

iTEP Study Sheds Light on the State of English Language Proficiency in India

Boston Educational Services (BES), together with iTEP India, recently conducted a large scale study utilizing the International Test of English Proficiency (iTEP) to learn more about the English language abilities of Indian students. English is the language of almost all higher education in India, yet there is no language assessment prior to admissions or graduation.

More than 3000 students at approximately 50 institutions across six Indian states took iTEP Academic-Plus for the study. Several top institutions, such as the Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur and Madras, Indian Institute of Management Indore, as well as CEPT University in Gujarat, and University of Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, were among the participating institutions.

The findings revealed that only four percent of Indian university students have an overall English level that would qualify as “advanced” according to the iTEP scoring system, which is paired to that of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). The “upper intermediate” level (4.0+), typically the minimum to be accepted to a US institution, contained 32 percent of the students tested.



Of the five language skills assessed (grammar, listening, reading, writing, and speaking), the sections with the poorest scores were grammar and listening. More than 50 percent of test subjects scored at beginner level or below on these sections.

The students assessed were often very successful overall in their studies. “These are hard-working, smart students,” BES observes. “Their English proficiency simply is not there.” While that may not directly impede graduation, it can create problems upon entering the workforce. The Times of India recently found that more than half of engineering graduates in India lack the English skills to grasp words commonly used at the workplace.

The study was recognized with the Award for Educational Excellence from the Indus Foundation, an organization dedicated to empowering the students of India for accessing the best educational and career opportunities.

“This is only the tip of the iceberg,” adds BES. The team is still analyzing the data from the study. iTEP certainly provides plenty to look at—the test’s detailed score report assesses sub-skills within each section and catalogs the speaking and writing samples from the test for further analysis. Affordability of the test and the ease of administering a 90 minute exam online were other key factors that enabled a study of this scope.