems?

Suk: Yes, I have learned that self-study is really difficult for me. But the reason does not relate to attending class in a cram school. I could not control myself. I am not used to studying for the test preparation.

Researcher: Can you tell me your daily schedule?

Suk: For the first week, I got up at 8 am in the morning. Then, I went to a study room at cram school B because the writing class started 8 pm in the evening. But I really felt sleepy and sometimes I took a nap until 6 pm in the room. I really felt annoyed with myself. So, after that first week I changed my study environment to my room. I got up at 8 am and had breakfast, watched TV until noon. I could not stop watching…so I tried to leave my house to study. But I really felt sleepy and would sleep until 6 pm. Even though I changed the location from the cram school study room to my room, it did not make any difference. As time went by, this uncontrolled behaviour made me feel a sense of guilt. This test-preparation is really giving me pressure.
He was gradually influenced by his daily life during test preparation. As test preparation continued, he stayed in his room, watching TV programs or surfing the internet. His isolated daily life seemed to lead him into distress. He felt extremely ashamed, helpless and afraid for himself.

Researcher: Are you afraid of the test?
Suk: I am afraid of myself. In my mind, I always think that I should work hard. But in reality, I do not work hard even though I have enough time to do so. Now I have no job and the only thing I should do is prepare for the test. But I have a lack of autonomous learning. I spend most of my time watching TV or surfing the internet. When I am in my room, the only thing to do is to go on the internet and use it. It is a kind of addiction. For the first two months of test-preparation, I studied hard: I did my homework, reviewed and preview. But starting the third month, I made friends in the cram school and seemed to be lazy about studying. Then, at the end of the fourth month I quit the cram school and I am now struggling from test preparation.

His test preparation was “shaking the very foundation of his identity” and “humiliating” him as shown in his comments and his reaction to test preparation was to feel a sense of guilt, self-contempt and uneasiness.

Researcher: How does this test preparation influence you?
Suk: It is shaking the very foundation of my identity. It is making me feel humiliated….in my life for the first time I have experienced humiliation and frustration with myself. When I worked for seven years, I was a competent person. But since I started test preparation, I feel terrible. Damn it! I have pride in my past work experience. But when it comes to test preparation I am not self-disciplined. But I am in my thirties. That means that I am not a child. But my real self is not an adult. I know what I should do during this time but I am like a child. I am used to working with people. But I have failed to manage my time and myself….I am very ashamed of my myself and feel guilty.
His negative reaction to test preparation can be interpreted as “agitation-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, “actual self versus ought self” (Higgins, 1987, p. 323): His actual self is a test taker who was used to 7 years of working collaboratively with colleagues in the workplace, hanging around with them after work, and watching TV or using the internet until he went to bed. He had pride in himself as a competent manager in the workplace. In contrast, his ought self was a test taker who needed to fully focus on test preparation. For several months from the start of the test preparation, he really tried to focus on test preparation by changing his study environment and avoiding contact with friends. However, as test preparation continued, he found that he was not used to studying in the context of test preparation. In addition, he found that the context is different from his workplace because it is an isolated environment. He became addicted to watching TV or using the internet. As his actual self did not match his ought self, his addiction became worse and his emotional reaction to this self-discrepancy became serious.

The causes of his self-discrepancy are not related to his motivation. Instead, he was very motivated by his goal during test preparation. Therefore, he gave up his job, attended classes and tried to study hard. Even though he had enough time, motivation and resources in order to prepare for the test, he could not do the work he needed to do. This lack of accomplishment was also not caused by his first test results, as was the case for Sunny. Their first test results were the same, 5.0 in total, their reactions to the results were different. Sunny was very dissatisfied with herself because she spent 7 months on test preparation. However, Suk was not influenced by his test results because he spent less than three months preparing. What caused his self-discrepancy was the context of test preparation. In terms of Seeman’s (1959) alienation, the context made him experience powerlessness, meaninglessness or self-estrangement outside of cram school while Sunny experienced them within the cram school. There was no one to take care of, to encourage or to push him. Rather, the context of test preparation made it easier to be isolated or to be addicted to the internet. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 4, test preparation activities in cram schools are repeated so that one gains familiarity with items. In this environment, the only thing that a test taker does is to repeatedly practise. However, he did not notice this at first. Even though he kept trying to make changes in order to focus on test preparation, he repeatedly failed to manage his time well and to control himself. As a result, he blamed himself and felt a sense of guilt from this alienation.
After that, he took the test for a third and final time and received the following results: a total score of 6.0 (R/C 5.5, L/C 6.5, W/C 6.0, S/C 5.0). Compared to his second total score of 5.5 (R/C 6.5, L/C 5.0, W/C 4.5, S/C 5.5), he increased his scores. However, he already decided to stop the test preparation after the third test even though he did not receive the result he needed. Instead, he planned to study in a language course with the second test results. Actually, he stopped test preparation after he took the test a third time because of his “dreadful test preparation experience”.

Researcher: Why did you decide to stop test preparation even though you did not yet receive the score you need?
Suk: Because test preparation was dreadful…Also, I already got the second test results and could apply for the longest language course as an alternative option. During test preparation, I hated myself because I could not control myself…I do not want to have this dreadful experience again.

What we can learn from this Suk’s story is that the impact of test preparation experience on his identity was a devaluation of his sense of self as a test taker, resulting in a state of alienation and addiction. As he prepared for the test, he compared himself as a competent manager in the past to that of a test taker in the present. What he found during test preparation was that his actual self did not match his ought self. Among the test takers in the study, his identity was very negatively influenced by the isolated environment. He became addicted to watching TV or using the internet. His addiction became worse, and his emotional reaction to this self-discrepancy became serious. During test preparation, he repeatedly said, “I hated myself because I could not control myself”.

In addition, we can learn from his story that an individual motivated choice does not always create commitment to that choice. In the beginning of his story, he gave up his full-time job in order to focus on test preparation, in part because he believed he could commit himself to it. However, as he explored his multiple identities, he increasingly experienced self-conflict, which in turn created negative emotional problems. Ultimately, his test preparation resulted in isolating himself from the outside world.
5.1.3 Hyun’s Story

Hyun was a 32 year old graphic designer and mother. She studied architecture at university and worked for four years in an art design company. As a full-time test taker, she prepared for 9 months (from October, 2010 to December, 2011). What we can learn from this case of Hyun is how her identity as a test taker and mother was influenced by test preparation. This section tells a story of how test preparation fits into Hyun’s life goal and impacts her identity from her point of view.

- **Hyun’s goal, choice and identity: “I am a mother but wish to be a professional designer”**

  Hyun’s goal related to her job experience like Suk. While she worked as a graphic designer in the art design company, she realized that she needed to study graphic design for career development. When she decided to prepare for the test, she was pregnant. While working, she prepared using a text book. However she decided to give up her job in order to prepare for the language test full-time.

  Hyun: I have been preparing for IELTS for one year. Before starting the test preparation, I worked at an art design company for four years. However, I wanted to study more advanced skills in the field of art design because my major was architecture in my university. I wished to develop and to be a specialist in the field. If so, I could get more opportunities in the future. So, I decided to study graphic design in the UK and to prepare for IELTS. However, at that time I was pregnant and it was difficult to do test preparation while working. So, I quit my job and delivered my baby. Then, I again started test preparation last year.

  After giving birth, she again started to prepare for the test. However, she realized she could not commit herself to self-study while taking care of her baby. She therefore decided to enrol in a cram school, and searched for well-known ones by reading comments written by enrolled test takers on the cram schools’ web sites.
Hyun: Actually it is really hard to prepare for the test by myself and to take care of my baby. I have only a little time to study after my baby falls asleep. But my goal is still important in my life. So, I should do this test preparation in order to earn the required score.

Researcher: How did you select a cram school?

Hyun: I searched for IELTS cram schools on the internet. Actually, the number of IELTS cram schools is between 4 and 5. The names of the cram schools are IELTS 1, IELTS 2, IELTS 3, IELTS 4 and IELTS C. I carefully read information regarding instructors’ profiles and class curriculum taken from the cram schools’ web sites or pamphlets. In particular, I looked for comments from enrolled students in the cram schools. I read positive and negative reviews on the internet written by enrolled test takers. The information played an important role in my selection of a cram school. I compared each and then selected cram school C.

In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), two sets of identity act as drivers on test preparation: Hyun viewed her actual self as a graphic designer, with her higher self-view devoted to relevant skills. Her ideal self is to be a specialist in her field. As explained through identity construction, she strongly believed that test preparation would be more valuable than working, because overseas study would open a door for her future. Like Suk, she also believed that a cram school mode would make it possible to gain required scores. Her choice of test preparation was a significant lifestyle choice, with very high cost implications. However, in later phases, she became influenced by test preparation. She realized there were gaps between her actual, real self as a mother, and her ideal self during test preparation.

- **Hyun’s English-mediated identity: Ashamed of self in speaking**

After setting a goal, Hyun prepared for IELTS in the same cram school where Sunny and Suk studied. She attended the intermediate class. As she practised the speaking section with peers using her own answers, she began to perceive herself related to the activity, comparing herself to peers.
Hyun: The items on the speaking part are an interview format. So, they require pair work. But I am not used to practising in pair work because I am a shy person. So, I studied it alone, making my own answers and memorizing them before enrolment in the cram school. But I realized that it is very hard to do it alone. So, I began to practise speaking in the cram school. But, as I practised, I discovered that I am self-conscious about peers who speak better than I do. Some peers speak fluently. Also, they seem to have good pronunciation. When I practise with these peers, I become discouraged and hesitate with my own speaking. It is a difference between self-study and the cram school. However, improving speaking takes time. I think that it is different from the reading and listing parts.

Hyun recognized a gap between her self-study and the cram school, while perceiving herself as very sensitive to the spoken English level of the peer. She also commented that the speaking section was the most difficult part for her because it revealed herself including her speaking skills to her peers.

Hyun: I think that the speaking section is the most difficult part among the four parts. That is why I should reveal myself to peers when I practise English speaking. During pair work, if I do not speak well in comparison to my peers, I feel uncomfortable because my peers may assess my English speaking. They may think that I am poor at speaking English. I do not want to make a fool of myself in front of my peers.

When I observed her in class several times, it seemed that she did not hesitate about answering during pair work. Compared to Sunny, Hyun’s anxiety when speaking did not seem to be serious. In interviews, however, she commented that she felt ashamed of herself when she could not answer questions in pair work. Her negative reaction to speaking practice related to experiences in the past.

Hyun: When I could not explain what I wanted to say during pair work, I really felt bad about myself. The feeling is the same I experienced on my trip to the US. At that time, English native speakers talked to me in a pub but I
could not answer them. I was alone and I did not know how to speak. I felt ashamed of myself because I could not express my ideas at that time.
I am not a child. I am an adult who has job experience as a graphic designer. But when I do not speak fluently in English, I feel like I am stupid.

When she could not answer questions in pair-work, it reminded her of the experience in the US. Even though she is a competent graphics designer, she became timid and felt the same fear as she felt with regard to her English speaking. In terms of Higgins’ (1987) self-discrepancy analysis, she experienced “dejection-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, her “actual self versus ideal self”: She thought that speaking reveals herself to her peers. During pair work, she thought that her pair would assess her speaking ability, and it made her nervous. Her actual self was “a child” in English speaking, as she herself commented. However, what she would like in English speaking is to be an adult who has job experience as a graphics designer. Her self-discrepancy between her actual self, ideal self, and ought self, reminded her of negative experience in the past.

- **Hyun’s changes over time: “Being in the wilderness”**

Hyun characterized test preparation as feeling like being “in the wilderness”. She had been a graphic designer in the past and was a 32 year old mother. She prepared for the test for 9 months. Compared to other test takers, her test preparation had some breaks because of her need to care for her child: For the first six months, she used an online program or textbooks in a self-study mode, and then for the last three months she studied at the same cram school Sunny attended. In the interview she repeatedly said that she “has no choice but to prepare for the test” and she was “unwillingly doing practice”.

Researcher: How does test preparation influence you?

Hyun: I feel like I’m in the wilderness. It is difficult. I am fed up with the test preparation. I really wish to study abroad because it is an urgent need for my life and the life of my family. I gave up my job and plan to study abroad. So, the goal is really important and necessary to accomplish but the process achieving it is difficult for me. It is taking a long time. To be
honest, I have no choice but to prepare for the test. I am starting to no longer want to take the test because preparing for it is such a heavy burden. I plan to stay with my family when I study abroad. In order to do that, I need a family visa. I already have a conditional offer and my IELTS score is 5.5. So, if I were single, I could have studied in a language course for several months as an alternative way to meet the entrance requirement. However, I have my family to take care of. So, I must get an unconditional offer in order to get the family visa. That is why I feel a strong burden for this test preparation. Even though I am fed up with test preparation, I cannot give this test preparation up. It is not only for my life but also for the life of my family. But I am unwillingly doing practice. I am fed up with the test preparation.

She already had a conditional offer but needed to raise her score in order to gain a family visa. As she commented, she had no other way to do that. In the interview, her motivation for achieving her goal was very desperate. However, she repeatedly said that she was “fed up with the test preparation”. She seemed quite exhausted from her efforts to prepare for the test and care for her child.

Researcher: How is your daily schedule?

Hyun: Because I should take care of my baby and family, I get up around 7 am and make breakfast for my family. I also do housework at that time. I come to class 10 am. After class, I study for one or two hours in the cram school. Then, I return home and take care of my baby until she goes to sleep. Actually, at home I cannot study at all because of the baby. So, after she goes to sleep at 10 pm, I study again until 2-3 am. But I really feel tired and it is very hard to concentrate on the studying. I have prepared for the IELTS since June, 2010 (interview conducted in November, 2011). I used an online program produced by cram school B for several months. But it was not useful for my test preparation. So, I enrolled in a well-known IELTS cram school. But I stopped and then enrolled in this cram school in November, 2011. I am studying for a long time.
Even though she was a full-time test taker, her life out of class was different from Sunny’s in that Hyun was a married woman. As a wife and mother, she was always busy with taking care of her family. In addition, the expense of test preparation, including tuition fees, gave her pressure. She therefore considered stopping attending the cram school.

Researcher: How is your test preparation in the cram school?
Hyun: It’s not bad except for the amount of money I have to spend on test preparation. Actually, now I am doing this test preparation but I don’t want to be. The fee to register for the test is too expensive, especially when you take into consideration the tuition fee of the cram school. The monthly tuition fee is 450,000 won (around 260 GBP). Also, I pay for a baby sitter when I am at the cram school. So, I’ve really spent a large amount of money on this test preparation. Despite all of that, my score isn’t getting any higher and I am thinking about stopping test preparation at this cram school.

In addition, as a test taker she felt she lacked the time for test preparation. In class, it was observed that most students did not chat with each other. Hyun was quiet in her seat and did not talk to peers. She did not know any names of classmates. Only for the pair-work, she talked to peers. In her interview, she described the class atmosphere as follows:

Hyun: Even though I have been studying for two months in the cram school, I do not know any of the names of my classmates. No one has asked me my name and no one talks to me. This cram school doesn’t provide any group study after class so we do not know each other. We are not close with each other. We don’t even say hello to each other. We are not interested in each other because we have come here to achieve a score. In this sense, this atmosphere can be good only for individual study. We can focus on our studying.
Later, in the second meeting, she said that she would leave the cram school because of the expensive cost of the test preparation. She was spending large amounts of money on the tuition fee and a baby sitter while studying in the cram school:

Researcher: How is your test preparation in the cram school?

Hyun: I may quit the cram school at the end of this month because the tuition fee is really expensive, over 500,000 won a month (around 286 GBP). Also, I spend extra money on a baby sitter while studying in the cram school. So, monthly I spend around 1,200,000-1,300,000 won on test preparation (between 688-745 GBP). It costs a lot and I’m not working. So, I need to leave the cram school. Before leaving the cram school I will take a test.

Even though she was considering leaving the cram school because of the expensive cost of the test preparation, she noticed that her test preparation would make her “isolated”.

