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## Cheating on Testing: Cramming on Test Preparation

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### Abstract

Professor Glenn Fulcher's research has influenced language testing and assessment in two ways: in proposing a new understanding of data-driven speaking test design, and in drawing attention to the core identity of language testers. The former has had a powerful impact on practical speaking testing and assessment. The latter has asked a very essential question of what language testers do, exploring philosophical, historical, and social ideas from a pragmatic view of language testing and assessment. In particular, Fulcher (2015)'s chapters on meritocracy and values in language tests explain why we have been using tests throughout history to discern vital roles of language tests and yet why people attempt to cheat on them, in relation to 'three Ms' ideas including meritocracy, material success, and motivation. Within this view, this paper aims to review TOEFL cramming practices on test preparation, using Fulcher (2015)'s notion of cheating. Korean test takers study TOEFL cramming skills at test preparation companies to acquire admission to schools, called *Hagwons* in Korean. However, there is little research regarding cramming practices in terms of cheating. Collected data from my doctoral study (Kim, 2016) were reviewed. It was found that cramming skills as a form of cheating were explicitly taught in class, including use of actual test questions, memorisation of sample answers, and the use of a testing environment. The study revealed reasons to lead the cramming skills: (1) practical benefits of test scores, (2) speaking and writing sections and (3) investments of test preparation. The implications of the study are to raise awareness of the importance of links between cheating and cramming in the field of language testing and teaching.

**Keywords:** *Cheating, Testing, TOEFL, Test Preparation, Cram Schools*

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has been used around the world to evaluate applicants' language proficiency in academic contexts. In Korea, many university students

prepare for the TOEFL to acquire international exchange student programme admission or pass an English test as part of a university graduation exam. Test takers enrol in well-known *Hagwons* or test preparation companies in Korea. *Hagwons* are private cram schools that offer coaching services that prepare test takers to achieve higher scores on tests, using their own cramming skills. However, cheating by cram schools, such as the use of test questions in a form of test preparation materials made by instructors, has been reported by the media (Ko, 2020; Nam, 2013). We know that problematic cramming skills have been taught at cram schools, which are threatening validity (Allen, 2016; Kim, 2010). While literature exists concerning test preparation in cram schools (Allen, 2016; Kim, 2010; Kim, 2021; Lin, 2020), there is little research regarding their cramming practices in terms of cheating.

According to Fulcher (2010, pp. 264-267), cheating is defined as ‘unplanned variations in test scores as a result of activities unrelated to the acquisition of skills, knowledge or abilities measured by the test’. Cheating also refers to any behaviour to attempt to get a higher test score through fraudulent means (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). Despite this clear definition of cheating, there is less concern for cheating on cramming skills, compared to cheating on test security. It may be because cheating tends to be viewed mainly by illegal principle. As a result, cramming tends to be seen as a much lesser form of cheating. However, cheating on tests was introduced by crammers or tutors for exam coaching services, which were the early form of cram schools (Fulcher, 2015). Still, cram schools have a powerful impact on test takers and parents, providing guidelines of test preparation including cramming skills and encouraging test takers to practise the skills to achieve a higher score within a short time (Kim, 2016). However, there seems to be a tendency not to view cramming skills in terms of cheating but to focus on the effectiveness of cramming regarding achieving a target score or improving actual language proficiency.

Within this view, this paper aims to examine TOEFL cramming practices, using Fulcher’s notion of cheating on tests, focusing on the speaking section of the test which Korean test-takers perceive as the most difficult part. In this paper I first review TOEFL preparation, and Fulcher (2011a, 2011b, 2015)’s work on cheating on language tests related to this study. Then I discuss the research method of this study. Next findings are discussed. Last, I conclude the paper with implications and suggestions.

## **Literature Review**

### *TOEFL Preparation*

Research on TOEFL preparation has been discussed within the research on test impact on teaching and learning (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1996; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hamp-Lyons, 1998; Wall & Horak, 2006, 2008, 2011). For example, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1998) studied the TOEFL test impact on teaching, using qualitative methods including interviews with teachers and students, and class-observations. They observed both TOEFL preparation classes and non-TOEFL preparation classes by the same teachers, comparing each class. The findings revealed that the test impact on teaching relies on types of test preparation including teachers’ instruction and test preparation materials rather than on the test itself. In addition, Hamp-Lyons (1998) found that TOEFL preparation textbooks mainly depend on test-taking skills and

strategies, analysing the textbooks' contents. In addition, Wall and Horak (2006, 2008, 2011) studied the impact of the TOEFL on teaching and learning in classroom settings.

