

Measuring Diversified Proficiency of Japanese Learners of English

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Abstract

Japan is faced with an imminent challenge of cultivating ‘global human resources’, as the whole society delves into the global information society. The Course of Study defined by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports and Technology (MEXT) of the Japanese government has emphasized communicative competence and / or ‘communication skills’ as a focus of the foreign language subjects (e.g., English) since 1900’s and the Courses of Study for most other subject also mention similar needs. During the academic year of 2014, the Educational Reform Working Group within the leading Liberal Democratic Party proposed the use of TOEFL iBT as an obligatory part of university entrance examination procedures. Furthermore, in 2015, MEXT advised the consideration of utilizing existing 4-skills English language proficiency tests that external test publishers have made available in Japan. Pearson offers various English tests that are automatically scored. Its spoken English test, Versant English Test, uses automated speech recognition and technologies. Versant Writing Test measures reading and writing skills and is scored automatically by using Latent Semantic Analysis. Approximately 60 first-year students at the undergraduate School of Law at Waseda University took Versant

English Test and Versant Writing Test four times and the scores are compared to those of Oxford Placement English Test that the same students took three times. Oxford Quick Placement Test is designed to measure vocabulary, collocation, and grammar through reading-based multiple choice tasks. The present study reports results of analyses of these test scores and estimated CEFR levels, and then investigates challenges that Japanese learners and teachers of English are facing.

Credits

Parts of the materials in this paper are presented orally in (Suzuki, Morishita and Harada, 2016 a). Materials presented here in English have previously been published in Japanese in (Suzuki, Morishita and Harada, 2016 b) and (Harada & Morishita, 2013).

References

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