Researcher: Does your leaving have anything to do with your comment, “I feel like I’m in the wilderness” and the atmosphere in the cram school as you commented in the first meeting?

Hyun: It might be. But the reason is mostly the expensive cost of the test preparation. I have been taking this test preparation for a long time. It makes me really exhausted. Whatever I do, I always think that I should study. I feel like I’m trapped in the test preparation. If I study in the cram school for a long time, I feel seriously. However, I have a family to take care of and I do not seriously feel the isolation. But this test preparation makes me feel lethargic. I think that it is time to finish it.

She finally decided to take one last examination before leaving the cram school. Before receiving the test result, she finally stopped studying in the cram school because of high costs including spent time, financial expenditure and energy on test preparation. After leaving the cram school, she received the score she required on the last test: Her score was 6.0 in total (R/C 6.5, L/C 6, W/C 6, S/C 6). Compared to her previous test results (5.5 in total) she raised her score. Ultimately, she finished test preparation. In the last interview, she said that test preparation was making her “lethargic”. She seemed to
experience “dejection-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, “actual self versus ideal self” (Higgins, 1987, p. 323): Her actual self is a test taker who was busy with child care and test preparation. In addition, she gave up her job in order to fully focus on test preparation. However, what she would like to be as her ideal self is a more professional graphic designer through studying abroad. As test preparation took longer, she prepared for the test with a sense of duty to earn a family visa, becoming dissatisfied with both the preparation and herself. Compared to Sunny, Hyun did not seem to have very serious emotional problems. However, she repeatedly said “I am unwillingly doing practice” or “I feel like I’m in the wilderness” with a very calm voice. She seemed to be experiencing Seeman (1959)’s powerlessness in test preparation. Even though she left the cram school because of the high costs on test preparation, she gradually experienced emotional problems related to alienation.

5.1.4 Min’s Story

Min was a 28 year old female graduate majoring in Oriental painting. As a full-time test taker, she prepared for 11 months (from February, 2011 to December, 2011). Compared to the other test takers, Sunny, Suk and Hyun, she positively reviewed her test preparation in terms of goal, choice and identity.

- Min’s goal, choice and identity: Desperate need for her job application

When she was a university student, she studied English at a language programme in the UK for 5 months. She said that she was a novice English learner at that time. While studying, she visited many museums and was impressed by art and gallery museums. Then she went to New York for 5 months and visited so many museums. The experience influenced her to set a goal to study museums in the UK. Therefore, she decided to give up her job in order to prepare for the language test full-time.

Min: My major is oriental painting. However, in reality my major is not practical. Only thing you can do with this degree is to become artist. I wanted to do other things related to arts when I was a university student. Around that time, I went to the UK to visit my relatives. Then I enrolled in a
language programme and studied English for 5 months. At that time, I visited many kinds of arts museums and galleries and was impressed by them. Five months later, I went to New York to visit other museums. The experience was fantastic and led me to find my goal for my future. I wanted to study and then work for a museum. After coming back to my country, I graduated from my university and worked for an art-education company for over 1 year. However, I could not give up my dream to study abroad. So, I left my job and prepared for the test.

After her leaving the job, she decided to enrol in a cram school and searched well-known cram schools by reading comments written by enrolled test takers on the cram schools’ web sites.

Researcher: How did you select a cram school?

Min: I searched well-known cram schools on the internet for IELTS preparation as most IELTS test takers do. IELTS preparation is not as common among students as TOEFL preparation. For this reason, the number of cram schools is limited to around 5 in Seoul. Their names are IELTS 1, IELTS 2, IELTS 3, IELTS 4 and IELTS C. I carefully read information such as comments from enrolled test takers, instructors’ profiles and class curriculum taken from the cram schools’ web sites. Among them, there are positive comments written by test takers about the IELTS C cram school. So, I decided to enrol in that cram school.

In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), two sets of identity acted as drivers on test preparation: Her actual self was a graduate, majoring in Oriental painting. She needed a breakthrough for her future because her major was not helpful for getting a job. Therefore, she set a goal to study museums in the UK, in order to be a professional in the field. She was very dedicated to her goal. Her test preparation was a desperate need in her life. Compared to other test takers, her test preparation did not negatively influence her life. Rather, she trusted the test itself, and tried to improve her English skills through the test preparation.
Min’s English-mediated identity: Becoming traumatized not by peers, but by an interviewer

Compared to other IELTS test takers, she was not negatively influenced by peers’ speaking proficiency. Rather, she preferred to join with a peer who had a high level of proficiency because she believed that speaking practice with a peer with a good proficiency would improve her speaking skills. She practised speaking in pair work on SKYPE for one or two hours almost every day. She also focused on building confident and spontaneous speaking in order to prepare for an actual test. Her self-image about English speaking was positive. She liked to study English speaking and worked hard.

Min: Among the four sections of the test, I like to study the speaking section because it relieves my stress about studying other sections.

Researcher: Other test takers commented that they are very nervous with speaking practice with a peer who speaks very well. What about you?

Min: I do not feel nervous too much. Rather, I prefer to speak with such a peer because I can learn from his or her answers. I think that it is a good opportunity to know what good speaking is. Even when I practise with a peer who has lower proficiency than I do, I listen to the peer’s performance and try to find what things the person should correct when speaking. I try to be a good listener. In fact, when I started test preparation, I was not good at speaking; I had no confidence in speaking. Also, I did not know how to answer the questions, so I practised a lot. I read good samples of answers and then make my own answers. I did not care about peers’ speaking proficiency at that time. I focused on my goal to improve my speaking skills because I am a very goal-oriented person.

However, her difficulty in the speaking part was to speak English in front of an interviewer during the test. She took an actual test every month, and took the tests eleven times in total. She felt anxious too much and was very sensitive with the interviewer’s reaction.

Min: When I took a speaking section on the actual test, I could not answer the questions. My mind became blank, and I was very nervous in front of a native speaker interviewer. I panicked. Even though I practised a lot, it
was different from the actual test. The fact that I should answer in front of a native-speaker stressed me out. It was very stressful. I am not a native-speaker, so I am concerned how the interviewer reacted to my answer. Actually, the experiences became traumatic, so I repeatedly practiced a lot in order to remove the anxiety of the speaking test.

In terms of Higgins’ (1987) self-discrepancy analysis, she strongly perceived herself as a non-native speaker when taking an actual test. During it, she worried how the interviewer assessed her from a native-speaker's view. Her ideal self in English speaking was constructed by the interviewer’s reactions, while her self-discrepancy was a gap between a non-English native learner and an English native-speaking interviewer.

- **Min’s changes over time: Becoming a strong-willed person**

  Min described test preparation as “such a very hard time”. She was majoring in oriental painting and was a 28 year old single. She gave up her job in order to prepare for the test. It was a life-defining choice in that she decided to be voluntarily unemployed. The high cost implications made her test preparation more difficult.

  Researcher: How does test preparation influence you?
  Min: I prepared for the test for around for a year. I took actual tests eleven-times in total. That meant I took a test every month. The experiences from the test preparation really were a hard time. I am not a person who easily gets annoyed or angry, but I have changed into that kind of person during test preparation. It is difficult to control my emotions while studying. Also, I cried many times because of this tough time. I have struggled all days.

  She expressed that she has changed into a vulnerable person due to test preparation, and had difficulty controlling her emotions. Additionally, as a single woman, she was sensitive given her age and uncertain marital status.

  Min: During test preparation, I had been concerned about myself, a 28 year old single. This fact is very important in my life, but it stressed me out. Now my friends are planning to get married, or they keep making money.
Even though I chose this way for my future, this test preparation is a gate for studying abroad. It means the test preparation itself does not guarantee my life, but if I could not open this gate, my commitment to test preparation would be useless. That is my fear regarding test preparation.

As with Sunny, Min thought about her age and status as a test taker. However, her reaction to test preparation was different. As she was really concerned as an unemployed full-time test taker, she became committed to test preparation in order to raise her score on the test rather than depressed by the test preparation. She did not have doubts about her commitment to the test preparation:

Min: I think that I have changed after test preparation. Before it, I used to set a goal and achieve it. I had no difficulty doing that because I am a very goal-oriented person. But after starting test preparation, I realized for the first time some things take much time, money and energy to achieve. That is IELTS preparation, which gives me a very big challenge. During test preparation, I have thought to myself, asking ‘How can I achieve the passing score?’ The answer is to be a person who commits her life to test preparation more than other test takers. I should work harder and harder than any other person. I need to be a strong-willed person in order to be superior to others.

Compared to other test takers, she had no serious emotional problems in terms of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987, p. 323). However, she perceived that she had become changed by the IELTS preparation. She became a stronger and more dedicated person in order to achieve a higher score. In her interviews, what she often commented was that she competed with others in order to get higher scores.

Min: I have prepared for the IELTS since February. Until this April, I studied all of the sections of the test in cram school. Then, from May to July, I received writing tutoring from an instructor there. I then enrolled in a speaking class at the cram school for three months, and later spent nine months there in total. Because the tuition fee is so expensive, I really
tried to finish test preparation, but it took time to raise my score. As test preparation continues, I have come to be very sensitive about scores. If I get higher scores, I feel a sense of achievement. But if I get lower scores, I feel like being a failure. I think it is very common in test preparation because getting scores is the most important part. My future depends on my scores.

She seemed to be a determined person in achieving her goals. Her actual self became more strengthened by test preparation, whereas her ideal self was to become superior to others with higher scores. When she took her final test, she was able to get the score she required: Her score was 6.5 in total (R/C 6, L/C 6, W/C 6, S/C 7.5). Ultimately she finished her long-term test preparation for 11 months. In the last meeting, she commented on this:

Researcher: How does test preparation influence you?
Min: Before test preparation, I was not good at English skills. Even though I started the test preparation in order to gain required scores for studying abroad, my English skills have improved though test preparation. Also, I have learned how to achieve a goal in my life. During test preparation, I struggled with many challenges, but they made me strong and patient. I trust this test, as it gave me an opportunity to improve myself. If someone should prepare for an English test, I would recommend this one.

Min’s test preparation had a positive impact on her life including English skills. Using Higgins’ (1987, p. 323) terms, she does not seem to experience serious self-discrepancy including emotional problems. Her actual self was a 28 year old single woman majoring in oriental painting. She gave up her job in order to prepare for the test. Her ideal self was to study in a graduate school in order to become a professional. As test preparation continued, she struggled with differences between her actual self and ideal self. She felt depressed but continued to prepare. In that her choice of test preparation had high cost implications, she could not give it up but instead committed her life to it. Finally, she achieved the required score. Compared to other test takers, she seemed to gain a sense of achievement through the test preparation. Even though she
began in order to gain the required score, she achieved a positive self-view in terms of goal, choice and identity.

In conclusion, this section has shown the identity construction of voluntarily unemployed test takers who prepared for IELTS test. First, test taker identities were involved in the choice of test preparation. This group had occupied highly-paid professional jobs before test preparation. For career development reasons, they decided to study abroad, which required that they give up their jobs in order to prepare full-time for a language test. Their test preparation was a life-defining choice in their stories. In terms of Higgins’ (1987) actual self and ideal self, they tended to focus on the ideal self related to the goal. They wished to pursue self-development through job experience; thus, they voluntarily left their jobs to complete test preparation. Their ideal self was a person who has more advanced skills and knowledge for career development. What we learn from the above cases is that they were very motivational for their goals and test preparation. In terms of Eccles (2009)’s identity theory on a life-defining choice, they expected to be successful in terms of their goals and took action through the two sets of identity construction. Their choice of test preparation was a life-defining choice with high cost implications. However, they had little knowledge about test preparation activities and the everyday lives of test-takers. Rather, they strongly believed that a cram school would make them raise their score or earn the required score.

Second, as test preparation started they constructed themselves as an interlocutor in the activity and were constructed by peers’ English speaking abilities. These findings are important because test takers’ English-mediated identity related to English speaking more than any of the other language skills. Even though they were given opportunities to practise such as in pairs or giving individual performances, they reacted to the activities with feelings of anxiety because they were worried they might be laughed at by their peers. These findings are similar to Duff (2002 cited in Norton & Toohey’s 2011) study which was about English language learners in ESL classes who felt afraid of revealing their language proficiency to English-speaking peers. They were reluctant to participate in speaking practices and instead remained silent because they did not want to be laughed at by their peers. In this study, even though the students in EFL classes were not silent during pair work, they were reluctant to complete the practice because they did not want to be assessed as a poor speaker by their peers.

In addition, these findings show that speaking activities could act as critical experiences which shape English-mediated identity: According to Block (2009),
English-mediated identity in EFL classrooms seems to work very minimally in that activities in the classroom do not construct learners’ lives like Norton’s (2000) study about learners in ESL; students in EFL classrooms talk to each other in English only if they are asked to practise by a teacher. Therefore, their activities do not include ‘critical experiences’ as identity formation. However, the students in this study did construct such identities during speaking activities, and their interactions with these activities shaped whether they constructed themselves as competent speakers or not. Compared to Norton’s (2000) learners in the context of ESL, English-mediated identity which Block (2009) discussed did not constitute the participants’ whole lives in the EFL context of test preparation. However, the students in this study were sensitive to speaking practice more than any other section of the test because speaking requires them to present their own ideas from their personal point of view. Additionally, their context as participating in high stakes-test preparation acted as a critical context where English mediated identity could be shaped.

Finally, this section identifies how test takers’ identities are influenced by test preparation over time. What we learn from these test takers’ stories is that the impact of test preparation on a test taker’s identity is self-conflict over time with negative emotional problems. What these test takers had in common was that they experienced alienation (Seeman, 1959). Test preparation made test takers view themselves as insufficient, for example, because they lack the individual effort they think is required. The findings of this section contribute to the field because they provide new knowledge with regard to how test takers react to test preparation before and after examinations. Previous research related to test impact demonstrated that test takers would show significant differences as the examination approaches (Bailey, 1999; Cheng, 2005). However, they have not reported on what test takers experience after the examination, including how and why they stop test preparation. In this study, the test takers struggled with themselves in order to achieve the score they required. Even though they studied hard or tried to do their best, they always said that they should work harder, and during this time they experienced anxiety, fear or shame. As they became alienated, they were more desperate to achieve their goals because of the cost value of their test preparation: In order to prepare for a test, they left highly-paid professional jobs. Then, they enrolled in cram schools and studied every day, spending financial expenditures including expensive tuition fees, time and energy on test preparation. As test preparation continued, they gradually experienced emotional problems and became serious around 2
months before the last examination. Regarding when to finish test preparation, what
they had in common is that they did not finish it after receiving the score they required.
Rather, they continued the test preparation until they could stand it no longer, blamed
themselves for their inability to earn the required score and finally decided to take one
last examination in order to finish the test preparation.

These findings show that high-stakes test preparation could be detrimental to test
takers’ identities in that a test taker gradually experiences emotional problems related to
alienation. Additionally, they support how test preparation and its features impact
TOEFL test takers’ identities in the following section.

5.2 Academic admission: Young applicants

This section identifies how test preparation fits into the life goals of young
applicants by telling their stories, attempting to understand the place of test preparation
in these stories, and the impact the test preparation experience has upon test takers’
identity. In particular, this section argues that test preparation induces self-conflict and
emotional problems as it continues, and in particular depends on the purpose of the test
for the individual test taker. This observation is supported by the findings presented
below, and interpreted by theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987; Seeman,
1959). This section highlights what test takers have in common and how they differ
with regard to the impact of test preparation on their identities.