Recent research on TOEFL preparation has been discussed within the research on cram schools, test preparation companies or institutions in Asian contexts (Allen, 2016; Kim, 2010; Kim, 2021; Lin, 2020; Yu et al., 2017). These studies show how test takers actually prepare for the test at test preparation institutions, and how crucial the role is that test preparation companies play in preparing for the test. Kim (2021) interviewed four Korean college students who prepared for the TOEFL iBT writing section at cram schools for commercialised coaching services, focusing on what they learnt at cram schools, and how they viewed cramming skills regarding effectiveness of their test scores and academic writing skills. The findings show that cramming skills such as templates which are formulated writing structures were taught mainly by cram school instructors. The test takers achieved their target scores within a short time frame, following what they learnt at cram schools. Compared to their achievement on test scores, their actual academic writing proficiency was not developed. Compared to Kim (2021)'s study on the TOEFL iBT writing, Yu et al. (2017) reported Chinese test takers' TOEFL iBT speaking preparation including teachers' instruction on test preparation courses, including features and effectiveness of preparation from students' and teachers' views. The study used questionnaires and qualitative methods including interviews with teachers and students, and class-observations. The findings seem to be inconsistent with Kim (2021)'s study, regarding the use of cramming such as memorising templates or sample answers. Yu et al. (2017) reported that various test-taking strategies including cramming were taught by teachers, showing that cramming skills were not efficiently used among the test takers. In addition, the context of each study seems to be different: While Kim (2021) described test preparation in *Hagwons* as cram schools for private coaching services, Yu et al. (2017) reported test preparation schools like language institutions, not exactly high-stakes coaching programmes.

Overall, these two studies are helpful for understanding how test takers prepare for the TOEFL iBT writing (Kim, 2021) and speaking (Yu, et al., 2017), focusing on descriptions of test preparation practices, including effectiveness of test preparation from views of test takers or teachers. However, they do not evaluate test preparation activities themselves from a cheating perspective.

### *Cheating on Testing*

Fulcher (2011a, p. 1) stated that 'wherever there is testing, there is cheating'. Cheating on language tests has been described by Fulcher (2009, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2015)'s work: Fulcher has defined notions of cheating, explaining examples of cheating on language tests throughout history, discussing why people attempt to cheat, and addressing why to stop cheating. This section will summarise and explain Fulcher's work on cheating on tests into three main issues related to this paper: (1) definitions of cheating on tests, (2) forms of cheating, and (3) temptations to cheat.

First, cheating is defined as 'attempting to get a higher test score than one would normally achieve through construct irrelevant means (Fulcher, 2015, p. 156)'. Cheating also refers to 'unplanned variations in test scores as a result of activities unrelated to the acquisition of skills,

knowledge or abilities measured by the test (Fulcher, 2010, pp. 264-267)'. In essence, cheating is defined as any behaviour to attempt to get a higher test score through fraudulent means (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007).

Second, forms of cheating have been discussed in two areas, test security and cramming (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b, 2015): Regarding test security, the oldest form of cheating on exams was small written cheating books made by test takers in the 18th century in China, which were secretly used as cheating sheets (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b, 2015). Also, bribery on tests was often enacted by examiners (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b, 2015). Today those cheating skills have been developed more technically and systematically (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b, 2015). That is, it has been changed from hidden booklets under shirts to hidden sensors in mouths, transmitting questions and answers between cheaters (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b, 2015). There have also been corruptions by internal staff at testing organisations such as selling questions on tests or changing test scores (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b, 2015). More world-wide cheating is ghost writing by cheating companies, paying a substitute test taker to take a test for a test candidate (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b, 2015). Also, cheating companies pay test takers to remember questions on the actual test, taking the collected items from each test taker and turning it into actual test materials, and selling them online (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b, 2015). As shown, test security has always been threatened by cheating.

