Are the GEPT and an alternative CEFR-aligned reading exam comparable?

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Abstract

Numerous proficiency scales and criterion-referenced assessments, aiming to reflect a hierarchical sequence of performance ranges, have been developed around the world in different contexts, yet only a few have been empirically supported. The General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), a five-level criterion-referenced EFL testing system, was devised in accordance with Taiwan's education system. The GEPT level framework has enjoyed widespread acceptance over the past decade in Taiwan. Based on a GEPT-CEFR alignment study (Wu & Wu, 2010) and a vertical linking study (Wu & Liao, 2010), ascending difficulty across the GEPT levels was observed both in terms of CEFR levels and test takers' performance.

The present study attempts to investigate whether the GEPT reading tests are comparable to alternative CEFR-aligned exams (e.g., Cambridge ESOL exams) at the same proficiency levels, in terms of linguistic demands, cognitive processing skills, contextual features and test results. This study adopts both qualitative and quantitative procedures to identify parameters that are useful for explicitly differentiating difficulty levels across reading tests. The scope of this study is limited to CEFR B1 and B2 levels. It is hoped that the findings of this study can provide an empirical framework for validation and comparison of multilevel test batteries.