

どうなる英語ライティング・スピーキング指導：日本の大学入試改革のインパクト

Teaching to the test?: the impact of four-skills tests on English language teaching in Japan

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A brief history of university entrance examinations in Japan

- Before 1979
Entrance exams were administered by each university.
- 1979
The Joint First-stage Achievement Test (共通一次試験) was introduced.
- 1990
The National Center Test for University Admissions (大学入試センター試験) replaced the Joint First-stage Achievement Test.

Before 1979

... university entrants were apt to be selected by a **single scholastic achievement test given by each university**. As individual universities developed their own entrance examinations in their own way, they very often tended to give too difficult and peculiar questions which were beyond the level and scope of the upper secondary school curriculum. This trend had adverse effects upon educational programs in upper secondary schools.

(MEXT's White Paper: Japanese government policies in education, science and culture 1990)

1979

The Joint First-stage Achievement Test was introduced with the aim of putting into effect a very cautious and elaborate selection process by means of securing high-quality test questions intended to assess students' general and basic achievements acquired in upper secondary schools, and by means of helping each university carry out diverse and comprehensive assessments of applicants' abilities, making the best use of the results of both the Joint First-stage Achievement Test and its own second-stage examination.

(MEXT's White Paper: Japanese government policies in education, science and culture 1990)

First-stage test + **second-stage** test

1990

The National Center Test for University Admissions replaced the Joint First-stage Achievement Test. This new examination is designed mainly to assess the basic scholastic achievement which applicants have gained in their upper secondary school. The examination is administered jointly by individual universities and the National Center for University Entrance Examination.

(MEXT's White Paper: Japanese government policies in education, science and culture 1990)

Center Test + second-stage tests of **multiple** universities

Simple facts of the current university admission system in Japan

- Entrance exams, not school leaving exams.
- Two main exams
 - The National Center Test for University Admissions
 - Individual universities' entrance exams
- Each candidate takes multiple exams.
- Great diversity of exams: diluted impact.

Lack of emphasis on productive skills

- Speaking has long been neglected in both teaching and assessment in Japan, and it is believed that this lack of emphasis has resulted in poor productive skills among the Japanese people.
- Low achievement in speaking and writing
- Need to introduce tests of productive skills in the assessment

The challenge

- The introduction of direct testing of productive skills will present significant challenges in many respects.
- The challenge; Administer and score four-skills tests of 500,000 candidates

The challenge

- Despite the size of the challenge, “we cannot afford not to introduce a test with a powerful beneficial backwash effect. (Hughes, 2002)”
- The question is how best to implement the new system.
- MEXT’s solution: to use **private** English tests for new college admission system

Ministry to pick private English tests for new college admission system

July 11, 2017 (*Mainichi Japan*)

- The education ministry is set to decide by the end of March 2018 which privately run English tests to use in a new standardized college admission testing system that will start in the 2020 academic year
- The new uniform test will replace the current National Center Test for University Admissions.
- Under the new system, private English tests will be used in tandem with the current multiple-choice answer-sheet exams prepared by the National Center for University Entrance Examinations during the first four years until the 2023 academic year.

Ministry to pick private English tests for new college admission system

July 11, 2017 (Mainichi Japan)

- The ministry's enforcement policy cites eight types of privately operated English tests as candidates for the new exam system, including TOEFL and Eiken (the Test in Practical English Proficiency).
- ... the eight types of privately run English tests cited in the ministry's plan vary in their purposes and testing methods. Some tests are used in applying for universities at home and abroad, while others are designed for business and other purposes. The evaluation methods for speaking ability are also different, from those based on interviews to computerized recording. Some tests are held on a single day, while others are conducted over more than one day.

Ministry to pick private English tests for new college admission system

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- To address these problems, the education ministry has offered the use of CEFR, or the Common European Framework of Reference for Language(s)
- As most Japanese high school students would fall under the A2 and B1 levels under CEFR, it would be difficult to differentiate applicants under the new system. Although universities will also be provided with applicants' raw scores from private English tests, it would be quite difficult to evaluate applicants in a fair manner based on their scores from different types of tests.