Also, cheating has been conducted through cramming (Fulcher, 2015). According to Fulcher (2015, p. 156), cramming is preparing a test taker to focus on test taking skills rather than language development. While cheating on test security has been reported by the media, drawing much attention from the public, cramming has not received the same attention. It is because cheating has been assessed by legal principles, but cramming has been concerned by standards of ethics (Fulcher, 2015). For example, researchers have suggested what type of test preparation is ethical or unethical, and what are the standards and principals for appropriateness of test preparation practices (Mehrens & Kaminski, 1989; Miyasaka, 2000; Popham, 1991; Vaughn, 2001). Mehrens and Kaminski (1989) proposed types of test preparation activities, defining whether each practice was ethical or unethical. According to their types of practices, unethical skills are to practise on a published parallel form of the same test or on the same test (Mehrens & Kaminski, 1989). Popham (1991) also evaluated five test preparation practices in terms of violation to professional ethics and education defensibility. Among the five forms of preparation, unethical activities are defined as practising current test content and test items a published parallel form of the same test or on the same test (Popham, 1991). The only ethical preparation is to practise general test taking skills including various item formats (Popham, 1991). According to the above principals, cramming is not only cheating but also unethical test preparation

Last, temptations to cheat come from highly valued test scores in a society (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b). Fulcher (2015) explained why people attempt to cheat, connecting to the 'three Ms' ideas based on pragmatic realism such as meritocracy, material success, and motivation. Tests were introduced as a meritocratic means to make it possible for individuals to access material success, not through patronage but on merit (Fulcher, 2015). As a result, a test score has an economical value, which makes it possible for individuals to access their material success such

as a new life, job, admission, graduation (Fulcher, 2011a). When people are under very high pressure of achieving required scores where a language test determines individuals' access to society, a school, a job, they are tempted by what they really desire, attempting to cheat to save money, time, and energy on test preparation.

Through this review of Fulcher (2011a, 2011b, 2015)'s aspects of cheating on testing, we have come to understand definitions and forms of cheating on tests, and why one might cheat. Within this view, this study investigates TOEFL iBT speaking preparation practices in terms of cheating. The research questions in this study are as follows: (1) What cramming skills on test preparation do test takers utilise? (2) What leads test takers to engage in cramming?

## Method

### *Participants*

The data on which this paper is drawn is from a larger case study (Kim, 2016), which designed high stakes speaking test preparation groups in Korea. Data are comprised of interviews, participant observations including group-study, documents, and field notes. Data for this paper is derived only from the TOEFL-preparation sources and examines features of cramming skills on the test.

Table 1 shows participants' profiles. Five Korean university students who were preparing for the TOEFL for the purposes of an international exchange student programme admission, including three females and one male, were selected by snowball sampling. Regarding their English learning background, Ann had studied at a secondary school in the UK for three years when she was young. Hee, Hye, and Tae had studied at an English language programme while they were university students. All participants were informed about the study purpose and completed their consent form. In the study, participants' names are pseudonyms.

**Table 1**

### *Profiles of Participants*

Name	Gender	Age	Type of test prep
Ann	Female	22	-Cram school
Hee	Female	20	-Cram school -Group-study
Hye	Female	22	-Cram school -Group-study
Tae	Male	26	-Cram school -Group-study

### *Data Analysis*

Data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) sequential analysis. First, it was to search for emerging themes. For example, each participant's data including transcribed interview, observation and field notes data were read and reread, underling key words. Later, key words

were used for codes. The codes were then grouped into smaller sets based on relationships between the codes. Regarding research questions, data were reviewed and made into categories. Second, it was to review the relevant research on cheating based on key themes, in order to analyse and interpret data. Third, the analysis proceeded, and codes were developed based on research questions and data results. Last, all data were coded into the revised coding scheme. For example, the data were categorised into a code, 'Cramming Skills' including three sub codes, 'Instruction', 'Materials' and 'Actual Performance'. Then, each data was categorised into sub codes, 'Class Procedure', 'Teaching style', 'Student work mode', 'Templates', and 'Using testing environment'.

Throughout the data review collected from the larger study (Kim, 2016), this paper partly covers Kim (2016)'s study findings.

## **Results**

*Research Question 1: What cramming skills for test preparation do test takers utilise?*

### *Use of Actual Test Questions*

In this study, one feature of cramming is to study questions on actual past tests, which are important resources for test preparation. Instructors assembled collections of actual past tests, which were taught in templates of sample answers. These instructor-made materials were highly valued in terms of instructor success in a cram school. If test items on materials come out on the actual test, the instructor gets to be well known to test takers, leading to a high rate of enrolment.