This group of test takers can be categorized into two sub-groups depending on the
goals of test preparation. The first group comprises young students who desire to attend
a university. The other sub-group comprises university students who desire to obtain
admission to an international student exchange programme. First, as shown in Table 5.2,
and among all participants, two young students, Jung and Young, have prepared for
TOEFL in order to become university students.
Table 5.2 Goals of test preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of test prep</th>
<th>TOEFL-prep group (Total n=7)</th>
<th>IELTS-prep group (Total n=6)</th>
<th>TOEIC-Speaking prep group (Total n=5)</th>
<th>OPIc-prep group (Total n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic university admission</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What they had in common was that their choice of test preparation was a desperate need in that it was the only way to achieve their goals. Compared to other test takers’ targeted scores, these test takers targeted relatively high scores because test results are the main metric used for competitive university admission. Their test preparation was a very life-defining choice with high stakes test preparation implications. Their test preparation came to dominate their life and the organization of their daily activities. Ultimately, they became obsessed with getting high scores, and they suffered from frustration when they did not get the scores they desired. Among them, Jung’s and Young’s stories will be discussed sections that follow.

In addition, among twenty-two participants, five university students in the study prepared a targeted test for international exchange student program admission, as shown in Table 5.3. Four students prepared for the TOEFL and one student prepared for the IELTS.

Table 5.3 Goals of test preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of test prep</th>
<th>TOEFL-prep group (Total n=7)</th>
<th>IELTS-prep group (Total n=6)</th>
<th>TOEIC-Speaking prep group (Total n=5)</th>
<th>OPIc-prep group (Total n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exchanging student program admission</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What this group had in common was that they viewed the goal as a socially required resource. Their goal was not only to gain admission to international exchange programmes but also to improve performance on graduation exams and the quality of their resumes for job applications. Their value attached to the goal shows how the test is
used in Korean society including for university entrance as explained in the previous section. In addition, most Korean universities require a graduation exam and it can, in some cases, be replaced by an English test result, including the TOEFL test. For those reasons, Korean university students prepare for the programme admission because an exchange programme functions as a useful certificate for studying abroad or completing a language training course when they make their resume for employment after graduation. When compared to the above young students preparing for university admission, these students show fewer features of identity construction during test preparation. One explanation might be related to their short test preparation time--less than months--compared to the previous groups. For shorter term students, test preparation was not high-stakes because their required minimum score was not as high as for young students’ scores. Accordingly, they prepared only part-time. Among them, Jung is one such example, and her story is presented below.

5.2.1 Jung’s Story

Jung was a 20 years old single woman. She studied as a full-time test taker for the TOEFL test in a cram school for 10 months (from November, 2010 to August, 2011). When she started to prepare for the test, she believed that she could accomplish her goals by putting a lot of effort into test preparation. She said that her test preparation would go well because she liked to study English. However, as test preparation continued, she faced challenges. Her test preparation came to dominate her life and she became obsessed with getting high scores. What we can learn from this case of Jung is how her identity acted as a driver on her choice, was constructed in speaking activities as she began to practice and gradually changed by test preparation. This section tells a story of how Jung constructed herself and was constructed by test preparation from her point of view.

- Jung’s goal, choice and identity: From a drop-out student to a university student

It is important to understand why she started test preparation, because it provided information showing how her identity initially acted as a driver for her choices. Her
educational background motivated her choice of test preparation. In her first interview, she focuses on the fact that she was a drop-out student from an arts high school.

Jung: I was a drop-out student from an arts high school. Since elementary school, I had studied classical music. But I dropped out of school because I could not endure the intensive pressure from competition between students. My school was the number one school for arts in Korea. But I began to lose my interest in music. For a long time I thought what to do in my life and how to accomplish that. Finally, I dropped out of school. However, at that time I only focused on searching my way rather than thinking about disadvantages of being a dropout. Later, I recognized that what I was. I could only have a part time job, and even those jobs were limited to being a cashier or shop girl.

It is not common to drop out of school in South Korea, in that the society values one’s educational background as a marker of success. However, Jung decided to give up her major because she could not find any motivation on her major. After leaving, she went to the Philippines to study in an English language programme.

Jung: Then I went to the Philippines for studying English abroad.

Researcher: Could you tell me why you wanted to study English as soon as you dropped out of your school?

Jung: I had not studied English because I had focused only on classical music. But after the drop out, I needed to improve myself in the society. As you know, most people study English for practical reasons, such as going to university or getting a job. Studying English is a basic skill for survival. So, I wanted to study English skills for my future, and enrolled in a language programme in the Philippines.

Jung studied English in the Philippines for six months after she had dropped out of an arts high school majoring in classical music. Studying English was an alternative for her future at that time. When she started to study English in the programme, she commented that she was at the level of novice. However, she studied hard to develop English skills, and successfully finished her language program.
Researcher: How was the study in the program?

Jung: Actually, when I started to study English at the program, I was really poor at English. My English level was same to an elementary student. For a while, it was really difficult time to adopt myself who was not good at English. But I really tried to improve English and I began to see my development. It was a very wonderful experience in my life. The programme allowed me to realize for the first time that English learning is very joyful.

After finishing the language program, she came back to her home and then started to teach English in a community centre. For a while, she was satisfied with her voluntary work. However, she started to perceive her status as a dropout student.

Jung: Six months later, I came back to my home and then voluntarily taught English for children in a community centre because I was confident in English. The sense of achievement was important for me. I thought that I could do something for my life. However, as time went by I discovered the disadvantages of being a dropout. I found out myself in reality. During my job experiences, I realized that the only way to have a better chance at being successful in life was to go to university. While searching for ways to accomplish this goal, I found that there are universities that accept only TOEFL scores for entrance. At that time, I thought that test preparation was an easier and faster way to realize this goal compared to other options. So, I started it.

After finishing the programme, she gained “a sense of achievement” in English. It also influenced her life-defining choice for test preparation. In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), her self-view about relevant skills of that goal was a confident English learner, which is her actual self. Additionally, in reality her identity was that of a dropout student who had limited access to social resources. Therefore, her ideal self was to become a university student in order to change her social status as a drop out student. The sets acted as her driving force on the TOEFL preparation. When she started to prepare for the test, she believed that she could accomplish her goals by putting a lot of effort into test preparation. Therefore, she
studied alone for the test, using test-preparation text books. However, as test preparation continued, she faced challenges.

- **Jung’s English-mediated identity: Clashes of values**

  After starting the test preparation, Jung selected a self-study. As she began to practise, she faced challenges on the study mode, and perceived herself related to speaking practices during test preparation. Jung found herself in the context of self-study and it was also a difficult experience for her. She started to perceive her actual self related to skills in test preparation and found through her speaking practice that there were discrepancies between her actual self, ideal self, and ought self.

  Jung: Before enrolment in a cram school, I studied the TOEFL test for one month because I thought that I could do it by myself. I used a textbook of the test. But I realized that I could not do this because everything was difficult to me. In particular, the speaking and the writing parts were really hard for me. I felt annoyed with the test preparation. Because I was doing poorly at the test preparation, I began to perceive there was a gap between what I expected and what I was doing.

  At the starting point of test preparation, she believed that she could prepare for the test by herself without enrolling in a cram school. She studied by herself for one month using a TOEFL textbook. In particular, she found that she was not able to prepare for the speaking and writing sections by herself: She did not know how to prepare for the two parts with test preparation. Because of this, she developed negative feelings about herself and the test preparation. Therefore, she finally abandoned the self-study mode. Then, she enrolled in a cram school. However, she experienced differences between what she believed and what she was asked to do in class. It was quite difficult for her to accept the way she was instructed to practise because the templates and samples were not her own. Templates are structures of how to answer the TOEFL tasks as explained in Chapter 4. They play an important role in the TOEFL materials because they provide organization of sample answers.

  Jung: In the first class, templates of answers and sample answers were given to the students. An instructor explained each sentence on the sheets
including new words and meanings. We were required to answer following the templates. If we did not follow the templates, we got a penalty from the instructor. I could not understand why I should follow them. However, the instructor told us that the templates made answers more systematic. Then she had the students memorize the structure of the answer several times. Also, she recommended memorizing sample answers. But I really felt pressure about the memorizing… it felt unnatural, like I was reading from a book. Actually it was not my answer. Speaking answers should come from my ideas.

In particular, the required practices were different from what she studied in an English language programme before starting the test preparation. She had never memorized answers for English speaking before. She disliked the teaching method and felt pressured from the onset with regard to the required test-preparation practice.

Jung: Before enrolment in the cram school, I studied by myself and found I needed more help to achieve my goal. That is why I enrolled in a three-hour daily test-prep class in the cram school without hesitation. But at the start, I was asked to take a level test and was shocked that I did not perform well. When coming back from the language programme in the Philippines, I thought that I could do everything with English. Learning English was easy for me at that time. That was why I decided to prepare for the TOEFL test and studied it by myself. Even though I realized that self-study was not easy for me, I did not think I do not fit into this test preparation. At that time I thought I could do very well if I enrolled in the cram school. But on the first day I took the level-test and my scores were very low. It made me confused about myself and then the required practices in class are to memorize answers and to use templates. The things that happened in the cram school were really different from what I expected.

In terms of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987, p. 323), she experienced “agitation-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, “actual self versus ought self”: Before the test preparation, Jung viewed her actual self as a competent English learner. This
positive self-perception related to English skills also acted as a driving force for test preparation. However, as she enrolled in the cram school she discovered that she was not good at the level test. In addition, the ought self from the instructor’s standpoint was to memorize templates and sample answers for the speaking test preparation. As she viewed the self-conflict between the actual self and the ought self, she felt pressured.

- **Jung’s changes over time: Becoming obsessed with getting high scores**

As test preparation continued, she faced challenges when she received her test results. Compared to other test takers’ targeted scores, she targeted relatively high scores because test results are the main metric used for competitive university admission. Her test preparation was a very life-defining choice with high stakes test preparation implications.

Jung: I took a level test on the first day at the cram school. The score was 46 in total. Among them, the speaking score was 12. At that time I was really shocked with the score. My self-confidence in English decreased. However, I studied hard for the actual test. So, four months later, I took the test and got a score of 64 with a speaking score of 18. I thought that I had achieved something because I raised my scores compared to the first level test scores. But I was greatly cast down by my instructors’ comments. They told me that I should have received around 70-80 at least on the first test in order to achieve 100 on a final test. Having a score of 100 is the minimum for going to a high ranking university in Seoul. So, they were disappointed with my test results.

On her first day at the cram school, she realized there were differences between the score she obtained and what she had expected. Even though she was unsatisfied with her first score, she studied hard to raise it, and then earned a higher one compared to previous results. However, she came to realize through her instructors that she needed to raise the score in order to achieve 100 on a test. Her test-preparation came to dominate her life and the organization of her daily activities.

Jung: Even though I did my best for four months, I only raised my score by 20 points and found that there was a long way to go to reach 100. The
experience was very upsetting to me. But I again did my best in order to
meet the targeted score, 100. Three months later I again took the test and
got a score of 86. That was May, 2011. At that time, the instructors were
satisfied with my test results. I gained confidence in myself. I thought
that I could get 100 if I worked harder. But, my test results stayed around
80 on several tests after that. It was very difficult to raise my score by
even just one or two points.

While she was struggling with getting high scores, her daily schedule was very
intensive for ten months. She studied every day for ten hours, and made progress.
Regardless of the cram school’s vacation period, she studied the test every day and
practised the speaking section, memorizing, recording and revising answers.

Researcher: Please tell me your daily schedule for test preparation.

Jung: My daily schedule was to study the TOEFL all day. I started studying at
10 am and returned home after 10 pm. Even when the cram school was
on vacation, I regularly studied there. For example, every day I practised
the speaking tasks including answering, recording and transcribing my
answers. Then I sent my recordings to the instructor via email. She gave
me feedback on my speaking and I practised again. Also, I memorized
general answers to apply to related questions.

However, her test results were still below her targeted test scores. As test
preparation continued, she began to be controlled by the test results. Ultimately, she
became obsessed with getting high scores, and commented that she learned a tip from
the class in order raise the score:

Jung: I learned a tip from my test preparation class to use the bad testing
environment to raise my score. It is to write down the person’s speaking
answer sitting next to me when I am hearing directions for the listening
section of the test. I pretend to listen to the directions on the listening test
but actually I should try to make notes about the person’s speaking
answers. It was really helpful for guessing the speaking questions on the
test.
Researcher: Did that help increase your score?

Jung: It depends on the person’s speaking level. If a person speaks poorly, it makes me crazy because I could not focus on my listening section. Also, I do not need to write down the answers.

The distracting testing environment was used for efficient cheating. How to cheat was taught in her test preparation class. As she explained in detail how to cheat, it became apparent that she took cheating for granted. This was a noticeable change in comparison to her reaction to test preparation practices she learned from class in the beginning. When she began, she was required to memorize templates and sample answers. She felt confused, and even disliked the way she was instructed to practise, because the templates and samples were not her own. At that time she felt pressures with differences from what she believed and what she was asked to do in class. However, as test preparation continued, she changed. She became obsessed with getting high scores, and was used to doing required practices in the class, but also learned how to cheat. She believed that the latter skills would help raise her score. In particular, she did not worry about detection by a test proctor.

Researcher: But it could be detected as a kind of cheating.

Jung: No problem! I have never been detected. Rather the most important thing is timing. If there is no one to answer questions on the speaking section when I hear the directions of listening section, the strategy is useless. Sometimes when I focus on the listening section after the directions, it happens that someone answers the speaking questions. That is why the timing is really important. If we succeed in using this strategy, we can easily answer questions on the speaking section. Without doing it, we must pause or hesitate to answer. So, test preparation classes in the cram school recommended this strategy because pausing while speaking negatively influences scores, according to the instructor. So, test prep classes focus on fluency without hesitation or pause.

Even though she used the strategy in order to achieve 100 on a test, but her score still was in the 80 s. As she tried to raise a score, she suffered from frustration when she did not get the scores she desired.
Researcher: How did your test preparation influence you?

Jung: It was really painful. It was such a painful time. I was always dissatisfied with myself because I failed to raise my score to 100. I became frustrated with test preparation. After receiving 86 in May, my score stayed in the 80s for a couple of months even though university application deadlines were approaching. I was taking tests because I needed a score around 100. Before the examinations, I felt extremely anxious about my test results, and I could not sleep because I was so afraid. But the test results were still below the targeted score.

Her test preparation was making her feel “painful” because of high pressure to obtain the required score. As a new test was soon coming, she suffered from anxiety and could not sleep. Even though she had undergone psychological problems, she kept to test preparation in order to obtain higher scores. However, ongoing test preparation changed her personality through loss of energy and confidence. As she commented:

Jung: As test preparation continued, I was losing energy and confidence. But I continued my studying, getting tired. One day, one instructor in the speaking test prep class played my recorded speaking answer to me, saying “You aren’t confident in your speaking. At the beginning of your test preparation, you answered with confidence. Now you answer well and test scores are better than before. But you have no energy and confidence in your speaking. You should get it back in order to raise your score.” I found that I was strongly discouraged during the test preparation.

Her change was also recognized by her instructor. In comparison with the beginning of test preparation, her voice in the speaking sections was no longer energetic. And, as test preparation continued, she became “discouraged”. In the interim she took her final test, and became deeply disheartened.

Jung: I finally got a score of 90 on my final test in July. After receiving the test results, one new student who had lived in US for 5 years came to our class in order to achieve scores for university admission. I wondered if
she could achieve around 100 because university applications would start less than two months later. But very surprisingly, on her first test soon after she started test preparation in the cram school, she got a score of 103. She ultimately got 110 in one month and then finished her test preparation. Teachers in the cram school used her speaking sample answers on materials, showing how good her answers are to us and saying “if you answer like her, you will get a score of 28 on the speaking section”. Our class followed her sample answers. But I felt completely empty and depressed.

In contrast to Jung, her new classmate quickly achieved scores around 100 in one month, and this rapid progress caused Jung to compare herself with her.

Researcher: Could you tell me more details?

Jung: When I compared myself to her, for the first time, I asked myself, “What have I done?” I spent my every waking minute of my life on test preparation for 10 months. I really did my best because getting a high enough score was everything in my life. Even though I was getting fed up with test preparation, I controlled myself because I believed that I could finally achieve my goal if I just tried harder. But my final test result was a 90. I could not continue test preparation because I needed to apply for university admission. But she achieved 110 less than two months after starting test preparation. My mom told me that my test result proves how hard I studied. I was deeply hurt by her comments. Even though I said that I did work hard, she did not agree with me. I realized that my efforts in test preparation were not enough. I should have worked harder and harder.

