

A collaborative approach to examining BESTEP's impact on tertiary EAP in Taiwan

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Abstract

The Bilingual Education for College Students (BEST) Program, launched by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, has facilitated the development of the BEST Test of English Proficiency (BESTEP). Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A2-B2 levels, BESTEP aims to bridge the gap between English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction and assessment practices at the tertiary level. This paper presents an ongoing validation study conducted jointly by the BESTEP developers and two prominent universities in Northern Taiwan, involving six EAP course designers and instructors and 200 students in six classes.

With the goal of establishing a comprehensive learning system to connect learning, teaching, and assessment more effectively, BESTEP performance descriptors were developed. Before BESTEP was formally implemented last September, *a priori* research had been conducted to establish the suitability of the descriptors by examining the perspectives of key stakeholders, including students and teachers of EMI and EAP courses. Yet, it is imperative to continue investigating the extent to which the intended impact of BESTEP has been realized, given that EAP courses in Taiwan's higher education institutions are currently undergoing significant reforms to enhance students' readiness for EMI instruction and facilitate their transition from English for General Purposes (EGP) to EAP learning.

This study explores the relationship between the BESTEP speaking and writing tests and the EAP courses of the two universities. It focuses on dimensions such as content specifications, assessment tasks, and student performance over two semesters. The year-long study employs a mixed-method approach, gathering insights from test developers, curriculum designers, English language instructors, and students. The research design comprises two key components. Firstly, it scrutinizes EAP course descriptions and BESTEP test specifications, along with classroom observations and teacher interview records, to compare overall course and test designs, as well as specific assessment tasks. Secondly, it tracks changes in students' speaking and writing abilities throughout the year, evaluating their performances in BESTEP pre- and post-tests, and

mid-term and final assessments by instructors.

By highlighting the dynamic interplay between learning, teaching, and assessment, the presentation aims to validate the intended uses of BESTEP and emphasize the importance of integrating these elements to drive positive changes in EAP education. Furthermore, through an exploration of the connection between BESTEP tests and EAP courses, this study endeavors to contribute to the conference theme of reforming language assessment systems. It provides valuable insights and recommendations to educational stakeholders, fostering an effective and integrated approach to English language education at the tertiary level.

Additionally, the study addresses the impact of exam reforms at the tertiary level, offering a meaningful perspective from Taiwan's higher education context. We believe that this study will contribute to the ongoing dialogue on improving language assessment practices and reforming education systems to meet the demands of the rapidly changing landscape, both in Taiwan and globally. (467 words)

Summary

As part of the Bilingual Education for College Students (BEST) Program, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan has supported the development of the BEST Test of English Proficiency (BESTEP). Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A2-B2 levels, BESTEP assesses English for Academic Purposes (EAP) abilities required at the tertiary level. This paper presents an ongoing validation study conducted jointly by BESTEP developers and two universities in Northern Taiwan. The study involves six EAP course designers and instructors and 200 students. Aiming to explore the connection between the BESTEP speaking and writing tests and EAP courses over two semesters, the study begins by analyzing and comparing course descriptions and test specifications, supplemented with classroom observations and teacher interviews. It then tracks changes in students' abilities using BESTEP as pre- and post-tests, alongside instructor evaluations from classroom assessments. The research highlights the vital integration of learning, teaching, and assessment, offering insights into means of improving language assessment practices and informing education system reforms. Additionally, it contributes to the conference theme of reforming language assessment systems by advocating for an effective approach to establishing a comprehensive learning system at the tertiary level in Taiwan. (196 words)