



Exploring the Impact of Repeated TOEIC Test-Taking on the Motivation and Performance of Fourth-Year EIC Majors at a Thai University

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ABSTRACT

English proficiency is crucial for success in variety of careers, especially in non-English-speaking countries. The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is a widely used benchmark for assessing professional communication, with large numbers of English for International Communication (EIC) majors in Thailand being required to achieve a high score for graduation. In addition, many Thai companies require TOEIC scores for job applications and promotions, which further increases the pressure on students. However, a large number of students face challenges in meeting the required TOEIC score, leading to repeated test attempts. This study investigates the impact of repeated TOEIC test-taking on students' motivation, future test performance, and overall well-being. Data from a sample of 58 fourth-year EIC students were analyzed, combining quantitative survey results with qualitative interviews. The findings highlight significant emotional and psychological impacts, including

	<p>discouragement, anxiety, and increased test fatigue. While some students develop improved familiarity and confidence with the test format, most report negative effects on their academic goals and self-esteem. The study contributes by suggesting concrete implications for teaching practices and institutional policies, such as designing more holistic TOEIC preparation courses, integrating stress management strategies, and providing support systems for students facing repeated failures.</p> <p>Keywords: language assessment, motivation and performance, repeated test-taking, TOEIC, test anxiety</p>
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Introduction

In today's globalized workforce, English proficiency is essential for success in a variety of careers, particularly in non-English-speaking countries. In Thailand, several types of English proficiency test are widely used in both the private and public sectors to assess language skills. Among these, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is widely recognized as a benchmark for professional communication. It is commonly used due to its affordability and reliability, making it a preferred choice for educational institutions to assess student readiness for the workforce. Achieving a high TOEIC score is often required for the graduation of English for International Communication (EIC) majors in Thailand (Burapharat & Tiansoodeenon, 2018; Maliwan, 2018; Namsaeng, 2021). Besides being a graduation requirement, the TOEIC score is also used in the job market (Nguyen & Gu, 2020) as key requirement for employment in various organizations, including several universities in Thailand, such as Rajamangala University of Technology (Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University, 2018; Kalasin University, 2021; Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, 2024). In addition, many private companies in Thailand, such as airlines, banks, and international firms, use TOEIC as part of their recruitment and promotion systems (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022; Charubusp et al., 2025).

Despite the emphasis on English proficiency, many EIC majors in Thai universities struggle to achieve the required TOEIC score, leading to multiple test attempts. This issue highlights a broader challenge within English language education in Thailand, where many students repeatedly attempt standardized language proficiency tests. Repeated test-taking has become a common experience for many students striving to meet proficiency standards (Demir & Keleş, 2021). The implications of repeated testing are significant, influencing students' motivation, performance, and psychological well-being. In this study, student motivation is considered in terms of both

intrinsic motivation (engaging in learning out of interest or for enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (driven by external requirements such as graduation or employment) (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

At Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep (RMUTK), the EIC curriculum requires all fourth-year students to achieve a minimum TOEIC score of 700 to qualify for graduation. However, recent data from the Management Information System (MIS) (2023) at RMUTK shows that only 49 out of 106 students were able to meet this requirement, leaving 58 students unable to graduate due to their failure to reach the required score (MIS, 2023). Research on repeated failures in high-stakes tests, such as the TOEIC, suggests that these failures can have long-term effects on students' motivation, self-esteem, and overall academic performance (Namsaeng, 2021; Santana et al., 2016; Silalahi & Sitorus, 2021). However, there is a lack of research specifically addressing how frequent TOEIC test-taking influences motivation and performance in the Thai context. This is especially important because TOEIC functions as a university exit exam in Thailand (Pan & In'nami, 2017), creating a washback effect that strongly shapes how students learn English (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022). This dual role, as both a graduation requirement and a job market credential, makes TOEIC use in Thailand a unique case within global English testing practices, since in most countries TOEIC is used mainly by companies as a job screening requirement, not as an official university exit exam.

This study sought to address the gap in understanding the impact of TOEIC use by investigating the psychological and academic impacts of repeated TOEIC test-taking on students' motivation, future performance, and overall well-being. Furthermore, it sought to provide insights that will help improve teaching methodologies, inform policy development, and enhance student support in English language acquisition. While the focus is on immediate and ongoing academic and psychological impacts, the study also raises questions about potential longer-term consequences for students' career readiness, which future research should explore. By addressing these issues, the study aimed to develop targeted strategies to assist students facing the challenge of repeated test taking, with the goal of improving both their learning outcomes and psychological well-being. The resulting insights are critical for informing national university educational policies and practices that are tailored to the needs of Thai EIC majors. The study generated the following research questions:

1. How does repeated TOEIC test-taking without achieving the desired score affect students' motivation and future test performance?
2. What are the psychological effects of repeated failures in TOEIC on students' overall academic and personal life?

Literature Review

This study built upon existing research related to high-stakes testing, student motivation, and the impact of repeated test-taking on performance and psychological well-being. Previous research has explored these issues in both global and Thai contexts, offering insights into how high-stakes exams affect learners in different educational environments.

High-Stakes Testing and Student Motivation

High-stakes testing, including standardized examinations such as TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS, and national assessments, has significant implications for students, educators, and institutions. The impact of these assessments on student motivation is the subject of an ongoing debate in academia and policy circles. Some argue that such tests can promote academic dedication and encourage skill development, while others claim that they lead to stress, anxiety, and a decline in intrinsic motivation.

Research shows that while high-stakes tests may motivate students to improve their language abilities, they can also cause significant stress and worry, which may then negatively affect performance (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). For instance, Chalak and Kassaian (2010) found that high-stakes examinations can foster both extrinsic and some degree of intrinsic motivation, as students view test preparation as an opportunity to enhance their language competencies. Similarly, Fan et al. (2014) highlighted the ‘backwash effect’ of university-based English language tests, showing that students focus more on test-taking strategies than actual language improvement, which ultimately affects motivation and the quality of learning. In the Thai context, recent studies emphasize how exit exams such as TOEIC shape not only classroom teaching but also students’ broader learning approaches (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022; Charubusp et al., 2025). In addition, learners’ perceptions of the test’s importance and fairness can influence their motivation and the time allocated for test preparation (Dong & Liu, 2022).