After the first test, Jung experienced “dejection-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, “actual versus ideal” (Higgins, 1987, p. 323): Her actual self is a test taker who worked hard at test preparation. Therefore she made progress on the first test result. However her ideal self did not match her actual self. Compared to other test takers, her ideal self was constructed by other important people in her life such as instructors, a peer at the cram school and her mother. Regarding the first test results, she said that she
did make progress but she was “greatly cast down by instructors’ comments”. They were “dissatisfied with her first test results”. Her ideal self was to become a test taker who achieved a score of 100, as her instructors and mother wished. Even though she was disappointed with their reactions to her achievement, she again studied hard for three months and took her second test. She got a score of 86. The instructors gave her positive comments and encouraged her so that she could achieve 100 on the next test. Therefore she again committed her life to test preparation. However, for a couple of months she could not raise her score. As test preparation continued, self-discrepancy between her actual self and her ideal self began to increase. As a result, this gap caused her emotional problems such as feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction, shame and frustration. Therefore, she became obsessed with getting a higher score. She also seemed to experience alienation in a sense of self-estrangement and powerlessness (Seeman, 1959): she ultimately judged and blamed herself when she did not receive the test results she desired, leading to self-estrangement. She became powerless as she could not raise her score even though she worked hard. Despite the difficult internal problems, she finally achieved a score of 90. Actually, she was gradually making progress during test preparation. However, in order to go to a high ranking university in Seoul, she required at least 100 on the TOEFL. Still, her actual self did not match her ideal self. In contrast, her new classmate easily achieved a score of 110 and it made her experience extreme alienation. Her mother blamed her lack of effort on test preparation for her low score. She was deeply hurt by those in her life whose opinions she respected.

Finally, she entered a university but she could not gain admission into a high ranking university in Seoul as was her goal. However, even after finishing her test preparation she wished to prepare for the test in the future in order to gain a score over 100.

Jung: I think that my English skills are improved compared to when I started test preparation. Also, test preparation was a turning point where I experienced failure in my life. When starting the test-prep, I thought that I could gain a high score. But, after studying the TOEFL, I realized that the English I studied before was only the tip of the iceberg. TOEFL English was very different from my previous learning. Since I started the test-prep, I have begun to fear English. I experienced repeated failures related to test results for the first time in my life. Even though I did my
best, I failed. The TOEFL test preparation showed me there is an
insurmountable high wall regarding English. My mom told me that I
should have worked harder and harder. She is right. I should have done it
in order to achieve 100 on the test. Still I want to achieve 100 on the test.
Just once in my life, I want to get a score of 100.

Her test preparation led her to experience “repeated failures” in her life, as
illustrated by her comments of the importance of her “achieving 100 on the test”. Even
once she had completed test preparation, her unfulfilled desire of the score still
remained as an impact of test preparation on her identity.

Researcher: What do you mean by “Just once in my life, I want to get a score of
100”? Actually, you have no reason to prepare for the test.
Jung: I have no apparent reason to prepare for the test. But, achieving 100 on the
test will tell me how valuable I am in terms of ability. The score will
represent what I am. I wish to improve who I am though the score. Once,
when I started to prepare for the test, I experienced repeated failures and
blamed myself. I wish to make myself a more valuable person by
achieving 100 on the test. If so, I will be satisfied with myself.

The impact of test preparation experience on her identity was to change her goals,
values and beliefs as she become obsessed with getting a higher score. In the beginning
of test preparation, she set a goal to go to a high ranking university, and studied hard.
However, she entered a lower ranked university but could not gain admission into a
high ranking one in Seoul, which was her goal. Even though she finished test
preparation, she still wanted to prepare for the test because she wanted to make herself
more able, valuable and worthy by achieving a score of 100. She believed that only this
result would make her an important person.

5.2.2 Young’s Story
Young studied the TOEFL test for university admission. Among all the test takers in this study, his test preparation took the longest time—20 months (from January, 2010 to August, 2011). What Young and Jung had in common was that their choice of test preparation was a desperate need in that it was the only way to achieve their goals. When he started to prepare for the test, he viewed himself as a confident English learner, and he expected success from his test preparation. However, as test preparation continued, he also suffered from not getting higher scores. What we can learn from the case of Young is how his identity was constructed and then changed by test preparation, through his focusing on higher scores.

- Young’s goal, choice and identity: From a competent English learner to a high ranking university student

In his first interview, he focuses on the fact that he was a student majoring in English at a foreign languages high school

Young: I was a student majoring in English at a foreign languages high school. From my childhood, I like to study English and am used to get a good mark in English subject. So, it was common to go to the foreign languages high school. Except other subjects, I think that I am good at English skills.

During the interview, he seemed proud of his school, as he focused on his educational background. Related to the goal, he took for granted that he prepared for TOEFL in order to go to a high ranking university because most students in his school go to high ranking universities in Seoul:

Researcher: Why did you decide to prepare for the test?
Young: I had no choice besides TOEFL test-preparation for university admission. In my first year at the high school, my College Scholastic Ability Test score was low for a high-ranking university admission but my English test score was high.
Researcher: So, you made the decision?
Young: Rather than making the decision, I really did not want to prepare for the CSAT. In particular, I really did not want to study math, social science,
Korean history. I gave up the test preparation. Compared to others, my English scores were higher. That was why I prepared for the TOEFL test. If I prepared for the CSAT, I could not go to university in Seoul. I was a student majoring in English at a foreign language high school and it would be shameful if I went to a university outside of Seoul. I had no other besides taking the TOEFL in order to go to a high ranking university in Seoul.

In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), his self-view about relevant skills of that goal was a confident English learner and a confident student majoring in English in the high school, which is his actual self. His ideal self was not to lose face as a student in the high ranking private high school. The sets acted as his driving force for TOEFL preparation. His identity constructed his expectations of success with regard to test preparation, and he believed that test preparation could be an easier and faster way to achieve his goals.

Young: When I decided to prepare for the test, I thought that it could be an optimal way for going to a high ranking university because I trusted myself. Learning English is not difficult for me. At that time, I thought that studying TOEFL was a kind of learning English. I did not think that only studying TOEFL could be a very challenging way.

However, it was not that he thought test preparation would be easy as it continued; it was that he become influenced by test preparation in its latter phases. He fully understood the gaps that existed between who he was now and what he would like to become. These challenges are discussed below.

- **Young’s English-mediated identity**

  Compared to Jung’s test preparation, Young’s test preparation was made in his classroom. He used a cram school while on vacation, but only when he needed some help. Unlike general high school students, he only studied TOEFL in the classroom. This differed from the regular practices of other students in his high school. In his school, there are two classes, CSAT preparation (the regular curriculum) and TOEFL preparation. He belonged to the TOEFL class. Every day he practised the same skills for
TOEFL preparation. However the TOEFL class did not play the role of test preparation as it only gave self-study time to students.

Young: I studied the TOEFL at home until last night. Very often I stayed all nights for the test preparation. In the morning I went to school and then I fell asleep in a classroom. Actually, the TOEFL class was self-study time. It was not a test preparation class. We were just given time to study. So, it was not problematic to fall asleep in the classroom.

When compared to general high school students, he did not do regular practice in his classroom. He studied the test at home, and easily fell asleep in class. The classroom was not a place for test preparation; even its context negatively influenced him because it was very competitive. His teachers and peers at school focused on test results, comparing, with the latter making fun of each other. As test preparation continued, he came under pressure and was distressed about his test results.

Young: When I started the test preparation, I did not think this test preparation practices seriously. I studied only TOEFL for over 10 hours a day for around 2 years. The only thing to do was to practise and take the test. I could not count how many times I took the test in order to get the score I wanted. Also, the test preparation context itself was really stressful. For example, my teacher always rebuked me with my test results, saying, “Why have your scores not increased? You must get a higher score in order to go to a high ranking university in Seoul.” Even though I worked hard, she just focused on the test results. She always pushed me to get a higher score. It made me get angry. It was even the case that some classmates who had already gotten high scores on the test made fun of me because of my results. For example, one who had a score of 118 made fun of me, saying, “Why are your scores the same even though you are working hard?” It was common to compare test results and to humiliate each other with them. But I became more and more stressed as test preparation continued. I became more sensitive about my score.
Compared to Jung’s self-conflicts due to test preparation practices at her cram school, Young did not struggle with those at his cram school because he was not required to memorize answers or templates, but to focus on spontaneous speaking.

Researcher: How did a cram school prepare a speaking part of the test?
Young: I usually used an advanced class. Generally, the class focused on spontaneous speaking. So, one by one should answer to questions. Then, the instructor gave feedback to each student.

Researcher: Did they ask to memorize answers or templates?
Young: No. Because my class was for advanced learners, it focused on practices for an actual test. We do not need to memorize answers. The practice is for beginners.

In general, he did not have difficulty learning test preparation practices in the cram school, as compared to Jung. However, as test preparation continued he struggled with the repetitious practices and became alienated from the context of test preparation. He practised only TOEFL test taking skills as a high-school student over two years, while his changes over time are discussed below.

- Young’s changes over time: Becoming obsessed with getting high scores

Compared to other test takers, his test preparation was a process of attempting to achieve almost a perfect score on the TOEFL which is a score of 120. In order to raise his score, he committed his life to test preparation for almost two years and struggled to raise his score. However, at the beginning of his test preparation he did not take the test preparation seriously.

Young: I started TOEFL preparation during winter vacation after my first year of high school. However, at first I took the test without preparation and got a score of 87.

Researcher: Were you satisfied with the score?
Young: Generally, the score was not bad because I did not study for the test at all. However, actually the score was very shameful for a student majoring in English at my high school. In my class, my classmates achieved scores of around 110 on the first test without test-preparation.
A few students achieved a score of 100. There was no student who got less than 100. So, my first score was very embarrassing. But I did not take the score too seriously because I could do better on the next test if I worked hard. So, after the first test, I worked harder.

Like other test takers, in the beginning of the test preparation he also thought it would be easy. Even though his first test results did not meet his expectations, he did not seem to feel disappointed in himself. Rather the first test motivated him to study hard.

Researcher: Please tell me your daily schedule during test preparation.
Young: I studied only TOEFL for over 10 hours a day for around 2 years. I was really fed up with the test preparation, really fed up. The only thing to do was to practise and take the test. I could not count how many times I took the test in order to get the score I wanted. I took the actual test over 20 times. The test fee was expensive around 200,000 won (around 115 GBP). For four hours, I took the test. It was making me crazy. In order to go to university, I repeatedly took the test. My daily life was a very boring routine. The test preparation really exhausted me. At that time I was always dull with excessive repetition of test preparation practice. It was a very high opportunity cost because I only studied TOEFL for university admission. That is why I had limited choices of major and university. You could not imagine how miserable it was.

However, he continued to practise repeatedly. He studied only TOEFL more than two years over 10 hours a day, and took the actual test over 20 times. As with Jung, he also commented that he learned a tip from the class in order to raise scores during the actual test. He explained in detail how to cheat.

Young: I know it is very general in test preparation classes in cram schools. They teach practical tips for raising scores during the actual test. Even the tips can be easily found on websites for test preparation. For example, when I take the TOEFL, I start the reading section very quickly. When the people around me start the speaking section, I finish the reading and
then the directions of listening section start. During the directions, the microphone should be tested by the test taker. But if I do not press any button, the screen stops in the phase for a long time. At that time, I can listen to the person’s speaking answers. I write down the answers on the sheets and I can guess questions from the answers. So, I make my answers using them.

The method of cheating was taught in cram schools and the information could also be found on test preparation web sites. He took cheating for granted. Even though it seemed risky, he commented that it was never detected during actual TOEFL test performance.

Researcher: Isn’t that risky? What if the test proctors detected you?
Young: No! Never! I have taken the test over 20 times but have never been found out by the proctors. Also, everyone does this. Because there are many test takers in the testing place, the proctors cannot detect it. So, memorization is useless because we could not remember the memorized answers during the actual test. Also, it’s not guaranteed that the questions to answers I memorized will be asked because this test is based on an item pool system. Rather using this skill is more useful for the actual test.

The distracting testing environment was used for efficient cheating. He was very used to use the cheating method on the test. While taking the test over 20 times, he was not detected by the test proctors. As he came obsessed with getting high scores, he repeatedly said that he was really “fed up with the test preparation”, which had a very high cost for him.

Researcher: After the first test results, did you make progress on the next test?
Young: Since I had gotten a score of 87 on the first test, I got a score of 92 on the second test. Then, I got a score of 93 on the third test, then 96 on the fourth test. When it was 10 months after starting the test preparation, I got a score of 102. Then I got a score of 103 on the next test. For several months, my test results were around 100. But my targeted score was over
117. In my class, a score below 117 was meaningless for university admission. So, I kept working hard and taking tests. So, I got a score of 106 and 107 on the next tests.

Compared to other test takers, his test preparation was a process of attempting to achieve almost a perfect score on the TOEFL which is a score of 120. In order to raise his score, he committed his life to test preparation for almost two years and struggled to raise his score.

Young: Over one year later after starting test preparation, I got a score of 112. At that time, I just had five months left to finish the test preparation. So, I felt anxious about being able to raise my score to 117. I needed to raise it five points from 112. But it was really hard to do this. For five months, it was the most difficult time in my life. As the deadlines for university applications approached, I felt an extreme amount of pressure to raise my score. My score of 112 was the same until the last month of test preparation. Finally, I got a score of 116 and then 118 in the last test at the end. I always struggled with raising my score.

As test preparation continued, he experienced “dejection-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, “actual versus ideal” (Higgins, 1987, p. 323): His actual self is a student majoring in English at a foreign languages high school. Compared to other test takers, he was proud of being an English major. Even though he was dissatisfied with his first test results, he did not seem to experience self-discrepancy because he believed that he could make progress. He worked hard and did his best in test preparation, making good progress on his test results. However, like Jung, his ideal self was influenced by the important people in his life, such as his teachers or peers at school. In his context of test preparation, his targeted score were over 117, which played a role of identification. Therefore, his ideal self was to become a student who achieved a score of 117. However, as his ideal self did not match his actual self, he experienced humiliation by the important people in his context. Regarding his test results under 117, his teacher always gave him negative comments and his peers made “fun of him”. In this situation, he became obsessed with getting a higher score, experiencing dissatisfaction and disappointment. In particular, for the last five months he could not raise his score and
seemed to experience alienation in a sense of self-estrangement and powerlessness (Seeman, 1959): He excessively used himself as instrument of the work, to judge and to blame himself by test results.

Researcher: How did test preparation influence you?

Young: It had a very high cost. I took the actual test over 20 times. The test fee was expensive, around 200,000 won (around 115 GBP). Also, I spent almost two years studying TOEFL. At that time, I was always only thinking about and working toward raising my score. I took the actual test over 20 times. The test fee was expensive around 200,000 won (around 115 GBP). For four hours, I took the test. It was making me crazy. In order to go to university, I repeatedly took the test. It was a very high opportunity cost because I only studied TOEFL for university admission. That is why I had limited choices of major and university. You could not imagine how miserable it was. Of course I wanted to go to a high ranking university. In particular, during the last five months, I was extremely fed up with the test preparation. I really wanted to stop preparing for the test. I hated preparing for the test. But I could not stop it because I needed to raise my score by at least five points.

In addition, he became powerless as he could not raise his score even by working hard. Despite the difficult internal problems, he finally achieved a score of 118 at the end of his test preparation. Therefore, he entered a high ranking university, using his test results. In addition, what he gained from test preparation seems to be score-mediated identity. Among the test takers in the study, he was the most confident and had strong pride in his achievement.

Young: I really know a score on the test makes a big difference for university admission. Even only one point makes a big difference. In fact, after getting the high score I gained self-confidence. I am proud of myself. Also, people judge me by my test results. My colleagues in my department asked me what score I have on the TOEFL because they know my university admission was made only by TOEFL results. As soon as I answered that my score is 118, they were really surprised at my
high score, saying “That’s a perfect score!” Their reaction was very different from my peers in high school. While my peers in high school made fun of me because my test results were below 117, now people in my university speak highly of my score of 118. Also, the score represents how well I speak English. I do not need to show how well I speak to others because I have a high score. The score makes me proud of myself.

