iTEP Case Study:
Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo - UFES

Evaluating Graduate Students' English Proficiency in Brazil

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 2020, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES) in Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil, began searching for a new testing system to assess the English reading proficiency of candidates in its graduate programs. UFES had built a reputation for providing serious proficiency exams with trustworthy results using "pen and paper" testing methods, but Covid-19 made these testing methods unsafe, so the university needed to find a suitable alternative. Throughout the 2020 school year, UFES was unable to offer any proficiency exams while it evaluated testing options; none of which met the university's security needs, budget, and specific exam content.

After hearing about iTEP, staff at UFES evaluated iTEP's Academic Plus exam, which met the university's basic criteria. UFES worked with iTEP representatives to customize the exam and in August 2021, after more than a year

without testing, the university launched its first online English reading proficiency exam. In 2022, when students came back to campuses, UFES decided to continue using iTEP's customized reading exam instead of returning to their "pen and paper" method. UFES remarked that iTEP's secure online testing, ease of use, and affordability were key components of its decision.

The Problem

In Brazil, all master's and doctoral program students must prove their foreign language fluency through a reading proficiency exam to graduate. The Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo offers multiple language courses with English being one of the most popular. Before Covid-19, students within the Humanities, Medicine/Biology, and Mathematics/ Engineering disciplines could take the English reading proficiency exam during any of the school's three annual sessions. The exams used traditional "pen and paper" testing methods with a specialized version of the exam produced for each discipline. The university's main campus in Vitória, hosted all proficiency testing events, with graduate candidates from countryside satellite campuses traveling hours to take the exam.

Every year, teachers in the Language Center and professors from the Language Department developed, processed, and graded each version of the English reading proficiency exam. With this small team, the "pen and paper" method took significant amounts of time to prepare and grade. When Covid-19 made the campus unsafe for in-person proficiency testing, the Language Center and Language Department did not have the staff nor the budget to create their own online accessible exam. They needed to find an alternative test that was easy for staff and students to use, budget-friendly, highly secure, and only tested reading skills.

The Approach

The Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo explored options for an alternative English reading proficiency exam throughout the 2020 school year, but none of the platforms were able to meet their criteria list. With an exceptional reputation for having serious proficiency exams with trustworthy results at stake, the Language Center and Language Department placed importance on finding the right quality test instead of offering candidates a quick solution.

After hearing about iTEP from another department, staff from the Language Center and Language Department began speaking with iTEP representative, Ana Perovano. Staff members thoroughly reviewed the full iTEP Academic Plus exam, testing iTEP's security features, exam content, ease of use, and score report. When iTEP's Academic Plus proved to be satisfactory, as well as affordable, UFES began discussions to customize the exam. UFES required a shorter exam that only tested candidates' reading proficiency skills. The university also needed simple administrative access to score reports, as well as exam instructions in Portuguese instead of the existing English instructions. The university also wanted to assess students during their yearly exam sessions rather than allowing students to take the exam whenever they wanted. UFES' current Language Coordinator, Mário Simões, recalled the customizing process as "super easy," stating, "For us, it was easy because iTEP was very flexible, and they gave us a lot of options."

The iTEP Solution

A customized version of the iTEP Academic Plus proved to be the right solution for the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo. The secure online testing allowed graduates at all campuses to stay safe while taking the exam and minimized the need to travel. The easy-to-use system made accessing testing results simple for administrators and participation in the testing process uncomplicated for candidates. iTEP's customized English reading proficiency exam was affordable, allowing candidates to pay similar testing costs as in previous years. With iTEP's diverse exam content, UFES no longer needed specialized exams for each discipline, and staff at the Language Center and Language Department did not need to develop or grade the exams.

While graduate candidates have primarily used the test to fulfill graduation requirements, some candidates have used the test results to find jobs. Teachers have also chosen to take the exam to evaluate their English reading skills. Though Covid-19 regulations have been easing and students have been returning to campus, UFES decided to continue using iTEP's customized English reading proficiency exam. Beginning in 2022, UFES plans to resume offering three testing sessions each year.

> " I think it [the iTEP customized exam] has added a lot to our reputation because students felt the exam itself was trustworthy. The technology is fine; it's not complicated to use, and it gives [candidates] this possibility of taking the exam wherever they are. They don't have to travel all the way to our campus. "
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> **UFES Language Coordinator, Mário Simões**