Impact of four-skills tests

- **Optimistic** scenario
 - Positive impact to learning and teaching
 - Revolutionise English language teaching in Japan
- **Pessimistic** scenario
 - Negative/no impact to learning and teaching
 - No change to English language teaching in Japan
 - Such concerns were voiced by Green (2014)

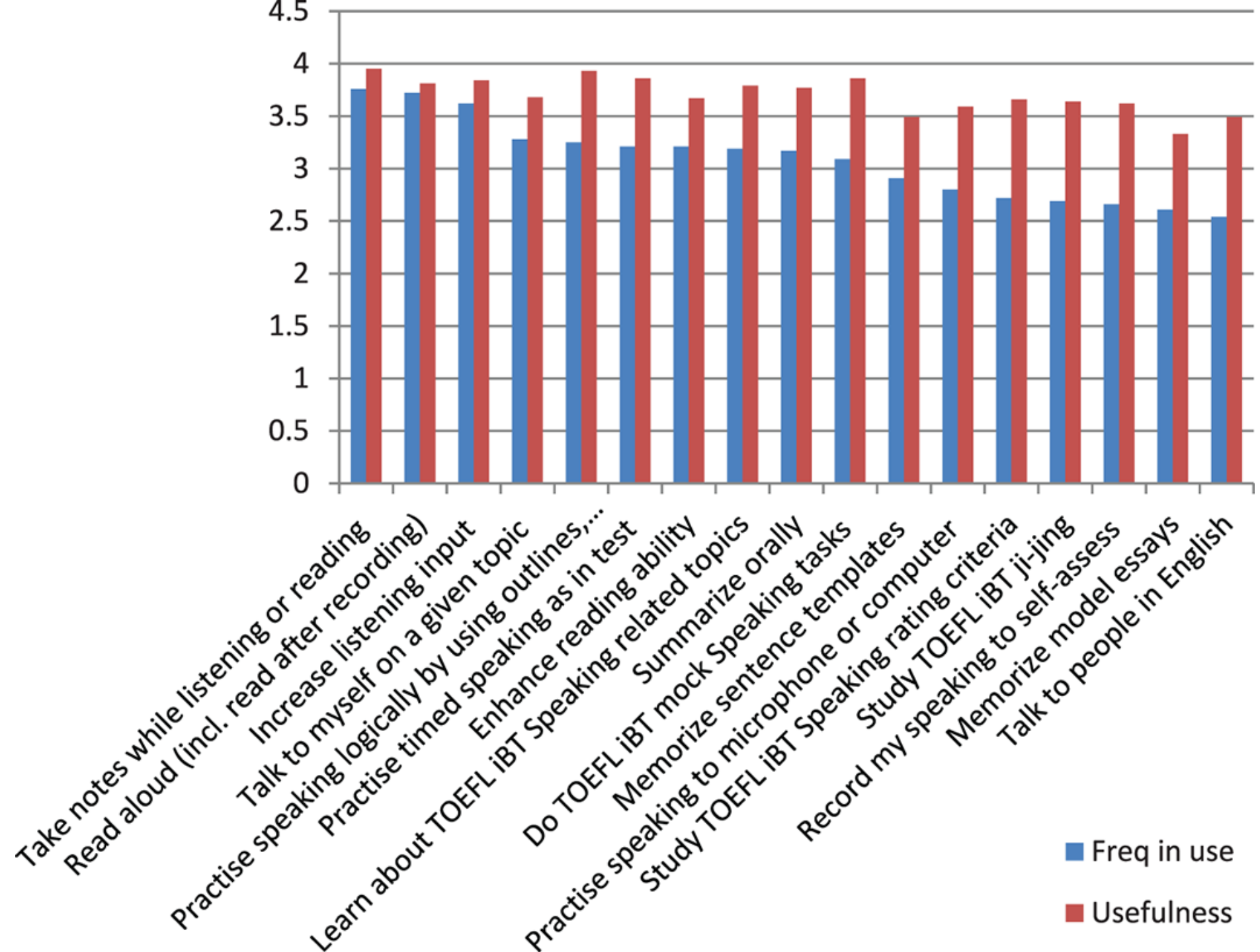
Negative impact

- “The research into washback suggests that teachers tend to pay close attention to the format of a test, rather than considering the underlying construct –the knowledge, skills or abilities targeted by the assessment. Just focussing on practice with the test format might not really help test takers to improve in the abilities being assessed (Green, 2007). A new spoken interview assessment based on personal information intended to assess impromptu conversation skills might, in practice, encourage memorisation of formulaic exchanges or short memorised speeches on obscure topics, even though these may be of rather limited value outside (or even inside) the examination room (Shohamy et al ., 1996).”