Repeated participation in the TOEIC has been reported to help some students to improve their English proficiency and boost their confidence over time (Lertcharoenwanich, 2022). However, these benefits are often accompanied by increased pressure, as the TOEIC scores significantly influence both academic and professional futures for non-native English speakers.

Despite some advantages, the pressure of high-stakes testing can have negative consequences for student motivation. Matsuda and Gobel (2004)

emphasized that such exams often lead to higher levels of test anxiety, particularly in language assessments. This anxiety can impair performance and create a cycle of poor results, which in turn discourages students and reduces their motivation to engage in the learning process.

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is particularly relevant here. According to the theory, extrinsic motivators such as the need for a TOEIC score for graduation can sometimes undermine intrinsic motivation. However, under specific circumstances, extrinsic goals can complement intrinsic motivation, particularly when these goals align with the learner's values and self-perception (Niemi & Ryan, 2009). At the same time, when exam pressure is perceived as controlling and reduces students' sense of autonomy and competence, anxiety tends to increase, placing additional psychological burdens on their test preparation and performance (Waluyo et al., 2025). Conversely, when students view the TOEIC requirement as meaningful and relevant to their personal or career development, the external pressure may work in a positive direction, supporting motivation by linking extrinsic goals with intrinsic values (Nguyen & Gu, 2020).

Repeated Test-Taking: Impact on Performance and Psychological Well-Being:

The literature on repeated test-taking presents mixed findings. On the one hand, familiarity with the test format and so reduced test anxiety can lead to improved scores over time (Hu & Trenkic, 2019). On the other hand, repeated test failures can have a demotivating effect, leading to a phenomenon known as the negative form of the backwash effect, where students become discouraged and disengaged from learning (Fan et al., 2014). More recent large-scale studies point to the dual nature of preparation: meta-analytic studies report that certain preparation approaches can raise scores, but not all methods lead to broader language gains, and effects vary by strategy and context (Hao et al., 2025; Permatasari et al., 2024)

The psychological effects of repeated failure in high-stakes testing are less commonly explored, but existing research suggests significant impacts on students' self-esteem, anxiety levels, and overall psychological well-being (Demir & Keleş, 2021). Such negative outcomes often extend beyond the academic setting, affecting students' personal lives and future career aspirations. Parra et al. (2014) emphasized the emotional toll that language learners experience, showing that repeated failures can lead to heightened levels of stress and frustration, which negatively impact both personal and academic development. These repeated failures in the TOEIC test have been linked to feelings of inadequacy and frustration in students, affecting their

mental health and self-confidence (Santana et al., 2016; Silalahi & Sitorus, 2021).

Empirical Studies on Repeated TOEIC Test-Taking

Recent empirical research has provided valuable insights into the impact of repeated TOEIC test-taking on student motivation, performance, and psychological well-being, particularly on non-native English speakers. Various methodologies have been employed to explore how students' academic and psychological outcomes are shaped by the challenges of high-stakes English language assessments.

Nguyen and Gu (2020) investigated the effects of using TOEIC Listening and Reading as a university exit test on non-English major students in Vietnam. Through a combination of survey questionnaires and student performance records, the study examined how the integration of TOEIC as a graduation requirement influenced students' motivation and test preparation behaviors. The findings revealed mixed outcomes: some students showed improved test scores over time due to their growing familiarity with the test format, while others experienced increased test anxiety and a decline in intrinsic motivation as pressure to pass the exam mounted. This study underscores both the performance gains and the psychological strain associated with repeated test-taking.

Similarly, Silalahi and Sitorus (2021) explored the perceptions and experiences of Indonesian EFL students who repeatedly took English proficiency tests. Using in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, the researchers found that students who failed to achieve the required score consistently developed a sense of learned helplessness. Many participants expressed feelings of pointlessness, which led to demotivation and, in some cases, decisions to abandon their attempts to pass the test. This study highlights the emotional toll that repeated high-stakes testing can impose, particularly when success remains elusive.

In the Chinese context, Hu and Trenkic (2019) focused on the IELTS test, which unlike TOEIC includes a speaking component, but their findings offer valuable comparisons to TOEIC test-taking. In their longitudinal study of Chinese test-takers, the researchers explored the effects of repeated test-taking and coaching on IELTS scores. Using pre- and post-test assessments alongside qualitative interviews, they found that while coaching improved students' test-taking strategies and scores, it did not necessarily lead to improved English proficiency. This echoes the findings of Roediger and Karpicke (2006), who demonstrated that repeated testing could enhance memory retention and long-term learning outcomes, though the focus on rote memorization may overshadow genuine language acquisition. Similarly,

Roediger and Butler (2007), working with Washington University undergraduates in a simulated classroom setting in the United States, found that testing fosters deeper engagement with learning materials.

In Taiwan, Pan and In'nami (2017) also questioned whether requiring TOEIC as a university exit test ensured higher employability, showing that while test scores may rise, the link to workplace performance is not always clear. These findings provide useful parallels for understanding the Thai case, where TOEIC serves as both a gatekeeper for graduation and as a credential for employment.

In the Thai context itself, Yamalee (2018) examined the challenges which Thai students face in achieving the required TOEIC score. Through focus group discussions and questionnaire surveys, the study revealed that the cultural pressure to attain high TOEIC scores caused significant test-related anxiety and stress. Many students shifted their focus from learning English as a language to simply passing the test, often relying on rote memorization techniques which were not conducive to long-term language retention.

Synthesis and Connection to the Current Study

These empirical studies collectively provide a clearer understanding of the challenges and outcomes associated with repeated TOEIC test-taking. The research highlights both the potential benefits, such as increased familiarity with the test format and improved scores (Hu & Trenkic, 2019; Nguyen & Gu, 2020), and the negative psychological impacts, including increased anxiety, learned helplessness, and a shift toward rote learning (Silalahi & Sitorus, 2021; Yamalee, 2018). Drawing on self-determination theory (SDT), we view repeated attempts under strong external requirements as likely to reduce autonomy and perceived competence for many learners, which can then lower intrinsic motivation while increasing anxiety (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Waluyo et al., 2025).