What he achieved through test preparation was not only a high score but also respect from others. What Young and Jung had in common is that they were judged by their test results. These two students were the youngest among the test takers in this study and those important in their lives were involved in their ideal self-construction. Even though the test takers had a desire to achieve high scores in order to go to a high ranking university in Seoul, their motivation was equally affected by the wishes of others. The test takers’ reactions to their test results led them to experience emotional problems because of self-discrepancy. They felt nervous, annoyed and fearful of their test results. It ultimately led them to construct their identity through their test results.

What we learn from these two test takers’ stories is that the impact of test preparation on a test taker’s identity is to make an individual become obsessed with getting a higher score in order to achieve respect from others. In addition, the impact of test preparation makes a test taker to excessively use oneself as instrument of the work, to judge and to blame oneself by test results. Therefore, the context of high stakes test preparation can be detrimental to students’ identities in that they can be humiliated by test results. Therefore, teachers, including instructors and educators, need to understand that they can influence test takers’ identity construction. Young’s comment leaves a very considerable message:

Young: Nobody knows how miserable test preparation is if they have not experienced it themselves. It is a repeated struggle with you have with yourself, all alone.
5.2.3 Tae’s Story

Tae was a 26 year old university student, majoring in engineering. Tae prepared a TOEFL test for international student exchange programme admission. He studied as a part-time test taker for the TOEFL test in a cram school for over 3 months (from March, 2011 to July, 2011). He enrolled in weekend test preparation class during test preparation.

- Tae’s goal, choice and identity

He wished to have more cultural or educational experiences through international student exchange programmes. The goal, studying at an exchanging programme, was perceived as having high social value and included the importance of English skills when he was a freshman. However, this goal was changed into broadening himself through cultural or educational experiences after going into the army.

Researcher: Why do you prepare for the test?

Tae: When I was a freshman, I set a goal to attend an exchange programme in order to get a certificate from a language training course for my resume after graduation as many students do. At that time, I wanted to use it to improve my qualifications for employment after graduation as others do. However, this has been changed into wanting a cultural experience after going into the army. I realized that making good specs such as going to a high ranking university, achieving higher scores, getting a certificate from a language training course and advanced English skills are not always important in my life. I met some people in the army who were not intelligent but really good at their job skills. I found that they just enjoyed their jobs even though they had no TOEFL scores, did not study abroad and did not speak English. Many Korean companies require job seekers to meet their standards. But I thought that the requirements are not everything in my life. So, I decided to broaden myself by communicating with people and learning in a foreign country. I really want to have experiences in a different country for at least one month or up to 12 months. I want to be a better person.
Unlike other university students in the study, his goal was to experience a different culture and people through the exchange programme. In terms of Higgins (1987)’s self-discrepancy, he did not view his actual self in terms of English skills that he currently possessed. Like other test takers, he focused on his ideal self, who would study abroad in relation to his goals. However, in the next phase, he faced a challenge as he started test preparations in the cram school.

- **Tae’s English-mediated identity**

After setting goals he started to prepare for a test by himself. A challenge he faced was how to prepare for a speaking section in the self-study mode. In addition, he viewed himself related to the speaking test preparation. As he started test preparation, he regarded himself as an “idiot” who did not know how to prepare for the test.

Tae: I was an idiot when I studied alone. I did not know how/what to do even though I practised according to a textbook. I began to fear test preparation. It was really hard time for me. I just came to know types of questions but did not know how to answer them. Even though I studied hard, I felt confused about the test preparation, and I was not sure about answering the questions.

During self-study, he discovered that he was an “idiot” as actual self in the test preparation. Additionally, he feared test-preparation because he could not do it well. After then, he changed to a cram school mode. However, he also experienced self-conflict between what he believed and what he was asked to do as a test taker in a cram school. He added that students in the class were forced to follow instructions.

Tae: In class, we are forced to speak within the templates and to memorize answers. The instructors say this is the best way to prepare for the speaking section of the test. In fact, if I learn English speaking, I would not do them. Speaking means to express my own ideas. However, what I learned in the cram school is for test preparation not for speaking. Those practices are just used to get a score. They are not for learning English. When I was a child, I travelled to the US with my family. At that time, my brother asked questions and talked to native speakers in the country.
Even though he did not speak well, he looked nice and competent. He really tried to speak something from his mind. It impressed me at that time. Speaking is to use our own words and ideas but the TOEFL practice shows how to save our time. We have to follow instructions and memorize answers.

Like Jung, he was required to memorize sample answers with templates. However, he was confused by the way he was instructed to practice because the templates and samples were not his own. Regardless of different cram schools, they had similar templates. In terms of Higgins’ (1987) self-discrepancy, he viewed differences between his actual self in English skills which he possessed and believed in, and ought self as being asked to memorize answers and use templates in a cram school. Even though he was dissatisfied with the instruction, he did not indicate his opinions or resistance to the instructor because there was punishment if he did not follow the instruction. Thus, he felt pressure to conform to the instruction and this self-discrepancy led them to experience a sense of resentment (Higgins, 1987). As he realized there were gaps between what he was and what he would like to be, he experienced fear, confusion and uncertainty related to test preparation.

Tae’s changes over time

Tae studied TOEFL for three months in a weekend test preparation class. However, his sense of self changed during test preparation. He commented that he was an “idiot” when he started the test, and he had a fear of speaking when practising during his self-study mode. Yet he learned how to prepare in cram school and practised as instructed. As test preparation continued, he commented that he overcame his fear.

Researcher: How does the test preparation influence you?
Tae: When I studied the TOEFL test preparation by myself, I was an idiot. I did not know how to prepare for the test. At that time I had a fear of the test preparation. So, I enrolled a cram school and then I have learned how to prepare for the test. During the test preparation, my fear of the test preparation disappeared. It is a change after studying at the cram school. I do not see myself as an idiot anymore.
In terms of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987, p. 323), he did not seem to experience emotional problems related to self-conflict. Rather, he viewed his actual self as “an idiot” when he started test preparation. This negative self-perception solely related to English skills. However, as he enrolled in cram school, he discovered the ‘ought’ self from his instructor’s perspective: to memorize templates and sample answers during speaking test preparation. He struggled with the self-conflict between the ‘actual’ self and the ‘ought’ self. When compared to Jung, however, he came to see himself as a competent English learner, and was able to answer questions in English fearlessly.

Two reasons may explain this positive turnaround: his target scores and his time commitment. His goal was to study in an exchange programme, and the requirement score was approximately 80. Compared to Jung and Young, who prepared for university entrance, Tae’s targeted score was lower. He was not under severe pressure to get this score, and therefore enrolled in a weekend class for three months. He did not get fully involved in daily test preparation practices because he was also a university student. It is therefore important to note how he reacted to his test preparation compared to other full-time test takers, because test preparation can have negative or positive impacts depending on test purpose and time commitment.

In conclusion, this section has shown the identity construction of young applicants who prepared TOEFL test for academic admission. First, test taker identities were involved in their choice of test preparation. Depending on test purpose, TOEFL test takers in this study can be categorized into two groups: young students who prepared for admission to universities, and university students who prepared for admission to student exchange programmes. What they had in common— in terms of Higgins’ (1987) actual self and ideal self— was that they tended to focus on the ideal self related to the goal: For the first group who wished to become university students, what they would like to be was to have higher social status, or to keep face as a qualified student by earning entrance to a high ranking university. For the second group of university students who wished to achieve admission to an international exchange programme, their ideal self was to be a competent person who had English skills which are recognized a powerful tool in the society.

Second, as test preparation started they started to prepare for a test by themselves. A challenge they faced was how to prepare for a speaking section in the self-study mode. In addition, they viewed themselves related to the speaking test preparation. While in the previous section they focused on their ideal self, as they started test preparation,
they viewed their actual selves. As they realized there were gaps between what they were and what they would like to be, they experienced fear, confusion and uncertainty related to test preparation. What we learn from the findings is that there might be a link between speaking activities and identity. Test takers started to perceive actual self related to skills in test preparation and found through their speaking practice that there were discrepancies between their actual selves, ideal selves, and ought selves. As discussed in the previous section, in the goal setting phase test takers focused on their ideal self (Higgins, 1987) including their perceived value of their goals. They believed that they could prepare for the test by themselves. However, as test preparation began they had difficulty in speaking test preparation. They viewed their actual self related to English skills for the test preparation. They realized that their self-study mode would not allow them to earn the score they needed. Therefore it led them to study in a cram school.

However, they faced value clashes between what they believed and what they were asked to do in cram school. Even though they attended classes at different schools, they were required to memorize templates of sample questions and sample answers, as discussed in Chapter 4. Templates were found only in the TOEFL materials across the cram school mode. Regardless of different cram schools, they had similar templates. These templates played an important role in the TOEFL materials because they provide organization of sample answers. Test takers tended to find their actual self in self-study and required ought self in cram schools. As they experienced Higgins’ (1987) self-discrepancy between actual self and ought self, they experienced emotional problems. However, they began to conform to the ought self.

Last, as test preparation continued, test takers’ identities were influenced by test preparation depending on test purpose and commitment of time to test preparation. The university students prepared for less than three months because they did not directly pursue getting higher scores. Their choice of test preparation was not desperate when compared to the young students. Therefore, their identity was not negatively influenced by test preparation. They instead commented that general test preparation was useful for overcoming their fear of TOEFL test preparation, including English speaking sections. However, a group of young students, Jung and Young prepared the test for competitive university admission over one year as a full-time test taker. Time was an important variable for the group because there were very high cost implications of test preparation, which have an impact on a test taker identity. For example, the context of test
preparation included alienation such as powerlessness, meaningless and self-estrangement (Seeman, 1959). In addition, the test takers’ teachers, peers or parents were involved in the construction of their ideal self or ought self. In these situations, the test takers continued to prepare for a targeted test, feeling serious distress, shame, frustration and fear. Regardless of their level of English, the full-time test takers, Jung and Young who prepared for over 3 months said that they were “fed up with test preparation”. They also experienced similar emotional problems. However, they did not give up on test preparation because they believed that their test results would provide them new opportunities in their lives. They did their best even though their test results did not fully show their commitment to test preparation. What we learn from these test takers’ voices is that their test preparation did not give them the opportunity for personal growth. Rather, it played a role of constraining their individual originality and values. It induced their self-conflict and emotional problems as test preparation continued.

In this study, the impact of test preparation on a test taker’s identity was devaluation of one’s sense of self. Although I found negative impacts from test preparation, what I discovered does not fully support Shohamy’s (2001) interpretation: that tests induce negative outcomes for individuals. In this study, test preparation impact on a test taker’s identity depended on test purpose and time commitment to test preparation. In particular, time was an important variable for the test takers because there were very high cost implications of test preparation, which have an impact on test taker identity. Additionally, the findings support how test preparation and its features impact a group of job-seekers who have prepared for TOEIC-Speaking or OPIc tests. These characteristics will be considered in the next section.

5.3 Job seekers (“I am a Cheup-jun-bi-saeng”)

This section first identifies what features job seekers had at the starting point of test preparation in terms of goal, choice and identity. Second, stories of individual participants including Han, Rae, and Euen are presented by the data, identifying how test preparation fits into the life goals of the test takers, attempting to understand the place of test preparation in their stories, and the impact the test preparation experience
has upon test takers’ identity. In particular, the section argues that a high-stakes test does not always equal high pressure test preparation. Short-term test preparation has less impact on a test taker’s identity. This is supported by the findings presented below, and interpreted by theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987; Seeman, 1959). This section highlights what test takers had in common and how they differed with regard to the impact of test preparation on their identities.

Compared to other groups, as shown in Table 5.4, all participants who prepared for the TOEIC-Speaking or the OPIc test called themselves a job seeker when they introduced themselves to me (in Korean, they call themselves cheup-jun-bi-saeng). They wished to work for a major company and earn a high salary. Six participants had graduated from university just before starting test preparation. Most test takers were financially supported by their parents. Three participants had prior job experience. During all interviews, test takers said that it was important to understand how they prepared for employment in order to understand who they are. They considered employment preparation to be, what they called, “spec-management”. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term, “spec” originates from a word from "specification," which also means "an act of identifying something precisely or of stating a precise requirement" or “a detailed description of the design and materials used to make something." This word has also been used for comparing features of computers, and now it comes to be popular with comparing competence in the skills of job seekers. Therefore “spec-management” means to prepare for employment in Korean Society (The Korea Times, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of test prep</th>
<th>TOEFL-prep group (Total n=7)</th>
<th>IELTS-prep group (Total n=6)</th>
<th>TOEIC-Speaking prep group (Total n=5)</th>
<th>OPIc-prep group (Total n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job application</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, what they had in common was short test preparation, including less than two months when compared to other groups. Their test preparation tended to be low-stakes in terms in that their targeted scores were not relatively high scores. However, their preparation for future employment came to dominate their life and
organization of their daily activities. Ultimately, their identity was influenced by their employment preparation, as illustrated by stories of Han, Rae and Euen below.

5.3.1 Han’s Story

Han was a female graduate majoring in applied chemistry. When a university student in her last year, she set a goal to study in graduate school using a government-sponsored scholarship due to financial issues. She prepared testing for the scholarship until halfway through her final year, but later failed the test and searched for other grants to obtain graduate school admission. Finally she abandoned the preparation and for her remaining time she prepared for employment. In order to do that, she studied as a full-time test taker for the TOEIC-Speaking test in a cram school for 2 months (from October to November, 2011) and the OPIc test for 2 months (from December to January, 2012).

- Han’s goal, choice and identity

Compared to other job seekers in this study, Han started to prepare for job application after her graduation. When she applied for employment, she found that it was impossible to do that without results of the English speaking test.

Han: After graduation, I applied for job offers. While completing the application, I found that many companies require a score on the TOEIC-Speaking. Without the required score, I could not apply for the positions. It is one of specs. I should achieve other specs such as computer skills or other foreign languages as well.

Before employment preparation, her goal was to attend graduate school on a scholarship. However, she did not get financial support, and gave up preparation. She then started to prepare for employment, her goal being “spec-management” on job applications. Test preparation was a compulsory choice in order to get a job.
Han: Actually, still I want to go to graduate school. But I could not gain any financial support and stopped it. Even now I am preparing for job applications. I will prepare for graduate school admission after getting a job. In order to do that, I should achieve a required minimum score on an English speaking test. But I am worrying about studying English. I really dislike studying English. I am not good at English skills. I feel anxious with English speaking.

Even though she set a goal of test preparation, she worried about her English test preparation because of her lack of English speaking skills. She added her negative experience when speaking English. Before starting test preparation, she took part in group study for English speaking. When she was asked to introduce herself in English to peers in the first meeting, she could not speak English well. Her peers corrected her rather than understood her, and she was hurt by their attitude.

Han: I joined in an English conversation study-group before that one. In the first meeting, I was asked to introduce myself to peers in English, but I could not do that because of my lack of English. Except for me, others seemed to speak English fluently. Some tried to help me to speak English. They corrected my English speaking sentence by sentence. In particular, when I hesitated, a team leader did not wait but made his own answers. He then asked me to follow his answers, but it made me feel inferior to them in terms of speaking English. After I came back home, I cried because I really felt ashamed. The experience was shattering, and I was depressed for a while.

In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), her actual self was that of a job seeker attempting to “spec-management”. Her self-view about relevant skills regarding that goal was not positive because of her experience in the group study. At that time, she did not speak English well compared to her peers and felt ashamed of herself. To make matters worse, her spoken English was corrected by her peers, and she was required to practise their suggested answers. This practice made her feel “inferior” throughout the meeting. However, English speaking test scores are required within a job application, so she had no choice. Her ideal self was to achieve a job and go to graduate
school by becoming self-supporting. The two sets of identity acted as personal drivers during her test preparation.

