



iTEP Case Study: **Temple University**

New Learning Strategies Research
by Linlin Wang, Ph.D.



About iTEP

The International Test of English Proficiency (iTEP) was introduced in 2008 to modernize English language assessment with on-demand scheduling, 24-hour grading, and accurate test data. iTEP provides a convenient and cost-effective testing option delivered in a highly secure test center environment or remotely at-home.

iTEP offers academic testing for secondary schools and universities for both admissions and on-campus ESL programs. iTEP also offers a range of career testing used by companies around the world to determine English proficiency needed for hiring and promotion decisions. For more information see www.itepexam.com.

Case Summary

In the field of Second Language Acquisition, listening is one of the least studied areas due to its reflective nature. Newly confirmed Doctor of Applied Linguistics from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Linlin Wang, Ph.D., spent her doctoral dissertation research studying listening as related to evaluating second-language proficiency. Simply put, Wang designed a research study to determine the impact that visual images or videos have on second-language listening exams. While Wang's research included two other pieces: a qualitative analysis of how the student interacted with the visual and audio info, and a dive into how note-taking influenced scores, it was the first piece that utilized iTEP's technology and exams. Based on positive feedback from other universities using iTEP, Wang contacted the testing company in 2019. Thanks to iTEP's generosity and flexibility, Wang utilized iTEP's listening exam to create a pre-test for all 190 Chinese students participat-

ing in her study. This iTEP evaluation allowed Wang to assess the test-takers' English-language proficiency as an important variable in her quantitative analysis. The iTEP team adapted an existing test to meet Wang's research needs, streamlining her pre-test functionality. At the end of the research, Wang determined that testers who received visuals received significantly higher scores on listening exams than those testing without visual cues.



The Problem

Wang herself is an example of the problem she set out to research. When she arrived in the United States and began her graduate program at the University of Pennsylvania six years ago, she took an English-language test (not iTEP). While humble about sharing her score, she received a 30/30 on the listening portion of the exam. In the real world, however, she struggled. Different accents, colloquial features she had not been exposed to, plus the speed at which those around her talked made for a very difficult listening experience. Visuals helped, and her experience led her to an interest in helping others through both teaching and using tools best suited to students' learning. Through her education and work as an English teacher to speakers of other languages, she learned of a mismatch in

evaluations. Many second-language exams use only spoken input. When visuals were involved, anecdotal evidence indicated that participants received higher scores.

In designing her study for her program at Temple University – an iTEP admissions partner school – Wang realized the importance of controlling for the participants' initial listening ability while categorizing the subjects into two groups to compare their performance on audio-only and audio-visual tests. The Chinese students, studying English in China, needed to take an exam to show English-language skills in order to proceed through the study. iTEP officials worked with Wang to provide the type of test and grading data needed to best help her research.

The Approach

Wang's research is based on a convenience sample of 190 undergraduate students in China, from all different majors and grades. Through teaching contacts in her home country, she was introduced to potential subjects. Overall, her purpose was to align test features with real-world listening tasks, and she sought to assess what learners do in actual situations. She hypothesized that participants who had access to visuals while listening would score significantly higher on the listening comprehension test, and her research found this to be true.

Wang's professional focus isn't research, but to bridge the gap between research such as hers and students in the classroom. By finding that listening and comprehending a second language is interconnected with other processes, Wang can implement new strategies to teach her students, resulting in smoother processing and higher scores. After graduation, Wang is taking a position as an adjunct professor at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. She hopes to continue to use research such as hers to improve language teaching to better equip students with the English language – through listening, speaking and more.

The iTEP Solution

To help Wang, iTEP provided 250 free tests for students participating in the study. iTEP representatives worked with her to modify the exam for only the listening portion that she needed. She was impressed with not only the reliable and careful scoring/data, but also the fact that the tests ran through an online platform rather than a required download of large, complicated software. To complicate the study, she realized early in the pre-test process that many of her participants had unreliable and slow Internet connections. To remedy this issue, iTEP worked to streamline the online security requirements. For traditional iTEP exams, the strict virtual proctoring ensures that only one person is completing the exam. For Wang's research purposes, this feature was not so critical – and minimizing it, the tests ran much smoother for the study participants in China. The iTEP exam was perfect for Wang due to the reliability of scores, the ease in score collection, and the assistance of the iTEP staff. Wang designed her own post-test for her research purposes which provided her with the data regarding how visuals impacted listening scores. She credits the iTEP exams, however, in helping her create accurate baselines for the overall research.

“ iTEP is committed to supporting educators, like Dr. Linlin Wang, who research ways to improve learning and language acquisition,” Jim Brosam II, President of iTEP International.

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