At the same time, evidence from meta-analyses and Thai preparation courses indicates that targeted preparation can support performance when it builds both language ability and test strategies (Hao et al., 2025; Lertcharoenwanich, 2022; Permatasari et al., 2024). Guided by this literature, the present study examines how repeated TOEIC test-taking relates to the motivation, performance, and psychological well-being of Thai EIC majors, where TOEIC serves both as an university exit benchmark and as a labor-market credential (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022; Charubusp et al., 2025; Pan & In'nami, 2017).

These patterns also raise questions about longer-term effects, since repeated TOEIC failures may not only discourage academic engagement but also limit students' future employability and career readiness (Dong & Liu, 2022; Pan & In'nami, 2017). This dual pressure from both graduation requirements and job-market demands makes the Thai case a distinctive one in global English testing research.

Overall, the conceptual link guiding this study is that repeated high-stakes attempts intensify extrinsic pressure and reduce students' perceived autonomy and competence, leading to heightened test anxiety and discouragement, which in turn influence study behaviors and performance. At the same time, structured preparation and communicative practice may moderate these effects, helping some students to maintain confidence and achieve better outcomes in the face of apparent adversity.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of repeated TOEIC test-taking. By utilizing both methods, the study collected numerical data to identify trends in motivation and performance, while also obtaining qualitative data in order to explore students' personal experiences and psychological effects.

Firstly, the quantitative component involved the use of surveys to assess changes in student motivation and test performance over time. Secondly, the qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews, which captured the personal experiences and psychological impacts of repeated test-taking by the participants. This approach allowed the study to examine both measurable outcomes and the subjective experiences of students, offering a well-rounded analysis of how repeated TOEIC attempts affected them. Both instruments were prepared in Thai, with English equivalents to ensure clarity.

Participants

This study's participants consisted of 58 fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in the English for Standardized Test course at a Thai university. All the participants were majoring in English for International Communication (EIC) and were selected based on specific criteria. Each participant had taken the TOEIC test at least twice without achieving the required score of 700 and had also attempted the university-tailored TOEIC test (UTK-TEST) twice, failing to meet the standard passing grade of 70.

Additionally, all the participants were enrolled in the intensive TOEIC 45-hour course during the summer semester. All the participants provided informed consent.

From this group, six participants were selected for in-depth interviews. The interviewed participants were chosen based on their TOEIC performance, with two students selected from each of the following categories: those who had taken the TOEIC test more than twice, those who had achieved a TOEIC score close to 700, and those who had obtained a TOEIC score below 400. This criterion-based selection ensured that the participants had shared relevant experiences with repeated test-taking, allowing the study to explore the effects of repeated TOEIC attempts on their motivation, performance, and psychological well-being.

The survey data offered a broader perspective on trends in motivation and test performance, while the interviews provided deeper insights into the personal experiences of students.

Research Instruments

To address the research questions and explore the impact of repeated TOEIC test-taking on students' motivation, performance, and psychological well-being, this study utilized the following instruments.

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was developed to quantitatively measure students' motivation levels and self-reported performance in the TOEIC test over multiple attempts. The survey included Likert-type items designed to assess financial, emotional, and motivational impacts, as well as psychological and emotional responses to repeated test-taking. The questionnaire was originally bilingual (Thai with English equivalents) to ensure clarity for participants, but for reporting purposes the English version is provided in Appendix A.

The final instrument contained 26 items across four parts: demographic information, motivational impacts, psychological effects, and emotional responses. Items used three response formats: (a) a 4-point agreement scale (1 = Strongly disagree ... 4 = Strongly agree), (b) a mixed scale with a "No effect" option plus 4-point agreement, and (c) multiple-response items. Before piloting, two EIC instructors reviewed the items for content and face validity and suggested minor wording adjustments. The questionnaire was pilot tested with a separate cohort of EIC students of the same major but a different year, and minor changes were made to wording and timing.

Because the study analyzed items individually rather than as composite scales and used multiple response formats, internal consistency indices such as Cronbach's alpha were not calculated. Instead, the emphasis was placed on content validity and clarity checks.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement the surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants ($n = 6$). Each interview lasted 10–12 minutes, and the same set of eight core questions was used across all participants to ensure consistency. The interview protocol was developed based on key themes emerging from the survey data, focusing on motivation, psychological effects, study habits, and personal/academic impacts. Interviews were conducted in Thai, audio-recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim. For reporting purposes, the English version of the protocol is provided in Appendix B.

The first author completed initial coding. To enhance reliability, one transcript out of six was independently coded by a second rater; agreement was high, and any differences were resolved through discussion. Given the small qualitative sample, consensus coding was used rather than computing a numerical inter-rater statistic. Theme development was primarily inductive; afterwards, we compared themes with constructs from SDT and test-anxiety research in order to ensure a theory-informed interpretation consistent with the study's framework.

Document Analysis

Participants' TOEIC performance records were reviewed with their prior consent in order to corroborate the self-reported data from the surveys. This allowed the study to track trends in test performance over multiple attempts, providing a more objective measure of performance and reinforcing the analysis of how repeated test-taking influenced motivation and academic outcomes. For consenting students, we noted their number of attempts and available TOEIC and UTK-TEST scores.

Procedures

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the data for this study was collected in April 2024. Participants were recruited from the English for Standardized Test course at a Thai university. The recruitment process focused on students who had taken the TOEIC test multiple times without achieving the required score.

The survey was distributed online using Google Forms and included structured questions to assess participants' motivation, self-reported performance, and emotional responses to repeated TOEIC test-taking. Participants were provided with clear instructions and were encouraged to complete the survey at their convenience. Periodic reminders were sent to ensure a higher response rate, and only fully completed surveys were included in the final analysis. All the survey takers were informed of the study's purpose and provided informed prior consent.

