

“Readiness is more than a test score”

Efficacy: Student perceptions of English language tests as indicators of academic preparedness

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RESULTS
OCTOBER 2014



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

50m 1h 30m + 10m 1h 15m 3h 10m 2wk paper based 1h 3-4mth 60-100m

2h 55m online Test time 48h 4h 2-4wk (online option available)

32-41m Register CAE Reading 10d

45-57m Writing IELTS PTE PEARSON TEST OF ENGLISH Academic 5d

1h 30m Listening TOEFL iBT CAE TOEFL iBT online

1h 'use of English' Speaking PTE Media 60-90m 5d

3h 20m Results paper based 77-93m sp + wr 11-14m

What I know about the tests

	CAE	IELTS	PTE Academic	TOEFL iBT
Media				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				
Listening				
Test time				
Register				
Results available				

What I know about the tests

	CAE	IELTS	PTE Academic	TOEFL iBT
Media	paper based	paper based	online	online
Speaking	15m	11 – 14m	77 – 93m sp & wr	20m
Reading	1h 15m	1h	32 – 41m	60 – 100m
Writing	1h 30m	1h		50m
Listening	1h “use of English”	30m + 10m	45 -57m	60 – 90m
Test time	4h	2h 55m	3h 10m	3h 20m
Register	2w	5d	48h	3 – 4mth
Results available	2 – 4w (online option available)	10d	5d	10d

- The literature now questions gate-keeper language proficiency tests as determinants of preparedness for academic study. (Dunworth, 2010; O'Loughlin, 2011).
- Student perceptions of the experience across two domains -'washback' (Messick 1996).
- Better understand the relationship between testing and preparedness for postgraduate study and the development of graduate attributes.
- This efficacy knowledge would assist us to give advice when consulting students about their learning trajectory and the best test fit for their intended purpose.

‘Raw quantitative overall band scores [mean] that little [can] be concluded about the stories behind each of the students, and ... whether there were differences in particular English language skills.’

(Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson 2012, p.7 on Birrell 2006)



Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson (2012). *English Language Standards in Higher Education*, Camberwell: ACER Press.

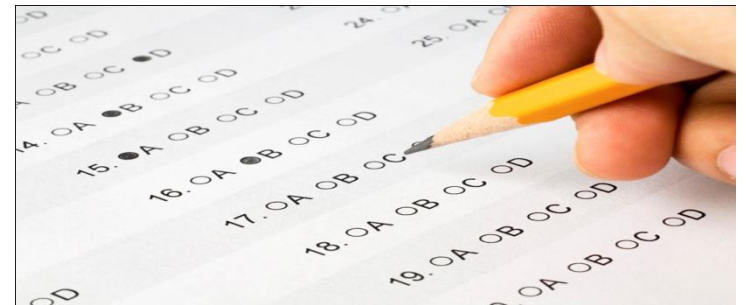
Birrell (2006). Implications of Low English Standards Among Overseas Students at Australian Universities. *People and Place*, 14(4), 53-64.