Table 2 shows an example of the use of actual test questions, representing a typical TOEFL speaking class at a cram school. The purpose of this activity was to make students memorise the sample answer. The upper box is the task 1 question and below is the answer in the form of a template. At the beginning of class, an instructor handed out materials, including questions and answer sheets made by the instructor themselves. Then, the instructor specifically explained the meaning of each word and sentence. For example, the teacher addressed the question as shown in Table 2 through a microphone: 'Describe a class you have taken that impressed you for some reason. Explain why the class impressed you. Include details and examples to support your explanation'. Then the instructor gave 15 seconds of preparation time. After that, students were required to answer and record their own voices for 45 seconds like they would on an actual test. The instructor showed the answer for the question above on a screen using a projector and made the students read aloud the first sentence: 'The most impressive class I have taken was a sewing class back in high school'. The teacher specifically explained the meaning of each word and the usage that was applied to new words.

**Table 2***A Sample Answer of Task 1*

Question: Describe a class you have taken that impressed you for some reason. Explain why the class impressed you. Include details and examples to support your explanation.	
What (Topic)	The most impressive class I have taken was a cooking class back in high school.
First of all,	it was fun
To be specific,	the class hour passed very quickly when I concentrate on cooking.
Second,	I (have) learned practical skill.
For example,	I am planning to cook a delicious food for my mother's birthday.
For those reasons,	the cooking class was very impressive.

The instructor then made the students read aloud the second sentence: 'First of all, it was fun'. The teacher also explained the purpose of each sentence. The instructor explained that the second sentence provides the first reason for topic selection. Then the instructor made the students read aloud the third sentence: 'To be specific, the class hour passed very quickly when I concentrated on making clothes'. The third sentence is to provide an explanation of the first reason with an example. After the detailed explanation of the sentence, the instructor made the students read aloud the fourth sentence: 'Second, I have learned practical skills'. The instructor explained that this sentence was designed to provide the second reason for the topic selection.

Then the instructor made the students read aloud the fifth sentence: 'For example, I am planning to make an apron for my mother's birthday'. This sentence provides an explanation of the second reason with an example. After the detailed explanation of the sentence, the teacher made the students read aloud the last sentence: 'For those reasons, the sewing class was very impressive'. The last sentence is to wrap up the statement. In particular, the instructor focused on the highlighted sentences in the right column because they can be applied to other answers. While explaining the meaning of the sentences, the teacher added new words that can be applied to the highlighted sentences. Also, the teacher again required the students to read aloud. At the end of the class, the teacher made the students memorise the answers, which was the purpose of this activity.

*Memorisation of Sample Answers*

The one common feature of cramming is to memorise sample answers within a frame of templates. For example, Hye experienced similar practices at a different cram school.

Hye: Actually I really was disappointed at practices in the cram school such as memorising sample answers. I think that answering with my own ideas is a real skill on the speaking test. I am doubtful of the practice. It is just to test my memorisation skills. Also, we are asked to prepare for speaking assignment. That means to write our answers and then memorise them.

However, we should answer questions for 45 seconds on the actual test performance. If we memorise answers for test preparation, is it really helpful to answer questions on the actual test? I am doubtful.

In this study, group study mode includes cram school-provided with materials and guidelines as an optional activity after class. The following represents a typical group study after class. A study room, guidelines and materials were given to students. According to the manual, a group leader conducted the study for one hour. For example, at the beginning of the group study, four students in pairs work on memorising the answers on the sheet which they learned in class including sentences from the textbook. Afterwards students checked each other's work. After that, each student presented their answers to the assigned questions from the day before. They made scripts of the answers as homework for group study and just read them in the group study. At the end of the group study, the team leader assigned homework to the students. However, the activities in the group study were the same as those in the classroom, focused on memorisation. The group study seemed to support the classroom activities.

#### *Use of a Testing Environment*

One interesting cramming strategy is using the conditions of the testing environment to your advantage. The starting and ending sections of TOEFL's four tests depend on an individual. In this sense, the TOEFL testing environment is distracting. For example, a person next to a test taker starts the speaking section on the test when the test taker finishes a listening or a reading section. It means that the person's answers to the speaking section can be heard next to the test taker. Some test takers have said that the distracting testing environment can be used for cheating with templates.

