

Effectiveness and sustainability of the University Test of English Language (UTEL)

Rohan Abeywickrama
Department of Languages, Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages,
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka
rohan.abe@gmail.com

The University Test of English Language (UTEL) is a standardized examination which measures the general English language proficiency of undergraduates in Sri Lankan universities. It provides opportunities for the university students to obtain a certificate for their English language skills. The test is considered a secure, global, authentic and customer-focused test which measures the true to life ability to communicate in English. The main purpose of this research is to identify the effectiveness and sustainability of this test introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education in collaboration with the Higher Education for the 21st Century Project (HETC) funded by the World Bank. This study is important for university academics since the findings of the research may provide suggestions for them to align their English language teaching (ELT) courses, materials as per the requirements of the UTEL. A random sample of students from two state universities including those who have obtained average band score 5 and above were selected for the study. In addition to a questionnaire survey, interviews were also conducted to obtain data so as to increase and cross-validate the students' responses to the questionnaire. The findings of this investigation indicate that establishing national standards for proficiency in English language skills has facilitated the graduates to assess themselves to identify the improvements they need and to gain recognition for their skills. Even though the percentage of the undergraduates who sit for test is limited, such standards and certification further enable graduates to access the best employment opportunities. The results and findings will enable stakeholders such as test administrators and educationists in the field of ELT to comprehend students' attitudes towards the test and to consider the recommendations of the researcher to make the test more reliable and consistent.

Key words: UTEL, standard, sustainability, undergraduates, employability, test