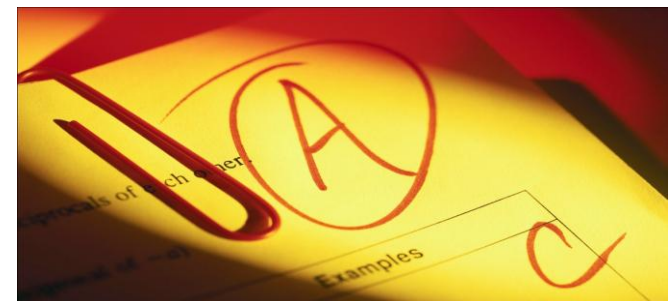
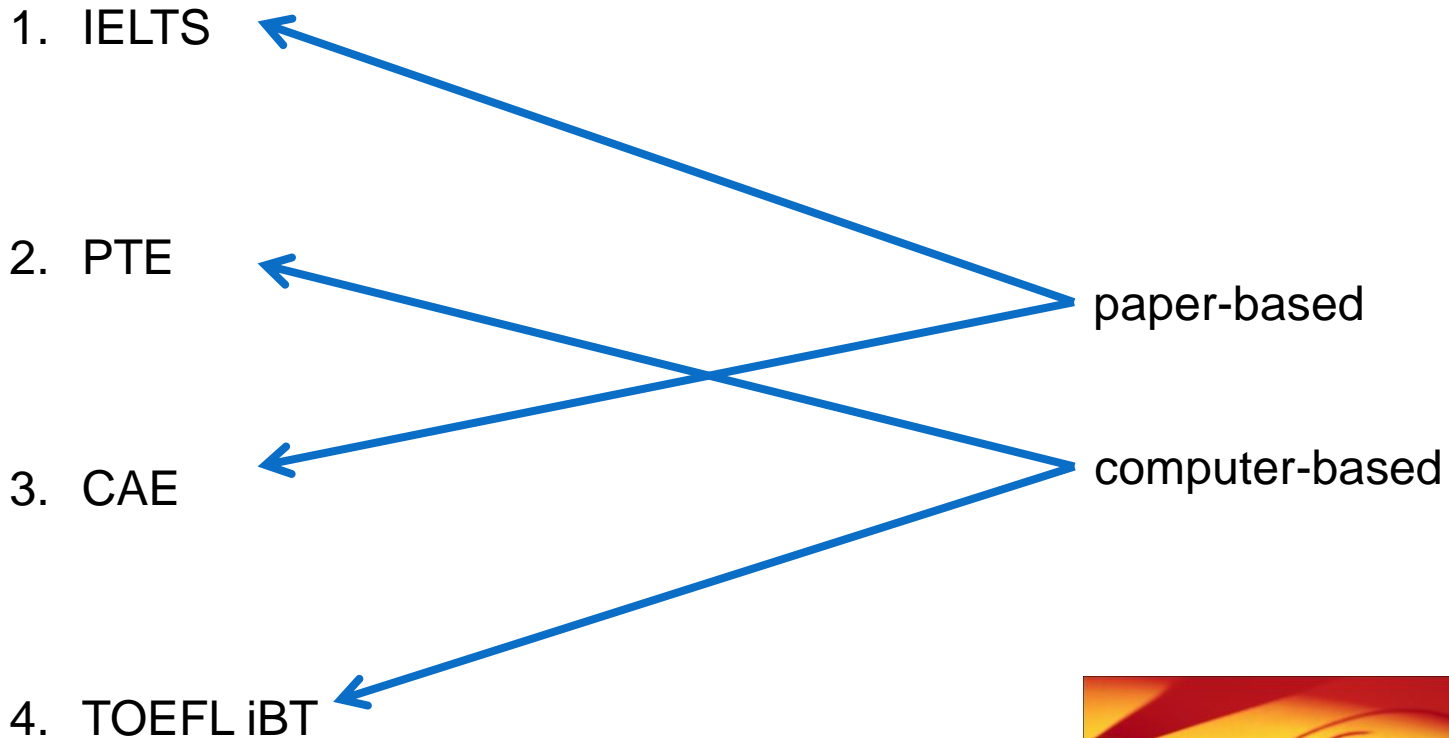


- Description of the research
- ‘Take-homes’ for English Language Teachers
- Findings



- 25 international student volunteers.
 - 1 withdrew after 1 test; 24 undertook all 4 tests
 - 11 BRA, 11 CHN, 2 SAU; lower-intermediate - advanced
 - Equal proportions M/F; median age 23 y.o.; Business, Arts, Study Abroad, media, Architecture, Engineering & IT
- 4 English language tests over a 6 week period before starting UG degree studies.
 - 10-hour prep class before each test.
- Follow-up interviews S1, 2014
 - May – mid-way after first assignments
 - August – week 2, S2
- Analysis using thematic coding and logical cross-analysis of perceptions. related to both the student experience in CET and at university. (Moore and Morton, 2005)





“In the end, it’s just a test.”

- No ‘ranking’ of tests; no scores recorded in our data.
- Perceptions are ... just that.
- And, they change over time!
- *“Overall, helpful. Pushed me to improve English.”*
- *“Test preparation is real-time English language learning.”*
- *“Test taking is all about technique.”*
- Integrated test items sometimes confusing.
- Education background with handwriting or keyboard skills skews writing test preferences, and possibly outcomes.
- *“Sometimes it felt as if certain questions were there so that we couldn’t answer them.”*
- *“In the end, it’s just a test. And that’s helpful for uni.”*



- Its our job to know about the tests we prescribe.
- In testing, we assume to know what we think is best, but what do your students think?
- Continue to do research, but listen to student voice as part of the research (SST > TTT).
- Ss familiarity with an upcoming test is important. There is an element of comfort with the known / familiar.
- Education background with handwriting or keyboard skills skews writing test preferences, and possibly outcomes.
- For the near future, Ss will prefer face-to-face speaking because it is more familiar to them; until Skype or Siri becomes the new norm!

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- Messick, S. 1996, 'Validity and washback in language testing', *Language Testing*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 241-256.
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Thank you for helping us today



Your feedback is always welcome

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