

Authenticity and need in the design of EAP reading tests

A tension exists between the needs of international students advancing to English medium graduate level courses and certain international testing systems which are designed to ascertain their ability to operate effectively at this level. This variance may also impact on published materials, resources and pre-sessional course design because test specifications can create a demand from stakeholders to shape materials to meet the requirements of the test rather than what students will *actually* need. The presenter considers student needs with particular reference to reading as it is arguably this language component which has the most cross-disciplinary relevance and he suggests an approach to assessing reading ability which may more closely approximate to what students should be able to do. Students on degree courses can be confronted with potentially unmanageable amounts of reading per week. Green et al (2008) identify this as a major problem and Nutall (1996) suggests that reading can only be accurately assessed if the reading source is sufficiently lengthy. In order to cope with the challenge of extensive reading on high level academic programmes, students should have, for example, the ability to read selectively, expeditiously and critically while acknowledging sources correctly. They should also have some sense of 'reading on' in order to develop a degree of tolerance for ambiguity. The academic reader should also be expected to make use of texts in order to produce effective notes, summaries, essays or reports and thus have a reasonably authentic reason for reading even under test conditions. The assessment of such needs through an integrated reading into writing test, which analyzes selected discrete reading skills such as identifying text referents and specific detail, as well as the more macro-level abilities outlined above is suggested as a way of providing an appropriate testing system.

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