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## TITLE

### Aptis for learning: Using Aptis as a diagnostic assessment tool in the EFL writing classroom

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This is a summary of a report by Jinlan Tang as part of the ARAGs Research Online Series. For a copy of the full report, see [www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/publications/](http://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/publications/)

## WHAT WE LOOKED AT:

The study investigated the efficacy of using Aptis as a diagnostic assessment tool in the classroom and addressed the following research questions:

- 1) What are students' attitudes toward and experiences with the Aptis test and its use as a diagnostic tool?
- 2) How do teachers view the efficacy of the diagnostic use of the Aptis test in the classroom?
- 3) How does the teaching experiment involving the use of the Aptis test as a diagnostic assessment tool impact students' performance?

The study, investigating the use of Aptis as a diagnostic tool in the China EFL classroom to identify students' strengths and weaknesses to improve teaching and learning, has important significance for educational advancement in that it has gone beyond just measuring learning but, more importantly, uses the assessment result to improve instruction and learning.

## HOW WE DID IT:

The study was undertaken at a university in China, within two English training programs (A and B) preparing students to study abroad. One of the main purposes of these programs was to assist students with the IELTS or TOEFL test after one or two semesters of instruction. The students studied the courses of IELTS reading, writing, speaking and listening in the program and the contact hours were about 20 hours per week on average.

A group of 95 EFL learners and two teachers in two English language training programs participated in the study. Pre- and post-tests with Aptis were conducted to evaluate the learning gain and the effectiveness of the teaching experiment. Pre- and post-test student questionnaires were designed and administered during the experiment. Teachers' views on the diagnostic assessment feedback and the efficacy of the teaching experiment were gauged through an open questionnaire and interim reports.

The teaching experiment comprised two interventions with the Aptis core module of grammar and vocabulary and standard writing tests being introduced as a diagnostic assessment tool for the experimental group to diagnose students' English language proficiency at the beginning and the end of the experiment, and the implementation of a teaching experiment to the experimental group based on the diagnostic feedback provided by Aptis test markers, while everything remained the same with the control group.

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### WHAT WE FOUND:

Students and teachers both considered Aptis grammar and vocabulary, and writing tests to be good indicators of candidates' language proficiency; writing test items authentic and motivating; and feedback on the writing tests helping them identify problems and improve writing instruction. The teaching experiment in the light of Aptis writing feedback seemed to have produced encouraging results, particularly for Program A students, with the pre- and post-test comparison indicating positive learning gains for the experimental group.

Both teachers and students responded favourably toward the teaching experiment. Teachers viewed the introduction of Aptis as a diagnostic tool in the classroom along with the remedial teaching intervention and the online learning resources to be an effective means of engaging students, of enlivening the classroom atmosphere and of improving teaching efficiency. Students embraced the teaching interventions of teacher in-class targeted writing instruction based on Aptis feedback, assigned writing practice, online writing, vocabulary and grammar resources, and teacher detailed feedback on their writing samples during the term. The research indicated that, if applied properly, Aptis was a useful instrument for both placement and diagnostic assessment (if supported with diagnostic feedback).