Following the survey, a subset of participants was selected for semi-structured interviews. These participants were divided into three distinct groups based on their TOEIC performance: (1) students who had taken the test more than twice, (2) students who had scored close to 700 points, and (3) students who had scored below 400 points. The interviews, each lasting 10–12 minutes, were conducted in order to acquire deeper insights into the psychological effects, study habits, and personal impacts of repeated test-taking. All the interviewees were informed of the study's purpose and provided informed consent. All the procedures were approved by the university IRB and followed ethical guidelines for confidentiality and data protection.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the surveys was analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize patterns in test-taking frequency, motivation, and performance. Measures of central tendency (e.g., means) and variability (standard deviations) were used to describe the distribution of responses. Additionally, frequency counts and percentages were employed to provide a clear overview of the key variables, such as the number of test attempts, TOEIC scores, and motivational factors. The results of this analysis were presented in the form of tables that highlight the relationships between these variables. For clarity, we report the scale anchors beneath each table (e.g., Table 2 uses a 4-point agreement scale; Table 3 uses an 'Effect' scale with 4 levels and a 'No effect' option). For multiple response items, percentages may exceed 100%. For single-choice items, percentages sum to 100% after rounding. Only complete responses were analyzed, and all analyses were only conducted on complete cases.

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. A systematic coding process was employed to identify recurring themes related to students' experiences with repeated TOEIC test-taking. The analysis focused on understanding the psychological impacts, such as stress, self-esteem, and changes in study habits, as well as how repeated failures affected students'

motivation and personal lives. The results of this thematic analysis were illustrated through selected interview excerpts that provide insights into the participants' experiences. Themes were refined through iterative reading and team discussion to ensure coherence with the survey findings. We also conducted data–method triangulation across survey patterns and interview themes in order to improve coherence and trustworthiness.

This mixed-methods approach enabled the study to integrate both quantitative patterns and qualitative insights, offering a comprehensive understanding of how repeated TOEIC test-taking influenced students' motivation, performance, and psychological well-being within the Thai educational context.

Findings

This section presents the findings from both the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire obtained data on students' demographic characteristics, the impact of repeated TOEIC test-taking on motivation, the psychological effects of repeated attempts, and the emotional factors influencing test performance.

Table 1 (Black, Boldface, Garamond, 12, 1 line before and after)

Demographic Information of Participants (N = 58)]

(Items 1–5 of the questionnaire)

		N=58	100%
1 Gender	Female	43	74.1
	Male	12	20.7
	Prefer not to say	3	5.2
2 Number of times taking TOEIC	2	30	51.7
	3	13	22.4
	4	12	20.7
	More than 4	3	5.2
3 TOEIC latest score	301-400	24	41.4
	401-500	20	34.5
	501-600	8	13.8
	Less than 300	5	8.6
	601-699	1	1.7
4 TOEIC highest score	301-400	9	15.5

	401-500	26	44.8
	501-600	13	22.4
	601-699	10	17.2
5 Factors that influence student motivation to take the TOEIC test?(multiple responses possible)	Requirement for graduation	57	98.3
	Career prospects	47	81.0
	Desire to achieve a high score	28	48.3
	Previous test score	20	34.5
	Personal interest in improving English	12	20.7
	Pressure from family & friends	6	10.3

As seen in Table 1, the majority of the 58 students who participated in the study were female (74.1%), with 20.7% being male, and 5.2% preferring not to disclose their gender. Regarding the number of TOEIC attempts, 51.7% of the students had taken the test twice, while 48.3% had taken it three or more times. This reflects the significant challenges many students face in achieving the required TOEIC score, necessitating multiple test attempts.

Despite the graduation requirement of a minimum TOEIC score of 700, only 1 student (1.7%) achieved a score between 601-699 on their latest attempt. The majority of students scored below 500, with 41.4% of students scoring between 301-400 and 34.5% scoring between 401-500. This suggests that repeated test-taking has not resulted in significant performance improvements for most students, and that many are struggling to meet even the intermediate score ranges required for graduation.

When looking at the highest TOEIC scores achieved, 44.8% of students scored between 401-500, while 17.2% managed to score between 601-699. However, 15.5% of students still had their highest score in the 301-400 range, indicating that repeated test attempts do not always result in improved performance. These results suggest that even after several attempts, many students are unable to break through performance barriers, which has implications for their motivation and sense of achievement.

Motivation for Repeated TOEIC Test-Taking

The primary factors influencing students' motivation to take the TOEIC test were overwhelmingly extrinsic. According to Table 1, the graduation requirement was the most significant motivator, with 98.3% of 58 students citing it as a driving factor. Career prospects were also a key

motivator, with 81.0% of students indicating that their future employment opportunities influenced their decision to repeatedly take the TOEIC test.

Interestingly, despite repeated failures, 48.3% of students stated that they were still motivated by the desire to achieve a high score, suggesting that while extrinsic motivators dominate, there still may be a notable amount of intrinsic drive to succeed. However, only 34.5% were motivated by their previous test scores, suggesting that past failures had a negative impact on motivation for some students.

In contrast, personal interest in improving English was low, with only 20.7% of students driven by such an interest in improving their language skills. Furthermore, 10.3% cited pressure from family and friends as a motivating factor. These findings may indicate that external pressures, such as graduation requirements and career prospects, play a far greater role in students' motivation than intrinsic factors. The relatively low rates of personal interest suggest that repeated failures may be discouraging students from pursuing genuine language improvement, focusing instead on the immediate need to pass the test.