-Green. (2014)

Impact study of TOEFL iBT[®] Speaking

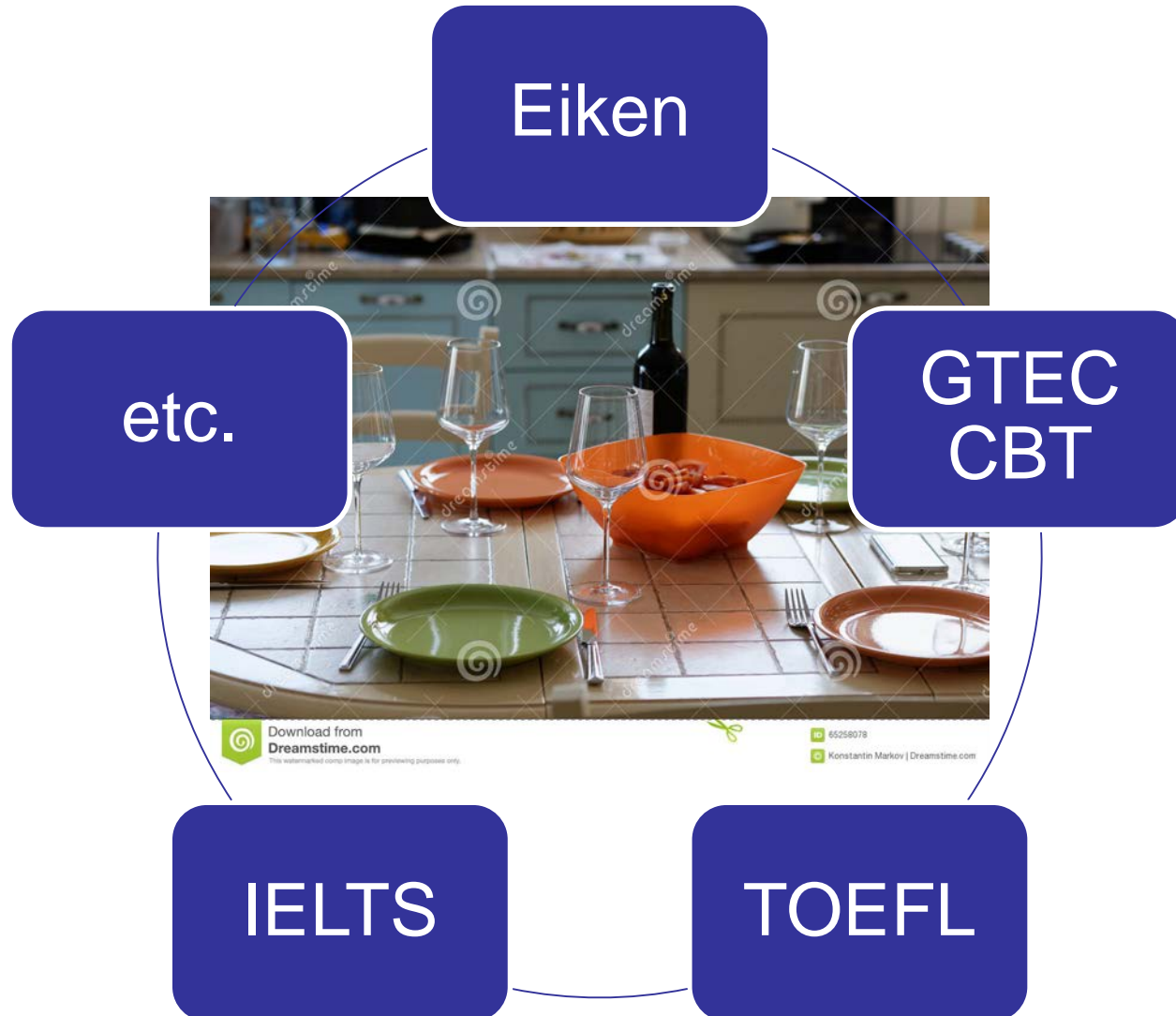
- Yu, G., He, L., Rea-Dickins, P., Kiely, R., Lu, Y., Zhang, J., & Fang, L. (2017). Preparing for the Speaking Tasks of the TOEFL iBT[®] Test: An Investigation of the Journeys of Chinese Test Takers. *ETS Research Report Series*.
- Yu et al. (2017) investigated Chinese university students' TOEFL iBT[®] Speaking test preparation.