In conclusion, the results of this study have revealed that the students learned how to use actual test questions, to memorise sample answers and how to use the distracting testing environment to their advantage. In particular, the main feature of instruction on TOEFL preparation courses was an excessive pattern drill including reading aloud and memorisation. The instructor at the cram school which test takers enrolled in also explained to the students why memorisation was very important to prepare for the test. The reason was that the TOEFL speaking section only allows very short preparation time and it is nearly impossible for novice test takers to answer spontaneously. It is important to consider this instructor's response regarding the purpose of the speaking section of the test. It seems that there is a gap between the test purpose and actual test preparation, indicating why problematic test preparation always exists.

#### *Research Question 2: What leads test takers to cramming?*

##### *Practical Benefits of the Test Score*

First, what leads test takers to cramming is closely connected to the practical benefits of test scores. Participants in the study prepared for the TOEFL for international exchange student programme admission. They viewed the value of the test score as a socially required resource. Hye commented:

Hye: I want to attain the international exchange student programme admission because a

certificate from that programme may be used for proving that I have the necessary English skills when I apply for jobs after graduation. Also, this TOEFL preparation is good for achieving many goals: to attain international exchange student programme admission and pass an English test as a graduation exam. I want to improve my English (speaking) skills through the test preparation and the language programme because English skills are a powerful tool for successful job applications. As many students prepare for the admission, so do I.

Similarly, Hee had been preparing for the TOEFL since she entered university. When she was interviewed, she was engaged in her third instance of test preparation. As in the above case of Hye, she had practical reasons.

Hee: In fact, before starting test preparation I considered the TOEIC speaking test or TEPS. However, the TOEIC speaking test is for business and it is not for me. A TEPS score is not useful for other purposes. Only the TOEFL score is useful because it would allow me to apply for international exchange student programmes and pass the graduation exam. It is even helpful to provide on a resume in order to get a job after graduation.

Ann studied at a secondary school in the UK for three years when she was young. After returning to Korea, she studied for the TOEFL in high school to achieve university admission. After she gained entrance, she again prepared for the test to achieve entrance into an exchange programme.

Ann: I want to have another experience of studying and living abroad as I did when I was in my teens. I was in the UK but now I want to go to the US. I really feel excited whenever I imagine my life there. It could be a very good time for extending my knowledge and thinking. Actually, in the past, I prepared for the TOEFL in order to enter university. I am once again preparing for the test. Since I came to Korea, I found that the test results are really necessary to do something important. They are needed for many things in society: university entrance, graduation exams, internship programmes, exchange programs and job offers. I think that the TOEFL score is a tool for achieving something important to students. What's more, my friends really try to get good results so they even prepare for the test when school is not in session such as during summer or winter break.

In terms of ideas of tests including meritocracy, material success, motivation (Fulcher, 2015), their goal constructed their motivation in test preparation, which was influenced by social values. That shows how the TOEFL is used in Korean society including admissions and graduation in university contexts or employment. They wanted to obtain test results that could be used as a powerful tool in society. These desires acted as a motivating force during their test preparation.

#### *Speaking and Writing Sections*

In this study, when the test takers started preparing for the test, they studied by themselves using test preparation text books. However, the speaking section of the test was very challenging for

them because they did not know how to study for the speaking test in the self-study mode. For example, Hye viewed herself as being unable to prepare for the speaking and writing sections.

Hye: When I prepared for the TOEFL test by myself, it was a really bad experience for me. I did not know how to prepare for the speaking and writing sections. I just knew the test formats. I really needed to get a high enough score on the test, but what I was doing made me feel confused and doubt the usefulness of my test preparation and, in fact, myself. But, at the starting point of the test preparation, I strongly believed that I could do this alone. I liked to study English and thought that I would have no difficulty in self-study. That was why I did not enrol in a cram school. I did try to speak and write as the textbook recommended but could not get any feedback about my practice. So, I read and memorised the sample answers in the textbook.

At the starting point of the test preparation, test takers believed that they could prepare for the test by themselves without enrolling in a cram school. They studied by themselves for one month using a TOEFL textbook and website. However, they found that they were not able to prepare for the speaking section by themselves. Therefore, they finally abandoned the self-study mode and enrolled in cram schools.