- **Han’s English-mediated identity in speaking activities**

  After setting a goal, she selected a well-known instructor through her friend’s recommendation. The TOEIC-Speaking and the OPIc prep groups in the study tended to search well-known instructors because some of the instructors for these courses were infamous for being strict and humiliating students during class as explained in Chapter 4.

  Researcher: How did you select the test preparation classes?
  Han: My friend strongly recommended the classes for TOEIC-Speaking and OPIc preparation because the instructor teaches well, making the class student-friendly. I’ve heard of other well-known instructors who humiliate students in class when they cannot answer questions. For example, one of my friends attended Ms. K’s class for test preparation but she directly scolded students for incorrect answers or hesitating to speak English which made the students feel insulted. I think any student could not speak English well in such a student-threatenning class. We can easily feel shy when we are asked to speak English because we do not speak English in our daily lives. Anyway, even though my friend selected a class in order to raise her score, she stopped attending after a week because of the terrible teaching. So, we decided to attend this recommended class.

  The class consisted of a daily program for one month. At the beginning of test preparation, she was anxious with speaking activities because of prior negative experience in group-study. She was required to practise in pair work using her own answers. While preparing for TOEIC-Speaking, she seemed to struggle with speaking practice.

  Han: When I started the test preparation, I was very shy with speaking practice in the class. I worried whether I would make a fool of myself in front of my peers, as I did in the group-study. I did not want to feel insulted again. So, I felt uncomfortable, without smiling, during the class.
However, she continued to attend the class and joined in group study after class. As explained in Chapter 4, this class was to give group study session including materials, guidelines and a study room to students. According to the guidelines, a team leader conducted the group study for one hour. Students worked in pairs and practised spontaneous speaking the same as in the class.

Researcher: How do you prepare for the test?
Han: I attend the class and participate in group study after class.
Researcher: How is your group study? Are you satisfied with the activity?
Han: It is good. At the starting of the group study, ten students joined. But one week later, over half of them have left. Now, it has been for three weeks, and only four students study together. We practise in pair work, using our own answers. We focus on the practice rather than giving feedback or correction on our speaking. It is different from previous group study in the past.

She did not have difficulty with group study because it gave her an opportunity to practice English speaking rather than being corrected. She studied hard in the class including the group study. As test preparation continued, she looked comfortable in the class, laughed when the teacher gave a funny story to students, and spoke well without hesitation in pair work. One month after starting test preparation, she took an actual test to obtain a level 6 TOEIC-Speaking. Her test results were higher than the required level 5 on the test.

Researcher: You got the results from the first test. It has been just one month since you started. Are you happy with that?
Han: Yes, I am so happy with the results. I did not expect to get the level 6 on the first test. I just thought that I would get level 5 on the test. Of course, over three weeks, I recognized that my English speaking was developing well compared to the starting point of test preparation. When I practise with a peer, I do not feel anxious with the practice. I tend to enjoy the time. It is big progress.
During test preparation, she noticed that her prior lack of English speaking skill had improved. In order to overcome her anxiety when speaking English, she practiced a lot with peers. She became comfortable with speaking practices. Her change was also shown in her behavior during interviews. Compared to her first meeting, her voice was louder and energetic. She seemed to have attained a sense of achievement through the test preparation. She also added how her teacher had helped her in the class.

Han: My instructor told me in a meeting that I looked very serious and almost cried during the class. So, she could not ask me to answer any questions for two weeks. She supported me to reduce my anxiety, making the class student-friendly. At the end of the course, she commented that I speak well and with confidence. I think that I am different from myself in the past. I am not anxious with my English speaking. I gained confidence in English speaking.

In terms of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987, p. 323), and before starting test preparation, she experienced “dejection-related emotions” regarding her “actual” self versus “ideal” self: The previous group study made her reveal her actual self as not being able to speak well when compared to her peers. Yet Han’s peer group’s English speaking through pair work constructed her ideal self. As her actual self did not match her ideal self, she felt ashamed. However, through test preparation, her actual self was transformed from a negative self to a positive self with regard to speaking activities. Her teacher helped her overcome her anxiety when speaking English, and her peers did not correct or assess her. The contexts of test preparation included a supportive teacher and a non-threatening study group. As test preparation continued, she began to get a positive self-image related to the speaking activity, and later gained a good mark on the test.

**Han’s changes over time**

After she got the first test results from the TOEIC-Speaking test, she continued to prepare in order to gain level 7. Even though she already had achieved over the required score a month earlier, she wished to improve her English speaking through test preparation. She continued to attend the class and to join the group study for another month. Then, she took the test again but received the same test results.
Researcher: Do you get a higher score?
Han: No. I got the same results as in the first test. But I am fine. Through test preparation, I came to enjoy English speaking practice. This is an unexpected big change.

Researcher: How does test preparation influence you?
Han: Before starting, I really disliked studying English. So, I was worried about English test preparation, and if I could do well. As I studied the test, I became interested in English speaking. After I received the first test results, I got a sense of achievement. The required score is level 5 on the test, so I do not need to take a test again. But I want to study more and develop my English speaking. So, I prepared for the TOEIC-Speaking test again.

She seemed to have changed into a motivated English learner. At the starting point of test preparation, her goal was to gain the required score for a job application, like other job seekers. However, she again set a goal, but only for improving her English speaking skills. Even though she received the same test results in the second test, she was not disappointed. At the end of the TOEIC-Speaking test class, her instructor who taught the TOEIC-Speaking test opened the OPlc test class and suggested that Han be an assistant, attending the class without a tuition fee. Therefore, Han decided to accept the suggestion, and to prepare for the OPlc test.

Researcher: You started to prepare for the OPlc test. How is your test preparation class?
Han: The class atmosphere is friendly. We are generous given our lack of English speaking. When I make a mistake in my English speaking class, our classmates are gentle and listen to me without any judgement. Of course the instructor gives feedback. She is also kind and receptive. So, I do not care for my mistakes in English speaking, and enjoy the speaking practice.

Her class was supportive of each other. She studied hard and in group study. Her OPlc test preparation seemed to go well. As test preparation continued over 3 months, however, she responded that her speaking did not seem to progress. In addition, she
became nervous with her unstable status related to long-term employment preparation. At that time, she was preparing for employment over six months.

Han: While preparing for the language test over three months, my English speaking did not seem to progress as quickly as I had expected. It makes me think whether test preparation is a waste of time or not. At the same time, I am not a student, and unemployed. My status is ambiguous. As test preparation continues, I think about myself: between what I am, and what I would like to become. I am now preparing for other certificates of qualification, and am spending time, costs and energy on job applications. Even though I am studying hard, I’m not sure whether I can get a job.

Her daily schedule was to attend class in the morning and join in group study after class. She then studied alone all day in a study room at the cram school. But she was getting tired with employment preparation. In terms of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987, p. 323), she experienced self-conflict between her actual self and ideal self within her reality. Her actual self is that of an unstable job seeker who prepares for tests all day, whereas her ideal self is to get a job as soon as possible.

As test preparation continued, she became tired but continued to do speaking practice with peers, memorizing good expressions. One month later, she took the first OPIc test and received an intermediate-high level and finished her English test preparation. These test results were higher than her expectations.

Researcher: Did you expect to get those test results?
Han: No. Unexpectedly, I got a good mark! As soon as I got the results, I called mum and said that I achieved it. Then, she was happy, and said that I had done well.

Researcher: How does test preparation influence you?
Han: I prepared for the TOEIC-Speaking for two months, from October to November last year, and for the OPIc test for two months, from December to January this year. In the beginning of test preparation, I was not good at speaking English. When I tried to say something, it was difficult to make sentences. I worried whether my speaking was
grammatical or not. Over two months, my English speaking became more organized. Now it is not hard to make sentences. It is better than the before. The test preparation, including test results, led me to have positive experiences when speaking English. They motivated my English learning.

Compared to other test takers, she did not suffer from language test preparation. She started to take an interest in English, and got a positive impact on her English speaking learning and self-image. Even though she started to prepare for the TOEIC-Speaking test for a job application, she voluntarily prepared for the OPIc test for two months. Actually, her OPIc test scores were not required in job applications where she wanted to apply. However, she was motivated by test preparation, and studied in order to develop her English speaking ability.

Han: As I told you, I had a bad experience with the English speaking group study. I also had a negative self-view when speaking English. So, I felt nervous with class activities. But through test preparation, I came to prefer studying together, such as in pair work or group study. I have learned how to share ideas and to give helpful feedback in order to give good answers to questions.

Ultimately, she finished the language test preparation. Her test preparation helped her overcome her negative experience of English speaking in the past, and improved her English speaking and self-view of English. She also learned how to study together through test preparation, which was a positive experience of group study.

5.3.2 Rae’s Story

Rae was a prospective female graduate majoring in international management. When she was a university student in her second year, she studied at an English language programme. After she came back to Korea, she prepared for an accounting test until halfway through her final year. However, she ultimately abandoned the test
preparation and for her remaining time she prepared for employment. In order to do that, she studied as a full-time test taker for the TOEIC-Speaking test in a cram school for 1 month (October, 2010) and the OPIc test for 2 months (from January to February, 2011).

- Rae’s goal, choice and identity

Rae’s goal was “spec-management” for job application like other job seekers. She explained that the term, “spec” means many kinds of certificates related to foreign language skills, computer skills, and major and voluntary work which most Korean companies require in job applications.

Researcher: Why do you prepare for the TOEIC-Speaking?
Rae: It is for spec-management.
Researcher: What does “spec-management” mean?
Rae: When I fill out a job application, there are many items I should check such as experience of study abroad including in a language programme, foreign language skills including English and certificates including computer skills. We call them specs. So, TOEIC-Speaking test preparation is just one of my spec-management.

As explained in the previous section, the reason why the university students prepared for exchange programmes was also that they function as a useful certificate for studying abroad or attending a language training course when they make their resume for employment after graduation. In addition, she explained that there is a process of “spec-management” and it takes between 6 months and 1 year. In particular, the first step is English (speaking) test preparation including the TOEIC and the TOEIC-Speaking or the OPIc.

Rae: Actually, the first step of job application preparation is to prepare for English tests including the TOEIC and speaking tests such as the TOEIC-Speaking or the OPIc. It takes 2 months but it depends on each case. We need to get a result of around 800 on the TOEIC and level 6 or 7 on the TOEIC-Speaking. The next step is to achieve certificates related to one’s major for 2 months. The last step is to make our resume and to join in a group study for job application during the last two months. We
spend at least 6 months on spec-management. However, it takes one year to get a job. Because most companies hire employees twice in a year, if a person fails in the first half of the year, the person again applies for jobs in the second half of the year. During that time, we could apply for internship programmes or achieve other beneficial certificates.

Regarding language tests, Rae added that university students prepare for employment starting in the third year of university. Then, during their final year, they can apply for jobs. At least they try to finish their employment preparation during the first half of their last year in university. However, compared to others, she started to prepare for employment late because she had been preparing for an accounting test.

Rae: My goal was to be an accountant before starting to prepare for employment. So, I prepared for an accounting test for over one year. But I gave up the test preparation and was depressed because my goal was not achieved. I expect this employment preparation to be successful. This is everything to my current life.

She seemed to feel sorry for her failed accounting test preparation. Her goal was “spec-management” for a job application, but her choice of test preparation was a desperate need in that she prepared too late for employment. She commented that she wanted to achieve higher scores beyond required scores because she believed that the test results might influence her employment.

Rae: I want to succeed in this test preparation because I failed in the accounting test preparation. So, I want to achieve higher scores rather than required scores. Of course job seekers in the field of business and management try to achieve higher scores rather than just earning the required scores. For example, we are generally required to achieve around 700 on the TOEIC, a level 6 on the TOEIC-Speaking and an intermediate-mid level on the OPIc. But we try to achieve at least between 800 and 850 on the TOEIC, a level 7 on the TOEIC-Speaking and an intermediate-high level on the OPIc because we believe that having a score higher than the required score will positively influence our job application. The test results show
how I am good at the required skills. Furthermore, recently some of the big companies including Samsung also hire employees who can speak Chinese. So, other students also prepare for Chinese language tests.

In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), her actual self was that of a job seeker attempting to do “spec-management”, who had experience of an accounting test preparation. Her ideal self was to achieve a job and to overcome her negative experience of previous test preparation. Compared to other job seekers, she started employment preparation late because of the failed accounting test. She wanted her test preparation to be successful. The two sets of identity acted as personal drivers in her test preparation.

- Rae’s identity in test preparation

After setting a goal, she selected the class through her friend, Han’s recommendation. As explained in Chapter 4, her test preparation classes did not require her to memorize answers or use templates, but to join pair work using their own answers. She commented that this test preparation class was helpful, and she was satisfied.

Rae: This class provides opportunities to practise English and receive feedback from the instructor. After giving a speaking performance, we receive oral comments from the instructor. It is really helpful for test preparation. I can recognize how I am speaking English as well as learn from others’ speaking.

She attended the class and joined in group study afterwards. During test preparation, she did not have difficulty with speaking practice. However, she was under pressure to achieve high scores, and seemed anxious should she fail.

Researcher: Do you have any difficulty with TOEIC-Speaking test preparation?
Rae: Not really. I do not have a big problem with test preparation. I like to study English. When I was a university student, I studied at an English language programme in UK. So, the test preparation is fine, but I feel anxious about getting a good mark. I do not want to fail again.
She studied the test for one month and then took the first TOEIC-Speaking. She gained a level 7 on the test, with results higher than those required. After she received them, she prepared for two months for a test related to her major. Then she started to prepare for OPIc in the same cram school where she had studied the TOEIC-Speaking. In fact, her test preparation for OPIc was optional because she already had the test results from TOEIC-Speaking.

Researcher: You already got the results from the TOEIC-Speaking. Why do you prepare for the OPIc?
Rae: In the beginning of the TOEIC-Speaking preparation, I just prepared for a job application. But as test preparation continued, I came to know my English speaking was improving. Actually, I do not need to prepare for the OPIc because I got the test results from TOEIC-Speaking. But I want to improve my English skills through the OPIc preparation.

She had been changed by the test preparation. When she started, it was for a job application only. However, as test preparation continued, she recognized how her English was developing, and she became motivated to improve still more. Like the TOEIC-Speaking preparation, her OPIc preparation also was going well. She experienced no emotional problems or negative changes with regard to the test preparation.

Researcher: Do you have any change after test preparation?
Rae: While preparing for the OPIc test, I think that I want to work for an international company where English is used. It will be a good change. Compared to the TOEIC-Speaking, the OPIc test gives more time to answer questions. So, I do not have time pressure, and I enjoy the test preparation. As test preparation continues, I can see my expressions and skills are improving.

Even though she did not struggle with speaking test preparation, a challenge she faced was long-term employment preparation, with its high-cost implications. She was preparing for employment over a six month period. She studied all day for a job application. She attended the classes and joined in group study. After the class, she
came back home and studied other tests in her room. She added that she wanted to “escape” from her situation.

Researcher: Please tell me your daily schedule for test preparation.
Rae: I attend TOEIC class from 8:30 to 10:30. Then, I attend OPIc class from 11:30 to 1:00 pm. Then, I join in group study at OPIc for one hour. Then I come back home. After having lunch, I study other tests all day in my room. Actually, I am tired with employment preparation. I have prepared for employment for over 6 months. I am still unemployed. It is stressful. Because of the long-term process of job application, I am losing my energy. I want to escape from this life. I think most job seekers would feel the same.

What we can learn from the case of Rae is that her English test preparation had no negative impact on her. Rather, she was motivated by it. In particular, her test preparation classes made it possible to have a positive impact on her learning. What she struggled with was employment preparation. As the preparation continued, she was “losing her energy”. She seemed to experience “dejection-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, her “actual self versus ideal self” (Higgins, 1987, p. 323): Her actual self is that of a test taker and job seeker who prepares all day for a job application. Alternatively, her ideal self would like being employed in an international company. When the employment preparation took longer, she got tired. A particular aspect was her very calm-yet-fatigued voice. Her responses seemed similar to Hyen’s “lethargie” response, as discussed in Section 5.1.

