EFL/ESL (English as a Foreign/Second Language) Students' Perceptions toward the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) Test

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EFL/ESL (ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN/SECOND LANGUAGE) STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THE TOEFL (TEST OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE) TEST

A Thesis
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in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Master of Arts

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Since its development in early 1960s, the TOEFL test has gained its popularity as the most widely used English proficiency test. The main purpose of the TOEFL test is claimed to assess the English proficiency of second language speakers of English who intend to study in institutions where English is the language of instruction. While the studies about this test are plentiful, little is known about how the feelings and perceptions of the test takers are in relation to these powerful tests that determine an individual’s future. This study investigates the EFL/ESL students’ perceptions towards the TOEFL test.

The Data collection method employed in this study was focus group discussion. Thirteen EFL/ESL student teachers in a mid-sized state university in the northeastern United States participated in this study. They were grouped into three focus groups with one group consisting of five participants and two groups consisting of four participants. Each focus group discussion was both audio and video recorded for analysis.

The participants in this study reported to have high anxiety when taking the TOEFL test. Words used by participants to describe their feeling about the test were anxious, stressful, not happy, and nervous. The participants also perceived that the topics covered in the test are not fair for test takers who have different educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, because they are subjects and cultures specifics. The tasks posed in the test were also perceived as unauthentic, mostly due to the time limitations. Thus, the TOEFL test perceived as not being able to measure test takers’ language proficiency. Consequently, the
participants agreed that the TOEFL score did not reflect their real English proficiency. Therefore, the use of the TOEFL score for admission requirements needs to be reconsidered, and the participants agreed that there has been misused of the test scores. This study supports using a more democratic assessment to assess the language proficiency of second language speakers of English.