Table 2

*Impact of Repeated TOEIC Test-Taking on Motivation
(Items 6–19 of the questionnaire; 4-point agreement scale)*

Statement	M	SD
I have spent a significant amount of money on the TOEIC test.	3.55	0.57
I feel discouraged after multiple attempts at achieving the desired TOEIC score.	3.33	0.82
I found the cost of taking the TOEIC test multiple times to be quite costly.	3.29	0.79
Repeatedly failing the TOEIC test has significantly increased my levels of stress and anxiety.	3.28	0.85
After repeatedly failing the TOEIC test, I began to question my aptitude for studying English.	3.21	0.81
It seems that the TOEIC test score for our major is excessively high. It can be quite challenging, especially when I have to take multiple exams.	3.21	0.77
I'm worried that trying to take the TOEIC exam many times will make others look at me like I have less ability.	2.90	1.07
I'm afraid of what other people will think if I don't pass the TOEIC after several attempts.	2.83	0.94

I felt compelled to take the TOEIC test many times.	2.78	0.96
The TOEIC score requirement left me feeling discouraged about the EIC course.	2.74	0.89
Taking the TOEIC test many times has made me think about changing my career path.	2.53	0.98
Taking the TOEIC test many times has made me think about changing my academic goals.	2.52	0.96
Taking the TOEIC test many times made me less interested in learning English.	2.36	1.07
I took the TOEIC test because I didn't want my parents (family) to be disappointed.	2.36	1.04

The findings from Table 2 shed light on how repeated TOEIC test-taking affects students' motivation. The financial burden was the most frequently cited concern, with the statement "I have spent a significant amount of money on the TOEIC test" receiving the highest mean rating of 3.55 (SD = 0.57). The cost of taking the TOEIC test multiple times obtained a mean rating of 3.29 (SD = 0.79), highlighting the financial strain associated with repeated test attempts. As one student shared in the interviews:

"I've taken the TOEIC test twice. Each time, I felt stressed and discouraged, especially because of the cost of retaking the test. It gets really expensive..."

Participant 1

Beyond financial concerns, emotional factors played a significant role in demotivating students. The statement "I feel discouraged after multiple attempts at achieving the desired TOEIC score" received a mean rating 3.33 (SD = 0.82), indicating widespread discouragement. Additionally, stress and anxiety were prevalent, with the statement "Repeatedly failing the TOEIC test has significantly increased my levels of stress and anxiety" receiving a mean rating of 3.28 (SD = 0.85). In the interviews, students reflected on the emotional toll of repeated failures. One student explained:

"I've taken the TOEIC test several times now. Even though I try hard each time, I still feel discouraged after each attempt. It stresses me out, especially at night when I keep thinking about how I failed..."

Participant 2

Similarly, another student expressed the stress caused by repeated failures:

“After my fifth try, my score actually dropped, and that really disappointed me. I felt really down during that time. I even started losing weight and felt a lot of stress...”

Participant 6

These insights illustrate the deep psychological impacts, showing that repeated test failures contribute to stress, self-doubt, and discouragement, even including physical impacts like weight loss, all of which negatively affect student motivation. As motivation declines with each failed attempt, students may experience a diminishing belief in their ability to succeed, ultimately affecting their future test performance. This highlights a direct link between repeated test-taking and a negative impact on future test preparation, as motivation wanes.

Although financial and emotional factors were more prominent, familial and social pressures also played a role in shaping students' experiences with repeated TOEIC test-taking. The statement "I'm worried that taking the TOEIC test many times will make others see me as less capable" received a mean rating of 2.90 (SD = 1.07), reflecting concerns about social judgment. One student elaborated on this concern:

“I'm really disappointed that I still haven't passed the TOEIC. Failing again and again has affected me, and I get really stressed about what others might think...”

Participant 3

However, concerns about familial pressure were rated lower, with the statement "I took the TOEIC test because I didn't want my parents to be disappointed" receiving a mean rating of 2.36 (SD = 1.04). One student described the supportive role of their family, which helped alleviate some of the pressure:

“I'm lucky because my family is really supportive. They don't pressure me much about the test, and even though I've failed a few times, it hasn't affected my daily life too much...”

Participant 4

Table 3

Psychological Effects of Repeated Test-Taking (N = 58)
(Items 20–25 of the questionnaire)

Statement	No effect with SS	Effect with SS	M	SD
I feel unnoticed or judged by those around me due to my TOEIC test results.	17	41	2.02	0.88
Repeatedly taking the TOEIC test took a toll on my relationships with family and friends.	14	44	2.14	1.00
I have been considering making some adjustments to my academic goals because of my TOEIC score.	9	49	2.22	0.96
I have been disappointed with my performance on the TOEIC test, which has had a negative impact on my self-esteem.	5	53	2.53	1.10
I can handle the challenges of exams since I have successfully completed the TOEIC test many times.	4	54	2.15	0.90
Repeatedly taking the TOEIC test heightened my anxiety levels when it came to studying.	1	57	2.77	0.91

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree.

The findings in Table 3 provide further insights into the psychological effects of repeated TOEIC test-taking. Table 3 presents the findings according to the number of students reporting an effect, moving from lower to higher frequencies. Anxiety and stress were again identified as significant challenges, with the statement "Repeatedly taking the TOEIC test heightened my anxiety levels when it came to studying" receiving the highest mean rating of 2.77 (SD = 0.91). This indicates that repeated test-taking intensifies anxiety, which can negatively affect both study habits and mental well-being. As one student expressed during the interview.

"I get really anxious before the test now. After so many tries, I just start to panic when I study, and it's hard to focus because I keep thinking about failing again..."

Participant 5

Self-esteem also played a crucial role in shaping students' experiences. The statement "I have been disappointed with my performance on the TOEIC test, which has had a negative impact on my self-esteem" attained a mean rating of 2.53 (SD = 1.10), highlighting that repeated failures led to feelings of inadequacy and reduced confidence. One student explained:

"Failing the test over and over makes me feel like I'm not good enough. It's hard to stay confident when you keep failing, no matter how hard you try..."

Participant 3

At lower frequencies, social and familial impacts were less pronounced. For example, "I feel unnoticed or judged by those around me due to my TOEIC test results" obtained a mean rating of 2.02 (SD = 0.88), indicating that most students did not feel strong social judgment from their peers or family members about their repeated test failures. One student commented:

"I don't think other people judge me too much for failing. My friends are in the same situation, and my family doesn't really mind..."

Participant 4

Some students, however, did report strain in their personal relationships due to repeated failures, with the statement "Repeatedly taking the TOEIC test took a toll on my relationships with family and friends" receiving a mean rating of 2.14 (SD = 1.00). This suggests that although direct social pressure may be low, repeated failures can create stress in personal interactions, particularly when family expectations or personal goals are involved, for some students.