5.3.3 Euen’s Story

Euen was a 27-year-old single woman who had worked for a trading company for over 4 years after university graduation. In order to get a more stable job with a higher salary, she left her job. Then, she started employment preparation. As a full-time test taker, she prepared TOEIC-Speaking for two months (between September and November, 2011).
**Euen’s goal, choice and identity**

Euen’s goal also was to get a requirement score for job application like job seekers. However, compared to Han and Rae, she had job experiences and voluntarily gave up her job in order to work for a better company. Her test preparation was high cost implications.

Researcher: Why did you leave your job?

Euen: I was not satisfied with the company. It was not a big company which offers high salary and stability. I want to work for a better company. Also, my parents want me to prepare for job application. They want me to work for more recognized company. So, I gave up my job and now I am preparing for job. The reason I prepare for the TOEIC-Speaking is to fill out job applications. Regardless of major, job experience or other values we should have the test results of the TOEIC-Speaking or the OPIc. Job seekers pursue same the goals. They want to work for a major company and to work in a stable place while earning a high salary. But the number of positions is limited. So, we compete with each other and pursue higher scores than those of others because it could have an impact on our employment.

The required scores were a level 6 on the TOEIC-Speaking. She wanted to achieve higher scores rather than just earning the required scores. She commented that she was majoring in English at her university. She liked studying English and continued to do so after graduation.

Euen: I was a student majoring in English at University. From my childhood, I liked to study English and am used to getting a good mark in English subjects. Unlike other subjects, I think that I am good at English skills. We are generally required to achieve around 700 on the TOEIC, which is a level 6 on the TOEIC-Speaking. But I want to get a higher level on the test than the required one. I believe that having a score higher than the required score will positively influence my job application. Also, I want to make achievements in my life.
Among this group of job-seekers in the study, she was very motivated at the goal-setting stage. Her test preparation was not just to achieve required scores for job applications, but also to “make achievements in her life”. In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), her actual self was that of a job seeker who had job experience. Her self-view about relevant skills was that of a confident English learner. Her ideal self was to achieve high scores on the test, and ultimately a better job. The two sets of identity acted as personal drivers regarding her test preparation.

- **Euen’s English-mediated identity in speaking practices**

After setting a goal, she selected the same class where Rae and Han studied. She was also concerned about the instructor’s attitude to students. She attended the class and joined in group study after class. As with Rae, she did not seem to struggle with speaking practice.

Researcher: How is your test preparation?

Euen: I like to study English and work hard. So, I do not have a big problem with the English test preparation. The instructor teaches well. Classmates are good.

She liked to study English and was satisfied with her class and group study. She prepared for the test for two months. Then, she took the first TOEIC-Speaking and achieved a level 7 on the test. Her results were higher than her required level, and she was very motivated by the test results. She decided to prepare for the test again, in order to achieve level 8 on the test.

Researcher: You achieved a level 7 on the first test in just two months. Are you happy with that?

Euen: Yes, I am happy with the results. But I will prepare for the test again in order to obtain a level 8 on the test.

Researcher: The level 8 is a full mark on the test. Do you have any reason to do that?

Euen: As I told you in the first meeting, I believe that having a score higher than the required score will positively influence my job application. Also, I
want to achieve a full mark on a test for the first time in my life. I never got a full mark on any test. I want to have achievement in my life.

In terms of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987, p. 323), she did not experience self-conflict at this stage. She was very motivated from receiving a full mark. Her goal of a full mark means not only her “spec-management” but also her “achievement” in life. She enjoyed English speaking and worked hard in the class and the group study.

- **Euen’s changes over time**
  As test preparation continued over three months, she seemed to get tired with test preparation. At the same time, she was preparing for another test for a job application. Her daily schedule was to attend the TOEIC-Speaking class and then join in group study in the morning. She then attended a TOEIC class and joined in group study afterwards. In the evening, she studied in a library.

  Researcher: How is your test preparation?
  Euen: I am still doing it. But at the same time, I am studying other tests for job applications. I am getting tired with test preparation. I started the employment preparation from September this year. Now, it is December. I am nervous about my current status. I am 27 years old. I had job experiences but have to compete with younger job seekers. I read an article about many companies preferring to select younger applicants. I am not sure if I can work at a better company.

  A challenge she faced was her unstable status. In particular, she worried about her age in relation to job applications. She often commented that young job seekers are her competitors. Her test preparation, including employment preparation, seemed to compete with them. As test preparation took longer –more than four months-- she became anxious about her future. She added that she felt like she was losing her individuality as test preparation continued.

  Euen: I think that I am losing my own individuality while employment preparation. Actually, I am not passionate about doing that, but I seriously try to achieve higher scores than others. I devote myself to
doing that because other job seekers are my competitors. In particular, young job seekers are working hard, and they are very competent in English. Many companies tend to prefer young job seekers and avoid candidates who are between 29 and 31 years old.

In the previous section, she seemed to be motivated by the test results but was changed by the long-term test preparation. She believed that her condition, such as her age, would be a disadvantage for job applications. Therefore, she focused on achieving higher scores on tests, and higher than other job seekers’ scores, even though she already had the required scores. Her test preparation seemed to her to be a way to cover her age yet reveal her ability in job applications.

Euen: I started this employment preparation last year. But now I am 28 years old and financially supported by my parents. I am anxious about the gap between what I am and what I would like to be. So, I really feel pressure about the employment. That is why I am focusing on raising my score. The only thing to do in order to prove how competent I am is to have higher score than other competitors. Even though I am older than other job seekers, if I could higher test results on all of tests, it will make me more able to get a better job.

As test preparation continued over four months, she experienced “dejection-related emotions” because of self-discrepancy, her “actual self versus ideal self” (Higgins, 1987, p. 323): Her actual self is a 28 years old single woman supported by parents, who gave up her job in order to focus fully on test preparation. She studied hard every day over those four months. What she would like to be, as her ideal self, was to achieve a better job with a high salary. However, she felt pressure and anxious about the gaps between her actual self and ideal self in the reality of test preparation.

Researcher: How does test preparation influence you?
Euen: When I got the first test results on the TOEIC-Speaking, I was so happy because I had a sense of achievement. So, I continued to prepare for the test in order to get a full mark. But it takes time to get the full mark. Of course I enjoy English learning and do not have any huge difficulty with
English test preparation, but the problem is self-control. Every day I study tests, attending class or group studies. This life makes it easier to be lazy, isolated or uncontrolled. If this test preparation takes longer more, I will be definitely fed up with this life.

Euen seemed to be influenced by the context of test preparation over time. In terms of Seeman’s (1959) definition of alienation, the context of test preparation made it easier to be isolated or powerless. She repeated test preparation activities every day as a full-time test taker. As test preparation continued, she noticed that she would be negatively influenced by test preparation. However, she still wanted to achieve her goal, and continued to prepare for the TOEIC-Speaking including other tests.

In conclusion, this section has shown the identity construction of a group of job seekers who prepared TOEIC-Speaking or OPIc tests for job applications. Compared to other groups, this group of test takers prepared for a targeted test in a relatively short period of time because their speaking test preparation was part of employment. Therefore it is important to understand “spec-management” in order to understand the identity of the group of job seekers in this study. “Spec-management” is their common goal regardless of their individuality, interest, job experience or major. This is also a process of shaping a person such that they consider: “how good am I at required skills compared to others”. During the interviews, test takers did not mention how they are unique or creative in order to show their own competence for employment preparation. Rather, this group shows who they are collectively in Korean society as they became what they called job-seekers.

In terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987), they had few negative features of English test preparation impact on their identities. Instead, they commented that their test preparation had positive impact on their English learning and self-image. They started to take an interest in English, and got a positive impact on their self-view. Their short-term test preparation did not induce self-conflict or emotional problems.

One explanation for this observation might be related to their short test preparation, less than two months when compared to other groups. As discussed in Chapter 4, test takers’ commitment of time on test preparation is important in terms of understanding the context of the high cost implication on test taker identities. The longer the time spent on test preparation is, the higher the cost to the individual. These findings are also
supported by reference to the group of university students who prepared for less than three months, as discussed in Section 5.2. In addition, a challenge they faced was not about speaking activities in the class or changes over time, but instead the impact of long-term employment preparation. They seemed to be tired with the reality of employment preparation, worrying about their unstable status and age.

This study reveals that a high-stakes language test does not always equal high pressure test preparation, identifying different contexts of test preparation where individuals construct their identities depending on test purpose. The contexts include variables that influence a test taker’s identity such as personal goals, the type of test, instruction in cram schools, cost implications, and people who are influential to a test taker. In addition, the negative impact on a test taker’s identity does not simply come from a test. We need to know the contexts of test preparation where different stakeholders’ desires are interwoven instead of simplifying the consequences of test use.
Chapter 6  Conclusion

This final chapter provides a summary of the findings while speculating about the significance of the findings for the language testing field more generally and discussing what the impact of this research is for various stakeholders. This chapter also discusses limitations and future research.

6.1 Summary and significance of the findings

This study set out to identify the relationship between test preparation and test taker identity, examining Korean test-takers’ preparation for tests of English speaking proficiency. This study used test-takers’ perspectives to investigate how the act of test preparation impacts identity. This study sought to answer the following main research questions:

1. How do Korean test takers prepare for a test of English speaking proficiency using TOEFL–iBT, IELTS, TOEIC speaking and OPIc test preparation?
2. How do test takers construct their identities during test preparation?
3. How does test preparation impact test takers’ identities?

With regard to the first research question, four areas of test preparation were identified. The first main area for consideration was a test taker’s choice of study mode because that is the first decision a test taker encounters when beginning to prepare for a targeted test. Across test prep groups, test takers in this study tended to use well-known cram schools for targeted test preparation. Regarding how to select a cram school or materials used in test preparation, most test takers searched on the internet or asked friends about well-known cram schools or instructors for targeted test preparation. Students tended to trust information regarding instructors’ profiles and class curriculum taken from cram schools’ web sites or pamphlets. The shared information of targeted test preparation among test takers was involved in the choice of test preparation method.
One original contribution of this work is the finding that there is no connection between the type of test a test taker is preparing for and the type of test preparation selected, in that participants across test prep groups chose a cram school mode as their main study mode.

The second main area for consideration was test takers’ commitment of time to tasks related to test preparation, because this provides information about the context of test preparation and has high cost implications. It was found that time spent on test preparation differed depending on test prep group. The TOEFL prep group spent the longest amount of time (8.7 months on average) on test preparation among all prep groups. Similarly, the IELTS prep group spent 7.5 months on average. Most participants were full-time test takers and mostly used a cram school mode. However, the TOEIC-Speaking and OPIc prep groups spent less than 2 months on average. The original contribution of these findings is that a high stakes test does not always equal high pressure test preparation. For the TOEIC-Speaking prep group and the OPIc prep group, test preparation did not seem to be high pressure. However, time was an important variable for the TOEFL and IELTS prep groups in that the very high cost implications of test preparation had an impact on a test taker’s identity.

The third main area for consideration was test takers’ activities within their study mode. What we learn from comparing activities across modes is that students’ test preparation was different depending on test prep group. In addition, it was influenced by test type and the instructors in the cram schools. In particular, what the students learned from the classes continued in their group study and self-study activities. The activities they participated in during their group and self-study modes were those that they learned in class: TOEFL test-takers in group study or self-study modes did not practice speaking spontaneously. Instead, they read sample answers or memorized them. In contrast, IELTS, TOEIC-Speaking, and OPIc test-takers did not memorize sample answers in these modes. Instead, they practised individually or in pairs, creating their own answers. In addition, during test preparation across modes test takers took an actual test; however, the number of times a test taker took an actual test depended on the test prep group. In the TOEIC-Speaking and OPIc groups, a test taker took a test twice on average. In the TOEFL and IELTS prep groups, a test taker took a test over three times on average. In addition, it was found that students’ speaking performance was influenced by the testing environment regardless of their test results. For example, most of the IELTS test takers in the study commented that the examiner’s reaction to their
answers during the face-to-face interview test increased their anxiety. Most TOEFL and TOEIC-Speaking test takers argued that the testing environment was distracting because of the delivery mode of the test. They were easily distracted by other test takers’ speaking performance, saying that this condition of the testing environment increased their anxiety. In addition, the conditions of the testing environment were used for cheating by some TOEFL test takers in the study. This method for cheating, which was comprised of test takers creating templates from others’ responses, was taught in cram schools and popular among test takers.

Instructor-made materials across modes played an important role in test preparation. This finding is important because it is not consistent with previous studies investigating test preparation materials (Wall, 1999, 2005 cited in Wall & Horak, 2011; Wall & Horak, 2011). The instructors assembled collections of past test items in their materials. These collections of past test items were considered more useful than published textbooks. The findings related to test preparation in cram schools provide new insights about cram schools. Even though there are always issues with generalization in qualitative research of this nature, the findings may very well be replicated across cram schools in countries that share a similar educational system and/or use of language tests for such high stakes purposes such as China, Taiwan, and Japan (Zeng, 1999).

The findings of the remaining research questions speak to the relationship between test preparation and test taker identity. This study identified how a test taker’s identity was constructed during three phases of test preparation, integrating notions of self (Higgins, 1987) into identity in choice (Eccles, 2009), self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987) and alienation (Seeman, 1959). During the first phase of test preparation, it was found that two sets of identity acted as drivers in test preparation choice. One is the actual self, which is one’s self-view toward competence regarding relevant skills, tasks and activities. The other is the ideal self, which is what one would like to be related to a goal. This study provides new findings in that it discovered that test takers tended to focus on their ideal self related to the goal. Participants strongly believed that test preparation would increase opportunities and open doors to their future. In this phase, their test preparation was a life-defining choice with high cost implications.

After goals were set, test takers selected a study mode and started to prepare for a test. These modes included cram schools, group study and self study. In the second phase of test preparation, some test takers tended to perceive their actual self related to their skills in test preparation or tended to discover their ought self in the cram school
mode. In addition, some test takers tended to recognize self-discrepancy between their actual self and their ideal self as they practised speaking activities with peers. These findings are important because they demonstrate how test takers’ identities were constructed by test preparation. Compared to the first phase, test takers started to perceive their actual self in test preparation.

As test preparation continued over 3 months, some test takers’ stories illustrated the impact of test preparation on a test taker’s identity over time. They experienced two types of emotional problems connected with self-discrepancy: “dejection-related emotions” in connection with self-discrepancy between “actual self versus ideal self” or “agitation-related emotions” in connection with self-discrepancy between “actual self versus ought self” (Higgins, 1987, p. 323). They found that their actual self as a test taker did not match their ideal self of who they would like to be or their ought self of who they thought they should be. Test takers’ teachers, peers or parents were involved in the construction of their ideal self. Self-discrepancy became intense and included feelings of serious distress, shame, frustration and fear. As they struggled with their self conflicts, they experienced alienation such as powerlessness, meaninglessness and self-estrangement (Seeman, 1959). The higher the cost to the individual, the greater the sense of alienation and negative feelings they experienced as test preparation continued. Compared to previous research (Bailey, 1999; Cheng, 2005), these findings are original because they identify the progression of identity a test taker experiences as test preparation continues. Therefore the findings make original contributions in that the study revealed that the impact of test preparation on a test taker’s identity was devaluation of their sense of self.

However, the findings do not fully support Shohamy (2001)’s interpretation that tests cause detrimental outcomes to individuals because these findings do not simplify consequences of test use. For example, some test takers’ stories had few negative features of English test preparation impact on their identities. Most of them prepared for a targeted test in a relatively short period of time. They commented that their test preparation had positive impact on their English learning and self-view. Their short-term test preparation did not induce self-conflict or emotional problems in terms of theories of identity (Eccles, 2009; Higgins, 1987). Therefore, this study revealed that contexts of test preparation include variables that influence a test taker’ identity such as personal goals, the type of test, instruction in cram schools, cost implications, and people who are influential to a test taker. We need to know the contexts of test
preparation where different stakeholders’ desires are interwoven. Therefore, the study is the first attempt to document the reality of test takers’ actual experiences.

