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Which Border to Cross: A Comparison of Two English Placement Tests Currently in Use in Japan



Communication across borders requires proficiency in the target language. With it, doors open to new worlds, jobs, and relationships. Along the way, learners discover new goals, most attainable. For learner benefit, there are many tests available for placement, self-checking, and improvement. Placement tests are often the first test that can determine future paths, paths that lead to an ideal living situation, be it in another country and culture, or ideal employment. Borders always have two sides, and

placement tests are no different.

Placement tests provide a positive overlay to colleagues, students, and their parents that a careful, systematic, and purposeful approach to assigning students to level-appropriate classes is, in fact, *de rigueur*. Alternatively, program administrators must answer budgetary concerns and test reliability. The study presented in this talk will consider two placement tests currently in use in Japan: the CASEC test and the World Link Placement test. The CASEC test is available by subscription and features Item Response Theory in determining students' proficiency level in the target language. Then, regardless of the textbooks used, students are ranked. The World Link Placement Test is freely available for programs that adopt the World Link Series. It is based upon previously accumulated data in constructing a norm-referenced environment where test taker outcomes may be compared and ranked accordingly. While markedly different, the intent of each is the same, i.e. to sort students within a short amount of time. The question of how the CASEC test compares with the World Link Placement test is of importance with regard to student-level experiences and program-level concerns such as ease of administration and cost. A correlation between the two will check for compatibility in test performance, and results from a student feedback survey will be shared. It is hoped this will assist and benefit program administrators who must make important, border-type decisions within fixed budgets while delivering program-level excellence.

Key words: *Placement tests, test reliability, program administrators, CASEC test, World Link Placement test*

Biodata

Thomas Goetz is a professor of English and Director of the Cross-Departmental English Language Program. He has been a leader in Moodle at Hokusei University, promoting blended learning at all levels. His research is in the application of computers for language learning. He has presented widely in Asia, the Americas, and Europe. He holds two Masters Degrees, one in Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey and Temple University Japan.

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6th Saarbrücken International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching
6. Internationale Saarbrücker Fremdsprachentagung
6e Congrès international sarrebruckois de l'enseignement des langues étrangères

27 - 29 October 2021 / 27 - 29 Oktober 2021 / 27 - 29 octobre 2021