Finally, while some students considered adjusting their academic goals due to their struggles with the TOEIC, this was not a major theme, with "I have been considering making some adjustments to my academic goals because of my TOEIC score" obtaining a mean rating of 2.22 (SD = 0.96). This suggests that although repeated failures can affect self-esteem and motivation, most students remained committed to their academic paths.

Table 4

Emotional Factors Affecting Test Performance

(Item 26 of the questionnaire)

		N=58	100%
Do students experience any emotions after taking the TOEIC test many times? (multiple responses possible)	Discouragement	47	81.0
	Frustration	44	75.9
	Anxiety	37	63.8
	Improvement in confidence over time	18	31.0
	Indifference	9	15.5
	Other (s)	1	1.7

The data in Table 4 summarize the emotional responses of the 58 students who had repeatedly taken the TOEIC test. The results provide insights into the various emotions experienced by students and their prevalence over time. Because this was a multiple response item, counts represent how many students selected each emotion.

The majority of students reported experiencing discouragement and frustration due to repeated TOEIC test-taking. Specifically, 47 out of 58 students (about 81.0%) indicated feeling discouraged, and 44 students (approximately 75.9%) reported feelings of frustration. These high percentages highlight the emotional toll that repeated test-taking imposes on students, especially when they repeatedly fail to achieve the required score. Additionally, 63.8% of students (37 out of 58) expressed anxiety linked to their repeated attempts to pass the TOEIC test. This anxiety is likely tied to the pressure to achieve a high score for graduation and to the challenges faced with each unsuccessful attempt. These findings align with prior research by Demir and Keleş (2021), which found that high-stakes assessments often increase exam-related anxiety and reduce intrinsic motivation. As one student explained:

“I felt really discouraged and sad every time I didn’t pass the TOEIC. I’m really determined to get a high score because it’s important for graduation. I’ve used YouTube to help me prepare and have taken the test many times, but it’s still really hard...”

Participant 5

This example shows how the combination of frustration and anxiety can push some students to seek alternative methods of preparation, such as online platforms, while still leaving them emotionally drained. This highlights the complex relationship between motivation and negative emotions, where students may continue to push themselves despite feeling overwhelmed.

Interestingly, 31% of students (18 out of 58) reported experiencing an increase in confidence over time. This suggests that repeated TOEIC test-taking may, for some students, help them become more familiar with the test format, allowing them to feel more comfortable and confident with each attempt. This finding is supported by Roediger and Butler (2007) and Roediger and Karpicke (2006), who argue that repeated test-taking can promote deeper engagement in learning and improve memory retention. One participant shared their personal experience:

“Even though I’ve faced challenges with passing the TOEIC many times, it hasn’t really affected my daily life too much. I’ve kept a positive attitude and still enjoy learning English, no matter how many times I take the test.”

Participant 4

This shows that although negative emotions are common, a subset of students may develop resilience and confidence through repeated exposure to the exam, helping them cope better with the pressures of the TOEIC test. This subset of students may also be more likely to improve in future performance due to their growing confidence.

A smaller portion of students (about 15.5%, or 9 out of 58) expressed indifference toward the test, indicating that not all students are emotionally affected by repeated test-taking. This finding suggests that a minority of students originally were, or might have become, emotionally detached from the test-taking process, possibly as a coping mechanism to deal with repeated failures. Additionally, 1.7% of students (1 out of 58) selected "Other" to describe their emotional response, which suggests that some students may experience unique emotional reactions that are less common and were not captured by the predefined categories.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings from this study in relation to the research questions and the existing literature. The main findings are analyzed and compared with previous research, and implications are drawn to provide a clearer understanding of the effects of repeated TOEIC test-taking on motivation, performance, and psychological well-being. In brief, the results answer RQ1 by showing that repeated test-taking is mainly driven by extrinsic demands (graduation and employment) and is linked to discouragement and anxiety, with only a small subgroup reporting growing confidence. In turn, RQ2 is answered by the evidence of heightened anxiety and lower self-esteem, with smaller social/familial effects and limited positive adaptation.

The study’s findings clearly indicate that repeated TOEIC test-taking has significant effects on students’ motivation and psychological well-being, with most students facing emotional challenges, including discouragement, frustration, and anxiety. A large proportion of students scored well below the required TOEIC threshold despite multiple attempts, further contributing to their stress levels and a sense of learned helplessness. However, a small subset of students reported increasing confidence due to their familiarity with the test format. These findings provide important insights into how repeated failures affect not only academic outcomes but also the mental health of students, particularly in high-stakes testing environments like that of Thai

universities. This pattern is consistent with self-determination theory (SDT): strong external requirements can reduce perceived autonomy and competence, lowering intrinsic motivation and raising anxiety (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Waluyo et al., 2025). The moderate SDs across key items indicate that not all students experience these pressures equally, which helps explain the small subgroup reporting improved confidence.

The results of this study align with several prior studies on high-stakes testing and its psychological impacts. Demir and Keleş (2021) highlighted how high-stakes assessments can significantly increase stress and reduce intrinsic motivation. This is consistent with the findings in this study, where students reported high levels of anxiety and stress associated with repeated attempts at the TOEIC. Similarly, Matsuda and Gobel (2004) observed a relationship between repeated language assessments and test anxiety, a pattern also reflected in the current study's data. The high levels of discouragement and anxiety documented here are consistent with Silalahi and Sitorus (2021), who found that repeated failures in English proficiency tests often lead to learned helplessness and demotivation in students. Thai studies also show that exit examinations can shape classroom priorities and students' study time in powerful ways (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022; Charubusp et al., 2025; Dong & Liu, 2022), which matches the strong extrinsic focus reported by our participants.

However, Nguyen and Gu (2020) found mixed results, noting that some students demonstrated improved test scores due to increased familiarity with the test. While the present study also noted that a few students reported greater confidence over time, this did not always correlate with improved performance, supporting Hu and Trenkic (2019), who argued that repeated attempts at tests do not necessarily reflect actual improvements in language proficiency. Therefore, while confidence might improve with familiarity, it does not always lead to better scores, a finding which the present study corroborates. Recent meta-analytic work adds nuance: structured test preparation can raise test scores overall (Hao et al., 2025; Permatasari et al., 2024), but gains depend on the approach. Programs that combine strategy instruction with communicative practice (e.g. CLT) tend to be more beneficial than rote drilling alone (Lertcharoenwanich, 2022), which helps explain the mixed experiences in our cohort.