### 6.2 Implications

The findings of the study impact a variety of stakeholders. This section discusses what the impact of this research is on these stakeholder sub-groups, and explains what they can learn from this research and how it might inform or change their current practices.

#### 6.2.1 Implications for institutions

What institutions can learn from this research is that a test should not be used for making life-defining decisions about individuals. Depending on test use, test preparation becomes high stakes or low stakes because a test determines test preparation. Historically, cramming has always existed as a part of test preparation (Fulcher, 2010). However, policy makers do not listen to test takers’ voices. This study found that the impact of test preparation on a test taker’s identity was the devaluation of a sense of self. Participants realized that they were losing themselves as test preparation continued. However, they could not abandon test preparation because test results would open doors for their future. Even though participants chose test preparation in order to achieve their personal goals, their test preparation had a detrimental impact on their lives. What institutions should remember is that a group of test takers is not a marginalized group but possible powerful-users who can influence test use policy. Individuals have rights, which should not be controlled by test misuse. In this sense, this study demonstrates that high-stakes test preparation may be harmful to individuals. Therefore, institutions should take social responsibility for their decision-making and use a test in order to “promote personal growth or provide individuals with new learning opportunities” (Fulcher, 2009).
6.2.2 Implications for testing companies and the test preparation industry

What testing companies and the test preparation industry can learn from this research is that a test can be damaged by cram schools that encourage unethical testing practices, which can, in turn, lead to negative impacts on a test taker. One problem with the current practices of these stakeholders is that they view a test taker as a material resource that can benefit stakeholders. Because the number of test takers is increasing, relevant testing companies and the test preparation industry are earning more and more money. Test takers try to find quick and easy test preparation methods to reduce the high-cost of test preparation. The test preparation industry suggests problematic test preparation for their customers. The reason that test preparation cannot achieve its purpose of education is that each stakeholder’s desire is interwoven in test use. However, this study reports that TOEFL test takers were taught to memorize templates and sample answers in cram school modes. Some of them were taught how to cheat during a test. Their test preparation is unethical because it distorts learning in test preparation. However, there are no regulations to protect a test taker from unethical test preparation because there is not enough ownership of social responsibility in the testing industry. In addition, the long-term side effects of false learning on a test taker tend to be neglected. However, this study suggests that long-term test preparation may devalue a sense of self and lead to emotional problems and alienation. If individuals are slowly losing themselves through the painful process of test preparation, the best way to void this is to stop test preparation and regulate relevant test preparation industries which provide test preparation. Even though testing companies and the test preparation industry are aware of the harmful nature of test preparation, if they do not change their current practices, they are avoiding reality and neglecting test takers’ rights.

Therefore, testing companies should develop appropriate test preparation practices. They should be aware of how test takers prepare for a targeted test and monitor the test preparation industry. The group of TOEFL test takers had serious and valid complaints about the distracting testing environment encountered, not to mention that this environment was exploited for cheating. In addition, testing companies should inform test users, including test takers, that longer high stakes test preparation can induce negative impact on a test taker’s identity such as emotional problems and alienation.
Furthermore, the test preparation industry, including cram schools and materials developers, should not advertise that their test preparation will lead to high scores in a short period of time. In this study, students tended to trust information from cram schools’ web sites or pamphlets which advertised just that. However, most test takers continued to prepare for a test even though it contradicted the claims of the advertisements. In addition, some test takers argued that they were humiliated by instructors in class. These findings reveal that the context of test preparation is different from that of educational learning. The study provides evidence that the impact of test preparation on a test taker’s identity may be devaluation of a sense of self. The testing industry should strive to change their views of test takers in test preparation. What they should teach is not a test but a learner.

6.2.3 Implications for test takers and parents

What test takers and parents can learn from this research is the reality of what test preparation is. Test takers should be smart test users rather than relying on cram schools. In this study what all participants pursued was to have a better life. Their personal motivation led them to prepare for a test. However, what they underestimated was the reality of test preparation. They strongly believed that cram schools would help them gain their required scores. However, test preparation involves high cost implications including time, cost and energy. Participants gradually experienced alienation and negative emotional problems during test preparation. Ultimately, test preparation at a cram school did not guarantee a test taker’s achievement. As test preparation continued, what participants commonly commented was that they were “fed up with test preparation”. Their test preparation practices included excessive rote learning. In addition, they were often humiliated by relevant others such as instructors, parents or peers. In particular, in this study a group of TOEFL test takers explained the teaching methods used in cram schools: The instructors forced them to memorize templates and sample answers. Sometimes they were taught how to cheat on the test. Even though other groups of test takers did not have similar experiences, their context of test preparation was still not motivated by learning but by raising scores. The test
preparation chosen by test takers to achieve their personal goals ultimately hindered their personal growth.

This study allows stakeholders to understand certain features of test preparation and the impact they have on a test taker’s identity. I strongly argue that test takers and parents should understand what will be beneficial for their lives in the long term. They should be aware of their right to be informed about the appropriate and inappropriate features of test preparation. These stakeholders are a potential power group who could instigate change from other stakeholders because they are the main participants in test preparation.

6.3 Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations. First, there are always issues with generalization in qualitative research of this nature, but that what I have learned about cram schools in particular is quite consistent, and may very well be replicated across cram schools in countries that share a similar educational system and/or use of language tests for such high stakes purposes. Thus, the results are likely to be generalizable to countries such as China, Taiwan, and Japan. Second, identity is difficult to define, and theoretical frameworks are in their infancy. Therefore, it is difficult to operationalise those frameworks in terms of actual behaviours that reflect aspects of identity and changes in identity. However, if this is not attempted, we are not able to make the first steps from the existing literature that is mostly theoretical, to understanding identity and change in real-world contexts. This study is starting to take these first steps towards operationalization because I believe that the lens of identity is useful for understanding how real people behave, feel, and make choices, in contexts where they are making life-changing decisions like preparing for a high-stakes test. Third, this study does not fully provide social relationships which may influence a test taker’s identity construction, such as detailed information about teachers, friends and family. Last, this study does not provide information about identity construction of a test taker in their personal spaces such as homes, workplaces or schools.

Future research is needed in order to fill these gaps. The first is to examine more cases of how test preparation impacts test taker identity. This would help to
operationalize theoretical frameworks in terms of aspects of identity and changes in identity. The second is to explore test takers’ social relationships involved in identity construction. That is, how teachers, friends and family influence a test taker’s identity construction. This would provide a more in depth understanding of identity construction. The third is to explore test taker identity in various spaces such as at home, in the workplace, at school or during social meetings. This would provide information about how a test taker’s identity is constructed in different contexts.

6.4 Research impact

In conclusion, the main findings of this research are predicted to have a significant impact upon a range of stakeholders in language test preparation practices. The key stakeholders identified are institutions, testing companies, including the test preparation industry, test takers and parents. By raising their awareness of how test preparation practices operate, and how it can affect test takers, I would expect improvements from the situation described in this thesis. These may include improvements in the areas of ethical test use and preparation. This research has therefore not only made a major contribution to the demystification of the test preparation industry, its practices, and its impact upon test takers, but also has provided guidelines for improvement to the field.
Appendix 1 Questionnaire form

Speaking test preparation study 2011
Questionnaire for test takers

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather your overall ideas on speaking test-preparation. As with other data generated for this project, your identity will remain confidential. Please read the questions below and check your opinion for each question.

Nahee Kim
School of Education
University of Leicester
Tel: 000-000-0000 Email: nk159@le.ac.uk

Please return your completed survey to Nahee before you leave today.

I. Section A: General information
1. Please fill in the below box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Job</th>
<th>Job Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Have you taken English speaking tests? Fill in the blank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Experiences</th>
<th>Yes or No</th>
<th>Test Score &amp; Date</th>
<th>What did you use your test result for?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL test:</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
<td>Score: Date(Year/Month/Day):  /   /</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS test:</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
<td>Score:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Type</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Date (Year/Month/Day):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC Speaking test:</td>
<td>□ Yes</td>
<td>□ No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPIc test:</td>
<td>□ Yes</td>
<td>□ No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other English speaking tests:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**II. Section B: Test preparation**

1. Which test are you preparing for? (Circle the test)
   - TOEFL-speaking
   - IELTS-speaking
   - TOEIC-speaking
   - OPIc

2. Why are you preparing for the test?

3. Why are you attending this workshop?

4. Are you satisfied with this workshop? (Circle one)
   - Yes / No

4.1 Please write the reason which you chose yes or no.

5. Are you attending test-preparation program for taking the test? (Circle one)
   - Yes / No

5.1 If yes, Where, When, How many hours a week are you attending the program?
   - Where _______________ When _______________ Hours a week _______________

5.2 Why did you choose this test-prep program?

5.3 Do you have any expectation for this program?

6. Are you using the test preparation textbook? (Circle one)
   - Yes / No

6.1 If yes, which book or books are you using?

6.2 Why did you choose this test-prep textbook?

6.3 Do you have any expectation for this textbook?
7. Are you using the test preparation websites? (Circle one) 
Yes / No
7.1 If yes, which websites are you using?
7.2 Why did you choose this test-prep website?
7.3 Do you have any expectation for this program?
8. Are you doing practice tests? (Circle one) 
Yes / No
8.1 If yes, how often and how many practices are you using?
8.2 Why did you choose this practice test?
8.3 Do you have any expectation for this practice test?
9. Are you attending group-study? (Circle one) 
Yes / No
9.1 If yes, Where? When? How many hours / week? 
Where __________ When___________ Hours a week ___________
9.2 Why did you choose this group-study?
9.3 Do you have any expectation for this program?
10. Please list any other preparation activities you do below.
11. Any other comments
Please add any other comments you would like to make.

*** If you are interested in this research and would like to talk with me about your experience preparing for the test, please write your name and contact details below or on the form handed out with this survey.

Name
Mobile phone
Email

Thank you very much for your time.
Please hand your form to Nahee Kim
Appendix 2 Information package

Invitation letter (Participation information sheet)

PhD Research study: Test preparation and identity: Cases of Korean test takers preparing tests of English speaking proficiency

You are invited to participate in this research. The purpose of this letter is to provide participation information in order to make a decision about whether you wish to participate in this research. Please read the following information.

1. Aim of the study

This study aims to identify relationships between test preparation and a test taker’s identity, examining South Korean test-takers’ preparation for tests of English speaking proficiency from the test-takers’ perspectives and investigating how the act of test preparation impacts identity. This will be done by multiple-case study using interview, diary study and observation. This research is being undertaken as part of a PhD study based at the School of Education, University of Leicester.

2. Participation

You will be invited to take part in interview study, a diary-study and observation during your test-preparation. However, it depends on your decision about whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to fill in a consent form. In addition, you are able to withdraw from this study at any time.

3. Benefits of participation

While you take part in the interview study, you can monitor your learning during test preparation, reflection on your test preparation experiences. In addition, you can have an opportunity to view yourself as a test taker, communicating with a researcher. Even though you spend your time on this research participation, this interview study will be conducted in a cosy cafe with refreshments. It will help to distress you in high-stakes test preparation.
4. Protection of anonymity

Anonymity of participant information will be kept confidential. Participant name and relevant institutions’ names such as university, cram school or other institutions will be pseudonyms in this study.

5. Results of the study

Interview data will be audio-recorded and transcribed. This data will be checked by each participant. Then, it will be used in a PhD thesis and may be published in academic journals. Participants will be able to request a copy of the research.

6. Approval of the study

The University Research Ethics Committee has approved this research.

Name, position and contact address of Researcher

Nahee Kim
PhD Student

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, please contact the Chair of The University Ethics Committee on ( ).

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet, please contact me if you require any further information.

Nahee Kim
September 2011
Consent Form

Full title of Research Project:

Test preparation and identity: Cases of Korean test takers preparing tests of English speaking proficiency

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:

Nahee Kim
PhD Student

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

PLEASE TICK BOX
Yes No

4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

5. I agree to keep a diary.

6. I agree test-preparation to be observed.
7. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

Name of Participant  Date  Signature

Name of Researcher  Date  Signature
Appendix 3 Coded transcript

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data extract</th>
<th>Coded for</th>
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<tr>
<td>M: I have prepared for the IELTS since February. Until this April, I studied all of the sections on the test in a cram school. Then, from May to July I received writing tutoring from an instructor at the cram school. Then, I enrolled in a speaking class at the cram school for three months. I spent nine months in total at the cram school. Because the tuition fee is expensive, I really tried to finish test preparation, but it took time to raise my score.</td>
<td>A. Choice of test-prep method 1. Cram school 1.1 Duration of enrolment 1.2 Classroom environment 1.3 Class procedure 1.4 Teaching style 1.5 Student work mode 1.6 Materials</td>
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<td>R: IELTS classroom included a white board at the front of the classroom, and an instructor’s desk in the corner of the classroom. The number of students in the class was around 40. This class did not provide a group study option for students after class. The seating arrangement was fixed in rows and the students were facing toward the instructors.</td>
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<td>Hyun: As the IELTS-speaking class started, the instructor handed out the day’s materials. Next, students were asked to brainstorm the topic for several minutes. Then, he explained it. After that, we practice with each other but no one comments on our speaking performance. This class does not require students to memorize answers from hand outs like other classes do. Rather this class gives enough time to practice English. In this sense, this class is good for speaking practice. However, the class does not give information</td>
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about speaking skills, whereas test preparation classes in cram schools tend to provide information about how to speak or how to raise a score. Also, this class does not provide instructor feedback on student speaking performance and we do not know if our speaking is correct or not.

Suk: I worked for an American international company and English communication was required. I should have communicated with foreign employees. I always felt uncomfortable when speaking English. If only I could speak more fluently, then I could achieve more. Also, I had no experiences of studying overseas like in an exchange student program. I always needed to negotiate with others but my speaking was limited. English is a required skill to survive in my field. Also, related to my job description I wish to study marketing in order to develop myself. I wish to be more confident in English speaking and more knowledgeable in the field of marking. For a long time, I planned to study overseas. At first, while working I enrolled in weekend test preparation class for two months. However, it was really hard to work and study at the same time. I sought advice from my friends about how to solve this problem. Some of them recommended focusing on the test preparation. Therefore, I left my job and now I am doing it.

Tae: I was an idiot when I studied alone. I did not know how/what to do even though I practiced according to a textbook. I began to fear test
preparation. It was really hard time for me. I just came to know types of questions but did not know how to answer them. Even though I studied hard, I felt confused about the test preparation, and I was not sure about answering the questions.

Tae: In class, we are forced to speak within the templates and to memorize answers. The instructors say this is the best way to prepare for the speaking section of the test. In fact, if I learn English speaking, I would not do them. Speaking means to express my own ideas. However, what I learned in the cram school is for test preparation…not for speaking. Those practices are just used to get a score. They are not for learning English.

R: How does this test preparation influence you?
S: It is shaking the very foundation of my identity…it is making me feel humiliated….in my life for the first time I have experienced humiliation and frustration with myself. When I worked for seven years, I was a competent person. But since I started test preparation, I feel terrible. Damn it! I have pride in my past work experience. But when it comes to test preparation I am not self-disciplined. But I am in my thirties. That means that I am not a child. But my real self is not an adult. I know what I should do during this time but I am like a child. I am used to working with people. I have failed to manage my time and myself….I am very ashamed of my myself and feel guilty ….

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<th>1. Actual self in self study</th>
<th>1.1 Self-view to English skills</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Actual self vs ought self in cram school</td>
<td>1.1 Self-view to English skills</td>
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<td>3. Actual self vs ideal self</td>
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<th>C. Changes over time</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Actual self vs ought self</td>
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<td>1.1 Emotional problems</td>
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<td>2. Actual self vs ideal self</td>
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<td>3. Alienation</td>
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<td>3.1 Powerlessness</td>
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<td>3.2 Meaninglessness</td>
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<td>3.3 Self-estrangement</td>
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References


International English Language Testing System. (2014). *What is IELTS?*


