

Test specifications for assessing English proficiency in Cuban higher education



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Overview



1. Background
2. Project design
3. Test specifications
4. Wrap up

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- English taught as a regular subject in heterogeneous classes for many years
- New educational policy for the teaching and learning of English in higher education (2015)
- Common European Framework of Reference taken as basis for proficiency framework:
 - Curricula
 - Learning outcomes
 - Teaching goals
 - Assessment objectives

Teaching and Certification System

Aim: Teaching and Certification System in EAP in Cuban HE for BA students

Term 1

- Teaching beginners
- Target A1
- Formative & summative assessment

Term 2

- Continuing teaching
- Target A2
- Formative & summative assessment

Term 3

- Continuing teaching
- Target B1
- Formative Assessment
- Final Certification

Results of needs analysis

1. Limited knowledge on:

- the CEFR or other international frameworks
- high-stake assessment systems
- classroom assessment
- rubric development
- grading
- test accommodations
- test theory
- basic statistics.

Results of needs analysis

2. Limited availability of:

- practical and valid assessment and testing tools
- unified criteria to determine competence level
- expert test developers

Overview



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4. Next steps

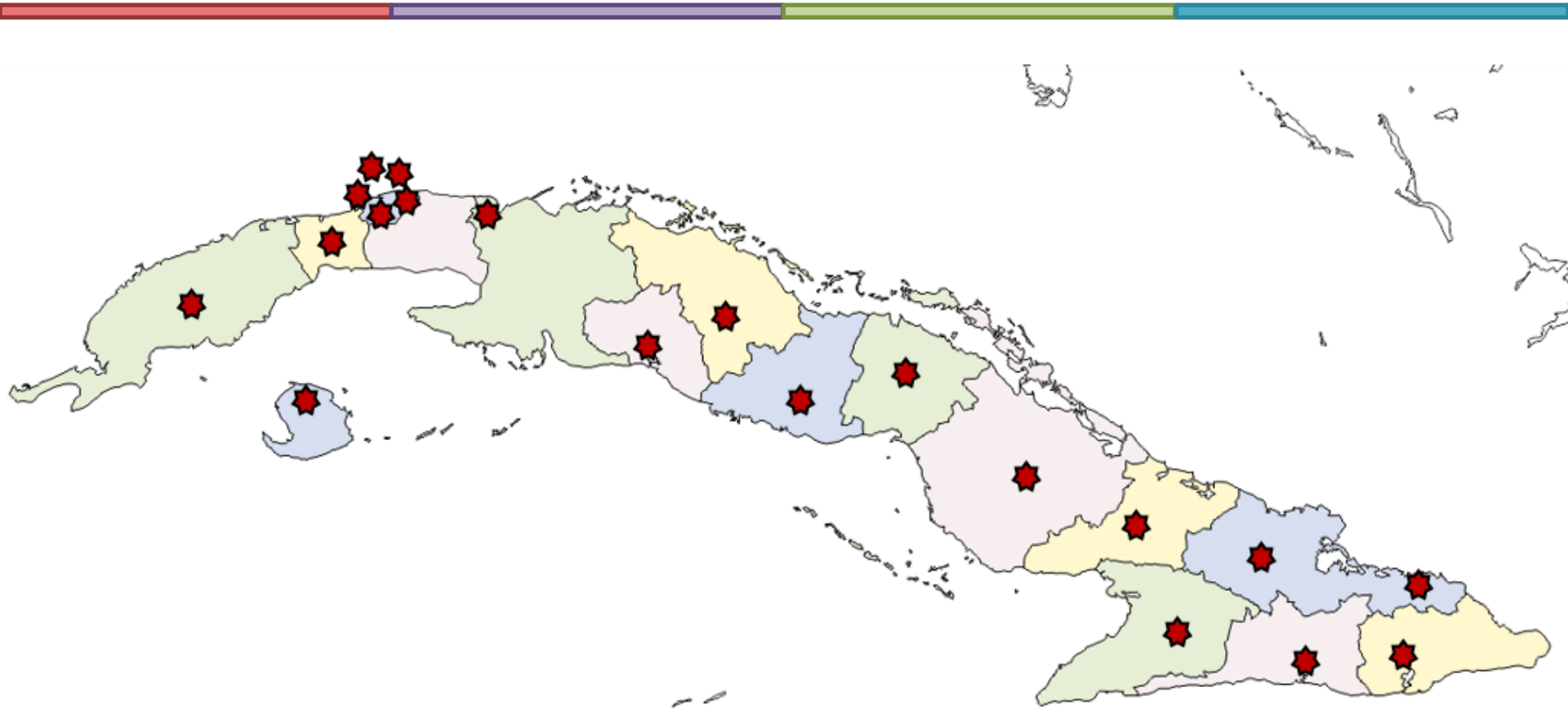
Objective

To develop test specifications for standardised tests in the Cuban higher education context.

