



An Academic Update from iTEP

November 8th, 2016

Introduction

iTEP is announcing changes that have been made to recommendations associated with the equivalency of iTEP Academic scores and Common European Framework (CEFR) scales and descriptors. Since we last updated these recommendations, many of our partner universities, colleges, and English language programs have provided us with feedback about their students' iTEP Academic scores and their understanding of the students' English proficiency levels. In addition, other well-known standardized English language proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS have recently adjusted their CEFR scale recommendations. Due to the nature of this feedback and changes that other proficiency tests have made, iTEP determined that it was indeed time to re-analyze its own interpretation of CEFR scales and descriptors and to make any necessary adjustments to its CEFR scale equivalency recommendations.

Process

First, an important consideration in any analysis of CEFR recommendations is the average iTEP scores accepted by institutions at particular levels of academic enrollment. iTEP compared these scores with commonly accepted CEFR equivalency recommendations for these levels of post-secondary academic enrollment, namely community college, undergraduate, and graduate. When comparing the iTEP scores accepted for admissions at the various levels of post-secondary enrollment and the existing CEFR score recommendations, concerns that iTEP test scores may be returning a high number of false negative proficiency indications began to arise. Naturally, there is a tendency for schools and institutions to be cautious when first setting iTEP cut-off scores. Indeed, this conservative approach is understandable as there is a tendency to avoid false-positive indicators at all costs. Indeed, iTEP took the same conservative approach in setting its own CEFR recommendations. However, after a review of long-standing cut scores at many institutions and the positive feedback from these institutions on the applicants achieving these scores, iTEP became concerned that the test was returning more than acceptable numbers of false-negative results if institutions were following the previous CEFR recommendations. By adopting the new CEFR recommendations, iTEP seeks to reduce the number of these false-negative indicators and reflect more accurately the test-takers proficiency based on CEFR descriptors.

Second, iTEP worked closely with a reputable intensive English language (IEP) program that administers the iTEP Academic Plus extensively within its program. The partner IEP is fully accredited and evaluates students using a set of well-established student learning outcomes (SLO) and



standardized rubrics. In the first stage, CEFR descriptors were matched with the SLOs for each proficiency level at the IEP. By comparing iTEP scores for each student and the descriptors that define each level of proficiency at the IEP, iTEP was able to determine proper CEFR cut-off scores through an analysis of the average scores achieved by students in each proficiency level. In addition, the IEP sets minimum iTEP score requirements to advance through the levels, increasing the likelihood that test-takers were fully motivated to perform on the test to the best of their abilities. This analysis used approximately 175 test-takers for two cycles of SLO evaluation and two iTEP test administrations.

Results

The results of the iTEP/CEFR scale analysis led iTEP to adjust its recommendations for the equivalency of iTEP Academic test scores to CEFR scales and descriptors. The chart below details the adjustment from the previous to the current recommendations.

CEFR	Previous Recommendation	Current Recommendation
C2	6.0	5.5-6.0
C1	5.0-5.9	4.5-5.4
B2	4.0-4.9	3.5-4.4
B1	3.5-3.9	2.5-3.4
A2	2.5-3.4	2.0-2.4
A1	0.0-2.4	0.0-1.9

For an A1 CEFR user, the iTEP score recommendations have been narrowed from 0.0-2.4 to 0.0-1.9. For an A2 CEFR user, the iTEP recommended scores have been narrowed from 2.5-3.4 to 2.0-2.4. The range of recommended scores to indicate a B1 CEFR user has expanded from 3.5-3.9 to 2.5-3.4. With its emphasis on familiar topics and text in addition to the focus on personal interests, iTEP recognized that test-takers scoring at the 2.5-3.4 were likely to have the CEFR abilities described at the B1 level. For a B2 CEFR user the range has remained the same but lowered in terms of iTEP scores from 4.0-4.9 to 3.5-4.4. Likewise, the range for a C1 CEFR user has remained the same but has lowered in terms of recommended iTEP equivalent scores, from 5.0-5.9 to 4.5-5.4. Finally, the range for a C2 user has expanded from 6.0 to 5.5-6.0.

Conclusion

Finally, CEFR emphasizes that the published associations between its scales and descriptors are indeed recommendations. A close reading of the CEFR report and subsequent statements by those who created the framework reveal that CEFR is designed to be interpretative and flexible across a broad range of contexts. The purpose of the CEFR initiative was not to produce a singular, definitive scale with corresponding descriptors. Instead, the CEFR scales and descriptors are meant to serve educational



professionals and organizational leaders as a sense-making tool in contexts where varying language proficiencies exist. All proficiency-testing companies that serve a large number of educational institutions and organizations have independent interpretations of CEFR descriptors and scales. While the CEFR recommendations that iTEP develops and publishes are established based on data and feedback from its stakeholders, we understand that an institution might make reasonable variations on these recommendations based on its unique interpretation of the CEFR framework. In publishing equivalencies with CEFR, iTEP understands that its unique interpretation of CEFR might not match exactly with every institution it serves. iTEP encourages all institutions and organizations that it serves to conduct their own review of CEFR and develop their independent interpretation. In addition, iTEP continually seeks feedback from its partner schools and institutions regarding CEFR equivalencies.

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