Fan et al. (2014) also described the backwash effect of high-stakes testing, where, in its negative form, repeated failures lead to students becoming disengaged from learning. The current study supports this finding, with many students reporting reduced interest in learning English after multiple failed attempts at the TOEIC. This phenomenon highlights the potential for high-stakes testing to demotivate rather than encourage

meaningful engagement with the language. In Thailand, recent evidence shows that exit exams can push students toward memorization and test strategies at the expense of broader development (Charubusp et al., 2025), and that institutional policies around exit exams influence teaching practices (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022). Our results fit this pattern, with extrinsic pressure dominating student motivation.

In contrast, Chalak and Kassaian (2010) suggested that high-stakes testing can enhance both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, as students recognize the value of language skills for future opportunities. The findings from this study, however, suggest that extrinsic factors such as the graduation requirement and career prospects play a far more significant role in motivating students, while intrinsic motivation remain low. This reflects the pressure students face in high-stakes environments, where external goals often overshadow personal growth, as Ryan and Deci (2000) explain in their self-determination theory (SDT). At the same time, some students' increasing confidence over time suggests a possible moderating role of familiarity and targeted preparation (Hao et al., 2025; Permatasari et al., 2024), which aligns with SDT's view that supportive structures can restore perceptions of competence.

The present study adds several important insights to the existing literature on high-stakes testing and its psychological impacts, particularly in the context of repeated TOEIC test-taking, as with in in Thailand. Previous studies have often focused on broader high-stakes environments like the IELTS and TOEFL tests (Fan et al., 2014; Hu & Trenkic, 2019), but this research specifically examined the effects of repeated TOEIC testing, which as a gateway test has unique implications for students in Thailand and potentially for students in similar educational settings. In Thai higher education, TOEIC functions both as an exit benchmark and as a credential valued in the labor market. However, evidence from Taiwan cautions that higher exit scores do not automatically ensure higher employability (Pan & In'nami, 2017). This broader view underscores the need to balance score targets with meaningful language growth.

This study also highlighted the emotional toll of repeated failures, a factor that has been under explored in previous research. While Nguyen and Gu (2020) and Yamalee (2018) discussed the role of test anxiety and stress, this study goes further in examining the long-term psychological effects, including self-doubt, discouragement, and the financial burden of repeated testing. This contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the non-academic impacts of high-stakes tests and their influence on student well-being. Parra et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of psychological well-being in language learning, and the present study extends that conversation by focusing on the Thai TOEIC context. Our data suggest sizable anxiety and

financial strain and for many students, which is consistent with other recent Thai evidence on English test anxiety (Waluyo et al., 2025).

Furthermore, cultural factors play an important role in how students perceive repeated test-taking. As Zhou and Yoshitomi (2019) and Bai (2020) note, test-taking motivation is shaped not only by individual goals but also by broader social expectations and perceptions of test use. In Thailand, this dynamic is magnified by the dual role of TOEIC as both a graduation gate and as a labor-market credential (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022; Charubusp et al., 2025), which intensifies the psychological burden reported by our participants. Additionally, students' perceptions of a test's value and fairness influence how much time they devote to preparation (Dong & Liu, 2022), which may help explain the heavy focus on retesting reported in our sample.

The findings of the present study carry important practical implications for educators, policymakers, and institutions. Given the financial strain and psychological toll that repeated test-taking imposes on students, educators must develop more effective support systems. This includes providing emotional support through counseling services in order to help students cope with test anxiety and repeated failures. Additionally, the emphasis on test preparation must shift from purely test-oriented strategies to holistic approaches that balance language acquisition and test performance (Lertcharoenwanich, 2022). Based on the literature and our data, we suggest concrete practices that would seem to be supportive in these ways: (1) integrate strategy training with communicative tasks in test-prep classes (Lertcharoenwanich, 2022; Permatasari et al., 2024); (2) use spaced retrieval and formative feedback rather than last-minute cramming (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006; Roediger & Butler, 2007); (3) add brief anxiety-management components (e.g., test-day routines, cognitive reappraisal), which can support perceived competence (Waluyo et al., 2025); and (4) provide low-stakes mock tests with feedback to build familiarity while reducing pressure (Hao et al., 2025).

At the institutional level, policy changes should be considered. For example, universities could explore more flexible alternatives to the TOEIC requirement, such as allowing students to demonstrate proficiency through other English assessments or by waiving the TOEIC score for students who show sufficient language proficiency in other areas or other exceptional proficiencies. Given that repeated failures can have lasting psychological effects, institutions should also invest in training for educators to help them support students who are struggling with repeated test-taking. These recommendations align with Kanoksilapatham et al. (2021), who argue that motivational differences between students from various academic backgrounds should be taken into account when designing standardized

testing policies. In practice, institutions may (1) offer financial support or fee waivers for limited retakes; (2) implement retake pacing (e.g., required preparation between attempts) to prevent rapid, costly retesting; and (3) consider multiple evidence pathways, e.g., approved alternative tests or course-embedded proficiency assessments, while monitoring alignment with employers' expectations (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022; Pan & In'nami, 2017).

While the present study provides valuable insights, it also raises several questions that warrant further investigation. Future research could comprise longitudinal studies to track how repeated test-taking affects students over a longer period, particularly regarding their long-term career outcomes. Additionally, research could examine the effectiveness of interventions such as alternative test preparation methods or stress management programs in improving both test performance and psychological well-being. Given the mixed results in this field, intervention studies that compare strategy-only, communicative-integrated, and counseling-enhanced models would be useful (Hao et al., 2025; Permatasari et al., 2024). Studies should also examine how perceived test value and fairness mediate motivation and time-on-task (Dong & Liu, 2022).

