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## Examining test-taker processes and strategies and stakeholder perceptions of relevance of the Aptis for Teachers Speaking test in the Australian context

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This is a summary of a report by Sally O'Hagan and Kellie Frost as part of the ARAGs Research Online Series. See the full report at:  
[www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/publications/](http://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/publications/)

### WHAT WE LOOKED AT:

Strong English speaking skills are considered central to effective classroom teaching in Australian schools, and the importance of oral communication and interaction is emphasised in the professional standards for teachers. To satisfy the English language requirements for teacher registration in Australia, internationally qualified teachers who are speakers of English as an additional language (EAL) need to take a general proficiency test, most commonly, IELTS. However, we know that classroom communication has special characteristics and it is possible that a general proficiency test might not be the best way to measure teachers' speaking skills.

In this study, we wanted to find out if a speaking test designed for teachers – Aptis for Teachers (Speaking) – would provide a more relevant measure of speaking ability. The test has four parts: Part 1 focuses on personal topics, while Parts 2, 3 and 4 focus on school-related topics and, in this way, use content tailored to the teaching domain. Task input consists of stimulus photographs and questions concerned with pedagogic scenarios that teachers would be likely to encounter in their practice. It is an automated, computer-delivered test.

Our aim was to explore the relevance of the Aptis for Teachers Speaking tasks to the demands of classroom speaking according to the perceptions of trainee (pre-service) teachers and teacher educators.

### HOW WE DID IT:

Ten trainee teachers from EAL backgrounds, and five teacher educators took part in our study. We asked the trainees to take the speaking test, and we recorded their performances on video while they did this. The trainees then watched the video and described to us what they were doing, and thinking about, while they took the test. Later, we transcribed what they said, and analysed this data to try to identify the speaking processes and strategies involved in completing the test tasks, such as strategies for finding ideas, planning what to say, and maintaining fluency.

After this, we interviewed the trainees, asking them questions about the oral communication demands of classrooms and how the test tasks compared to these demands. We conducted similar interviews with the educators, after first giving them time to examine the test materials.

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### WHAT WE FOUND:

The Aptis for Teachers Speaking tasks were valued by educators and trainees for their content-relevance to the teaching domain: trainees generally felt the familiar content would allow them to perform at their best; educators regarded teaching-related topics as appropriate for a test designed for teachers. On this basis, educators felt the test results could provide relevant information to schools considering employing teachers from EAL backgrounds. However, although the contextualised content was valued by trainees and educators, they also identified problems with some topics, which were perceived to be too specific to particular classroom contexts, or beyond the likely experiences of some test-takers.

The tasks elicited language considered to be relevant to the communication demands of the classroom (most notably, giving explanations), which suggests a potential for test preparation to lead to improvements in classroom communication skills, or what is termed 'positive washback'. In other respects, some important aspects of classroom communication were thought to be missing from the test; for example, the test uses a monologic response format which precludes interactive speaking, and some skills, such as modifying instructions to suit learners of different abilities, are not included in the test.

Finally, test topics were generally felt to reflect pedagogical values consistent with expectations for Australian classroom contexts. One educator felt this created an issue for test fairness, arguing that the test topics were dependent on knowledge of local classroom cultures and that EAL trainees may not have had the opportunity to acquire such knowledge; however, for most educators in the study, this alignment with professional values contributed to the suitability of the test.