Yu, et al. (2017)

Students did more solo speaking activities (i.e., what they could do on their own) than interactive speaking activities (e.g., talk to people in English). **The activity “talk to people in English” was the least practiced.** Students most frequently practiced note taking during reading or listening tasks, which is a key process of TOEFL iBT integrated speaking tasks, and they considered note taking to be the most useful preparation for TOEFL iBT Speaking test. “Read aloud” and “increase listening input” were the next two most frequently practiced (nearly once a day), with the rest of preparation activities being practiced close to weekly.

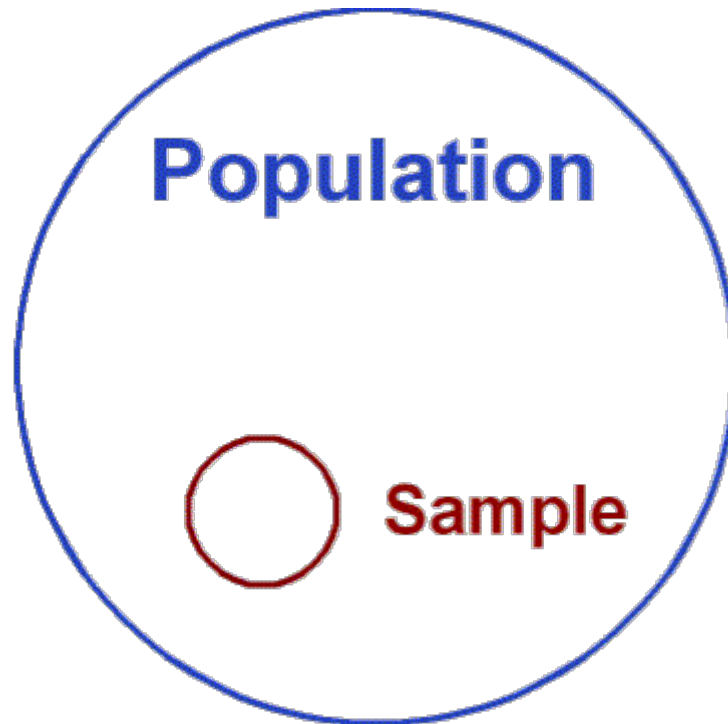
MEXT ELT reform: Multiple tests on the plate



Opt for ...

- an easy and inexpensive test
- “easy” in terms of test preparation
- Writing: one task, e.g. e-mail writing
- Speaking: one task, e.g. story telling (sequence picture description)

Impact of sampling in testing



For a positive impact

- In order to generate a positive impact, it is important, from the beginning, to inform the teachers and students of “the underlying construct—the knowledge, skills or abilities targeted by the assessment” and to give them proper training for them.
- Do NOT teach to the test; the focus would be too narrow.

A few ideas for teaching
writing and speaking

Dilemmas in Teaching Writing

- To correct or not to correct, that is the question.



- A high school teacher said, “Since I don’t have time to correct my students’ writing, I don’t get them to write”.

Dilemmas in Teaching Writing

- To write or not to write, that is the question.



- In order for the students to improve writing, get them to write.

Dilemmas in Teaching Writing

- Writing regularly and extensively is of primary importance.



- Getting feedback esp. corrective feedback is secondary.

Dilemmas in Teaching Speaking

- To be correct or not to be correct, that is the question.



- The best way to make no mistakes is not to speak!
- To speak or not to speak, that is the question.

Dilemmas in Teaching Speaking

- If you want to be able to speak a foreign language, you have to speak it. In doing so, you may make mistakes.



- Speaking regularly and extensively is of primary importance.

The impact of four-skills tests on English language teaching in Japan

- Teaching to the test?
- It may be better than no teaching, but it will not be the best solution.