Further studies could also investigate how different educational systems or cultural contexts influence students' experiences with repeated high-stakes testing. Zhou & Yoshitomi (2019) and Bai (2020) both emphasize that test-taking motivation is influenced by both personal and cultural factors, suggesting that the findings of the present study might vary in different regions or by educational system if replicated elsewhere. Comparative studies across Thai institutions with different exit policies (e.g., program-level alternatives vs. single-score thresholds) would clarify how policy design shapes washback (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022; Charubusp et al., 2025).

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size of 58 participants may limit the generalizability of the findings, particularly in contexts outside Thailand. Additionally, the self-reported nature of both the survey and interviews may introduce bias, as students may have over- or under-reported their feelings and performance. Finally, this study focused specifically on students in the English for International Communication program at a single Thai university, which may not fully capture the experiences of students in other programs or universities. The cross-sectional design also limits causal inference and does not capture longer-term outcomes; in addition, items were analyzed at the item level across mixed response formats, so internal consistency indices were not calculated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides important insights into the impact of repeated TOEIC test-taking on student motivation, performance, and psychological well-being. While repeated test-taking can lead to increased familiarity and confidence for some students, the emotional toll of repeated failures, particularly in terms of anxiety, discouragement, and financial burden, is significant. These findings underscore the need for more supportive educational policies and holistic approaches to language learning and assessment. By contributing to the body of knowledge on high-stakes testing, particularly in the Thai context, this study offers valuable directions for future research and educational reform. Overall, our results suggest that to reduce negative washback while keeping standards fair, teachers should combine strategy training with communicative practice, use structured preparation with feedback, and universities should offer flexible pathways to show English proficiency (Athiworakun & Adunyarittigun, 2022; Hao et al., 2025; Pan & In'nami, 2017; Permatasari et al., 2024). These recommendations are consistent with Self-Determination Theory and recent research on test anxiety, both of which emphasize the importance of supporting students' autonomy and competence as a means of reducing pressure and fostering resilience (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Waluyo et al., 2025).

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Appendix A
Questionnaire

Note: The questionnaire was originally administered in Thai with English equivalents to ensure clarity for participants. For reporting purposes, we provide here the English version only.

Title: Exploring the Impact of Repeated TOEIC Test-Taking on Motivation and Performance of Fourth-Year EIC Majors at a Thai University

Instruction: For each of the following questions, please respond honestly. All responses will remain confidential.

Part 1: Demographic Information

1. Gender Male Female Prefer not to say
2. Number of times taking TOEIC
 2 times 3 times 4 times More than 4 times
3. TOEIC latest score
 Less than 300 301-400 401-500
 501-600 601-699
4. TOEIC highest score
 Less than 300 301-400 401-500
 501-600 601-699
5. Factors that influence student motivation to take the TOEIC test?
(multiple responses possible)
 - Requirement for graduation
 - Career prospects
 - Desire to achieve a high score
 - Previous test score (influence of last received score)
 - Pressure from family & friends
 - Personal interest in improving English

Part 2: Impact of Repeated TOEIC Test-Taking on Motivation

Instruction: Please indicate your agreement with the following statements.

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree

6. I have spent a significant amount of money on the TOEIC test.
7. I feel discouraged after multiple attempts at achieving the desired TOEIC score.
8. I found the cost of taking the TOEIC test multiple times to be quite costly.
9. Repeatedly failing the TOEIC test has significantly increased my levels of stress and anxiety.
10. After repeatedly failing the TOEIC test, I began to question my aptitude for studying English.

11. It seems that the TOEIC test score for our major is excessively high. It can be quite challenging, especially when I have to take multiple exams.
12. I'm worried that trying to take the TOEIC exam many times will make others look at me like I have less ability.
13. I'm afraid of what other people will think if I don't pass the TOEIC after several attempts.
14. I felt compelled to take the TOEIC test many times.
15. Seeking a TOEIC score requirement left me feeling discouraged about the EIC course.
16. Taking the TOEIC test many times has made me think about changing my career path.
17. Taking the TOEIC test many times has made me think about changing my academic goals.
18. Taking the TOEIC test many times made me less interested in learning English.
19. I took the TOEIC test because I didn't want my parents (family) to be disappointed.

Part 3: Psychological Effects of Repeated Test-Taking

Instruction: Please indicate your agreement with the following statements. If the statement has no effect on you, select "No effect."

Scale: No effect / 1 = Strongly disagree / 2 = Disagree / 3 = Agree / 4 = Strongly agree

20. I feel unnoticed or judged by those around me due to my TOEIC test results.
21. Repeatedly taking the TOEIC test took a toll on my relationships with family and friends.
22. I have been considering making some adjustments to my academic goals because of my TOEIC score.
23. I have been disappointed with my performance on the TOEIC test, which has had a negative impact on my self-esteem.
24. I can handle the challenges of exams since I have successfully completed the TOEIC test many times.
25. Repeatedly taking the TOEIC test heightened my anxiety levels when it came to studying.

Part 4: Emotional Factors Affecting Test Performance

26. Do you experience any emotions after taking the TOEIC test many times? (multiple responses possible)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discouragement | <input type="checkbox"/> Frustration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> Improvement in confidence over time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indifference | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (s) |

-----Thank you-----

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Note: Interviews were conducted in Thai with English equivalents to ensure clarity. For reporting purposes, we provide only the English version

Title: Exploring the Impact of Repeated TOEIC Test-Taking on Motivation and Performance of Fourth-Year EIC Majors at a Thai University

1. Could you share your experience with the TOEIC test? How many times have you taken it, and what were your scores?
2. How did you feel after your first attempt at the TOEIC test, and what motivated you to take it again?
3. Have you experienced any changes in your motivation with each attempt at the TOEIC test? Could you describe those changes?
4. What specific factors have had the greatest impact on your motivation to keep preparing for and retaking the TOEIC test?
5. In what ways have repeated attempts at the TOEIC test influenced your academic and personal life? Could you share any specific experiences?
6. Have your TOEIC test results caused you to feel anxious, frustrated, or discouraged? If so, how did you cope with those feelings?
7. How has your approach to preparing for the TOEIC test changed over time? Could you describe any adjustments in your study habits or strategies?
8. Do you feel that your performance on the TOEIC test has improved, declined, or remained the same over your attempts? What do you think has influenced this outcome?