

# International research tests language tests

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Unique Queen's University research will shed light on how motivation and anxiety affects language test scores, and on the relationship between the test scores and the social and educational contexts of the tests.

Education professor Liying Cheng, underscores the importance of understanding the power awarded to language tests in certain decision making processes around the world.

"After the student takes the [test](#), administrators usually see one number - their test score," says Professor Cheng. "That single number can determine the student's future, but does not necessarily reflect the actual testing context."

A better understanding of test takers' performance and the impact of the test results on their life choices can offer important insights into the high stakes decisions made about them in Canada.

To conduct the research, information about demographics, motivational orientations, test anxiety, and perception of the stakes of the test, will be gathered in a survey of 1,500 students and will be linked to how they do on their respective language proficiency tests in Canada, mainland China and Taiwan.

In preliminary studies, Professor Cheng found that 17 per cent of the variance in the writing score in English proficiency tests was attributed to "attitude" and "worry." A score that is lowered because of worry can prevent an international student from being admitted to a Canadian

university, a certified professional program or even being allowed to immigrate to Canada.

"In China, a family could give all the money they have to their only child to get them into a Canadian university. That's a tremendous amount of pressure on that student," says Professor Cheng. "The anxiety level may conceal the true potential of the student, but ultimately all the test scores are used the same way."

The initial project involved 81 Canadian Academic English Language Assessment (CAEL) test takers. The test takers completed a questionnaire. Questions measuring factors including motivation and test anxiety were then linked to their test scores. The researchers found that variables including "worry about speaking English outside of class" and "motivation to learn English" were also reflected in the [test scores](#).

Source: Queen's University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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