

Constructing Proficiency Tests for English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP)

Abstract

As courses of English for specific academic purposes (ESAP) become popular in higher education, the needs for developing standardized tests to evaluate students' proficiency in designated fields have also increased. Currently, almost all commonly used proficiency tests are created to evaluate learners' general proficiency, with items covering a wide range of topics. Even academic-oriented proficiency tests, TOEFL and IELTS included, adopt the "one-size-fits-all" approach to accommodate college-level students of all majors. In this study, three sets of ESAP pilot tests were administered. The ESAP tests include a science and engineering (SE) test, a health and medicine (HM) test, and a business and management test (GPL). The SE and HM tests were constructed from the test item bank of GEPT, while GPL test was LTTC's existing GEPT Pro test designed to evaluate workplace English proficiency. The ESAP tests were specifically designed to parallel the controlled GEPT High-Intermediate (GEPT_HI) test in terms of language functions, testing techniques, test length, linguistic complexity, and vocabulary coverage. The primary difference among these tests was on topic selection in the texts. In January, 2015, during two weekly class sessions, all students (N=1704) enrolled in the NCKU ESP courses took two tests, one ESAP test corresponding to the students' ESP course, and one GEPT_HI test. The participants included 756 in the SE group, 306 in HE, and 642 in the GPL group. Following each test, students filled out a questionnaire to report their test-taking experience. In addition, each of the three groups could be further divided into two sub-groups based on the students' majors. Students were considered *majors* if the ESAP test they took was in the same field as their academic majors. The results show that both ESAP and GEPT for all three groups are similar in measuring students' overall proficiency level. However, an interaction between proficiency level and test performance was observed: students below B2 across discipline performed better in the ESAP than the GEPT_HI test. The results suggest that ESAP is a better test for students with lower proficiency. The study suggests that ESAP tests have great applications for comprehensive and technical universities in Taiwan where ESAP courses are required in general education. To better understand the impacts of test-takers' knowledge of field-related vocabulary on their performance in ESAP tests, lexical analyses should be conducted between the ESAP tests with different types of general tests, and with the corresponding ESAP textbooks. The results may extend the effects of ESAP tests on students with higher proficiency.

Keywords: higher education, proficiency test, English for specific academic purposes (ESAP), test development

發展及建構專業學術英語能力測驗

摘要

專業學術英語課程(English for specific academic purposes, ESAP)已經逐漸成台灣高等教育英語課程的主要內容之一，其相對應的標準化能力測驗的需求也因應產生。目前常用的英語測驗大多檢定參與者的一般英文能力(例如 LTTC 的 GEPT)，內容通常涵蓋多種主題。目前市面上以學術英文檢定為主的考試(托福、雅思等)亦是如此，皆是以一體適用的方式，不分學術領域，讓不同主修的學生應考同一份試卷。本研究發展及測試三份 ESAP 測驗，按學術領域分類成理工(SE)、健康醫療(HM)、商務職場(GPL)等三個領域。前兩份試卷內容取自 LTTC 全民英檢的題庫，商務試卷則為 LTTC 專為台灣商務職場需求發展的企業英檢(GEPT Pro)。三份 ESAP 測驗之題型，題數，考試時間和語法複雜度及字彙涵蓋度皆與用來做對照組的 GEPT 中高級測驗相當，僅在文章之主題選擇上有差異。本研究施測人數共 1704 人，分別是理工 756、醫療健康 306、商務職場 642 名。參與者為國立成功大學修習大二專業英文的學生，測試的科別以大二英文課程主題分類(例如，所有選修基礎工程英文的學生參加工理科考試)。因學生可以依興趣或上課時間從 12 門大二專業英文課程中選擇課程，因此各科目的考生皆包含主修與非主修學生(例如，選修基礎工程英文的會計系學生因課程主題會參加工理科考試，身分為非主修學生)。學生於 2015 年 1 月在兩次上課時間分別參加 ESAP 測驗以及 GEPT 中高級測驗。此外，於每次考試後，學生填寫問卷，回報當次參與測試的經驗。本次研究發現，三組學生在 ESAP 以及 GEPT 兩個測驗的表現相當。本研究還發現，程度低於 B2 學生在 ESAP 的表現高於其 GEPT 的結果，表示程度較低的學生可以利用其專業領域知識在 ESAP 考試獲得較好的成績。本研究顯示 ESAP 測驗對於將專業英語課程納入通識核心課程的一般或技職大學有極大的施用效能，為更了解在專業英語課程中教授的專業領域字彙對學生參加 ESAP 測驗的影響，本研究小組建議進一步比較分析 ESAP 測驗及一般英語能力測驗之字彙使用的差異，並比對 ESAP 測驗及其對應領域之專業英語教科書中的字彙涵蓋率，使 ESAP 測驗的效能能擴大到達「全民英檢」(GEPT) 中高級或相當 CEFR B2 的大專學生。

關鍵字: 高等教育、檢定測驗、專業學術英語、試題發展