#### *Time Investment*

The last important consideration is test takers' investments of test preparation including time, efforts, and money. In this study, most test takers used a cram school for two months while on vacation. This does not mean that all test takers achieved the desired test scores within two months. Depending on the targeted test scores or their language levels, they continued their test preparation on vacation. Then, they used the self-study mode during the term. This process of test preparation was repeated until they achieved the targeted test results. It shows that investments of test preparation itself are high stakes outcomes (Fulcher, 2011a, 2011b). For this reason, some test takers changed their minds and gave up on test preparation. For example, Hee and Hye gave up the test preparation. Hee decided to focus on studying her major rather than the TOEFL. Hye also decided to transfer her major, from biology to pharmacy.

Hye: Actually during the test preparation I thought about my future. My goal was to attain exchange programme admission. However, it was not all for my life. Many students want to get the admission because they can learn English and get a certificate of studying abroad. It will be used for job applications after graduation. However, I need to consider a long-term goal. The goal of the exchange program was what most students prepare for. However, I need to think about what to do after graduation. I do not seem to be interested in my major. Also, my major is not practical after graduation... I need to change my major for my future...

Even though their test preparation did not continue, it is true that their test preparation came to dominate their lives. They committed themselves to test preparation, which may take from several months to one year. Test preparation becomes a ritual among test takers (McNamara & Roever, 2006).

The results show why test takers learn cramming skills on their test preparation even though they knew the practices were problematic. First, the test score had practical benefits including social values. Second, in the reality of test preparation, they realised that they were not able to study the speaking section of the test by themselves because they had no idea about what to do to prepare themselves. For this reason, they took the course at cram schools. Last, the investments of test preparation were high-stakes to the test takers. On every vacation they enrolled in cram schools and continued until achieving the targeted test results. However, some test takers stopped the test preparation and changed their plans, comparing values between the test score and other goals.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated TOEFL test preparation by Korean university students at cram schools, identifying why test takers study cramming skills from a cheating perspective. This study sought to answer the following research questions: 1. What cramming skills on test preparation do test takers learn? and 2. What leads test takers to cramming?

With regard to the first research question, the results of the study have indicated that the Korean university students in the study who wished to achieve admission to an international exchange programme, learned how to use actual test questions in the form of templates, memorising sample answers. They were not asked to participate in spontaneous speaking practice. They even learned how to use distractions in the test environment. The findings show cram school-based test preparation played an important role in actual TOEFL preparation. This result does not support previous studies regarding test preparation materials. According to Wall and Horak's (2011) study, teachers used TOEFL course books in their classrooms in that the teachers trusted the published course books rather than their own materials. However, in this study, actual test questions and answers from TOEFL materials are more useful resources than textbooks.

With regard to the second research question, the results of the study have indicated that test takers were motivated by the practical benefits of test scores in the meritocracy society for their material success in terms of Fulcher's three Ms (2015). Also, the finding shows why they chose the cram school mode in the reality of test preparation. That is, at the starting point of test preparation, test takers had studied by themselves before selecting a cram school. They believed that they could prepare for the test by themselves without enrolling in a cram school, using a TOEFL textbook and materials on websites. However, their first challenge was the speaking test preparation. They did not know how to prepare for the speaking section. As a result, they finally abandoned the self-study mode and then selected the cram school mode. Regarding investments of test preparation, they took for granted that it normally took two months at cram schools during their vacation time. Then, they used the self-study mode during the term. Repeatedly, they tended to enrol in test preparation courses at cram schools during every vacation.

In conclusion, this research provides new findings concerning TOEFL cram school based on test preparation. The findings of the study demonstrate that test preparation was motivated by the individuals' goals for material success within in a meritocratic society in terms of Fulcher's three

Ms (2015), dominating test takers' lives. They relied on cram school-based test preparation. Their selection of study mode tended to be repeated between a cram school and a self-study mode. What we have learned from this study is that cramming skills are deeply involved in test takers' test preparation. The practices are shared among test takers. As Fulcher (2015) commented, such cheating practices on test preparation are unethical but not illegal. That is why cramming always exists.

However, the main problem with cramming for speaking and writing tests is that test takers have no chance to practice English, in their own words. It is true that memorisation of sample answers for achieving test results dominates language learning itself. Unfortunately, learners lose how to use their own English language when they speak or write, leading to losing their own language identity. Therefore, it is important to consider cramming as cheating in terms of stealing a test taker's true language identity. The implications of the study are to raise awareness of the importance of links between cheating and cramming in the field of language testing and teaching. Future research is needed to explore alternative methods for resolving cramming and cram school issues, strengthening the argument that sees cramming as cheating.

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### **Competing Interests**

No, there are no conflicting interests.

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