
TITLE

Aptis in China: Exploring Test-taker perceptions of its test validity and practicality

This is a summary of a report by Ying Zheng and Yanyan Zhang as part of the ARAGs Research Online Series. For a copy of the full report, see

www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/publications/

WHAT WE LOOKED AT:

This project investigated potential Aptis test-taker perceptions of its validity and test practicality in China. Eighty-three students from Wuhan University China participated in the study and took the Aptis test.

The study addressed the following two research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Aptis test takers in terms of their perceived difficulty levels and opinions of taking a computer-based test of this nature?
2. What are test-taker perceptions of Aptis and what are the perceived differences between Aptis and other national or international tests in terms of test constructs measured and practicality?

HOW WE DID IT:

83 students participated in this study, including 58 non-English major students and 25 English major students, 53 females and 30 males. All participants had been learning English for at least six years.

The instruments used for this project consist of: 1) The Aptis test: the British Council offered test codes for the students to take the test; 2) A questionnaire on test-taker perceptions of Aptis, in terms of their test-taking experience, test items, difficulty levels, skills measured, and practicality of the test; 3) Semi-structured interviews with 9 randomly chosen candidates, on their perceptions of test constructs and practicality in comparison to other high-stakes tests they are familiar with.

The whole data collection process took approximately four months from September to December 2014. As Chinese students were not familiar with Aptis, seminars were given to familiarise them with the test format by using the sample Aptis tests online. The participants took the test in three groups: Science students, Arts students, and English major students.

WHAT WE FOUND:

Overall, the majority of the students' level in this study is at CEFR B2 as measured by Aptis, with variation at the skill levels. The Speaking average score is the lowest among the four skill scores. The Reading average score is the highest, followed by Grammar & Vocabulary and Writing. Listening and Reading have a higher SD than the other three test components. In general, the test-takers—especially the English majors—did not perceive the Aptis test to be particularly difficult,

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except for the Speaking component. Test-takers reported that the main difficulty in the speaking task resulted from having too little preparation time.

Test takers felt the Aptis test items seem to establish close links with daily life in that the test emphasises the real application of English. Candidates also commented on their perceived differences between Aptis and other English tests. In comparison with other well-known tests in China, they considered Aptis to be more innovative, diverse, and practical.