Local context – global partners

- Ministerio de Educación Superior de Cuba (MES)
- Universidad de las Ciencias Informáticas (UCI)
- The University of Bremen, Germany
- The British Council, Cuba and UK

Participants Cuban network (MES)



Networks

Cuban Network of
Language Assessment
in Higher Education
Part of LAALTA



<http://laalta.org>

Developing assessment literacy

Train the trainers:

Training in all relevant areas of assessment, so that the trainers can

- a) develop assessment tools for the new certification system, and
- b) train other teachers in their regions in relevant assessment matters.

➤ Sustainability and independence

Developing assessment literacy

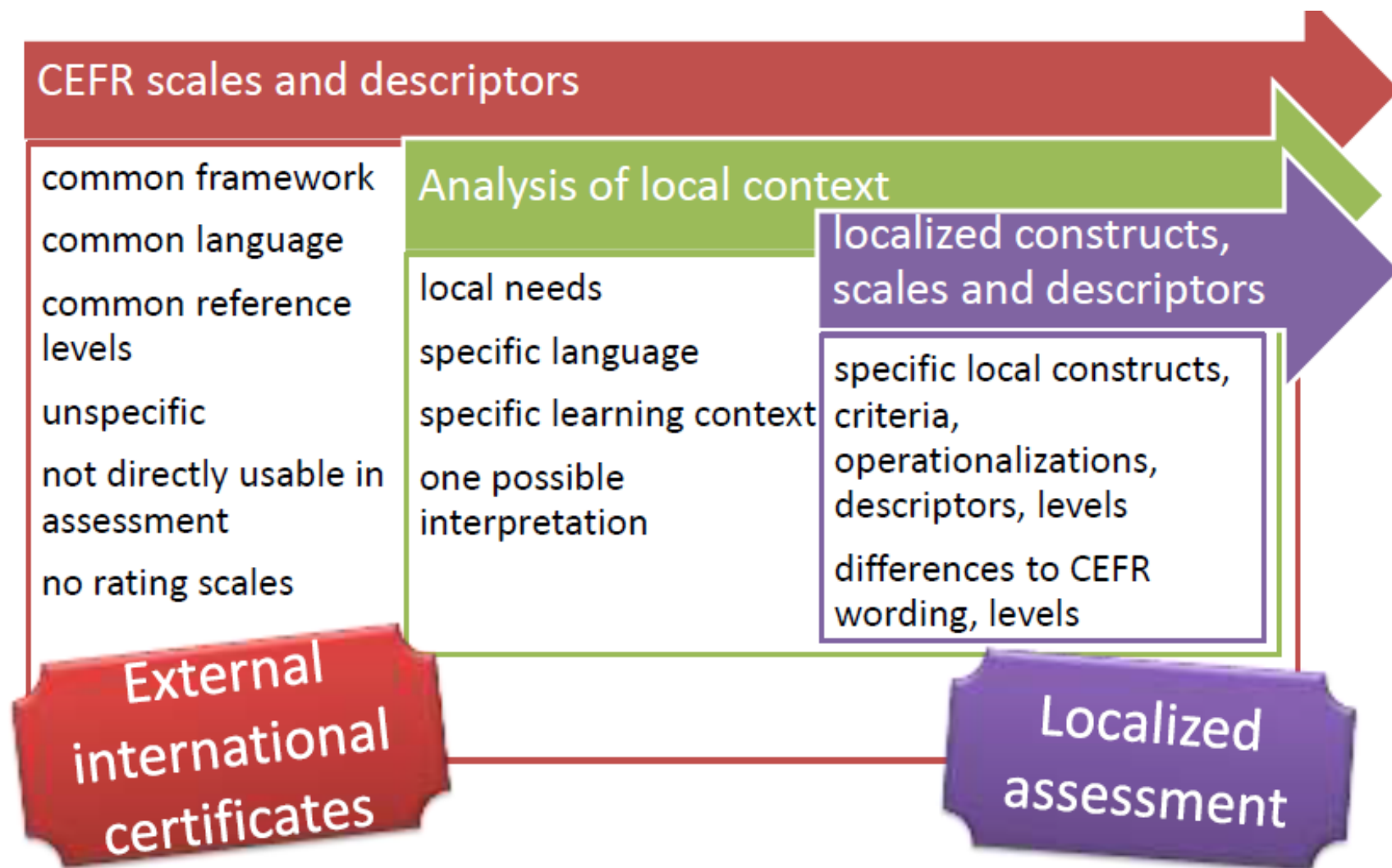


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Making the CEFR local



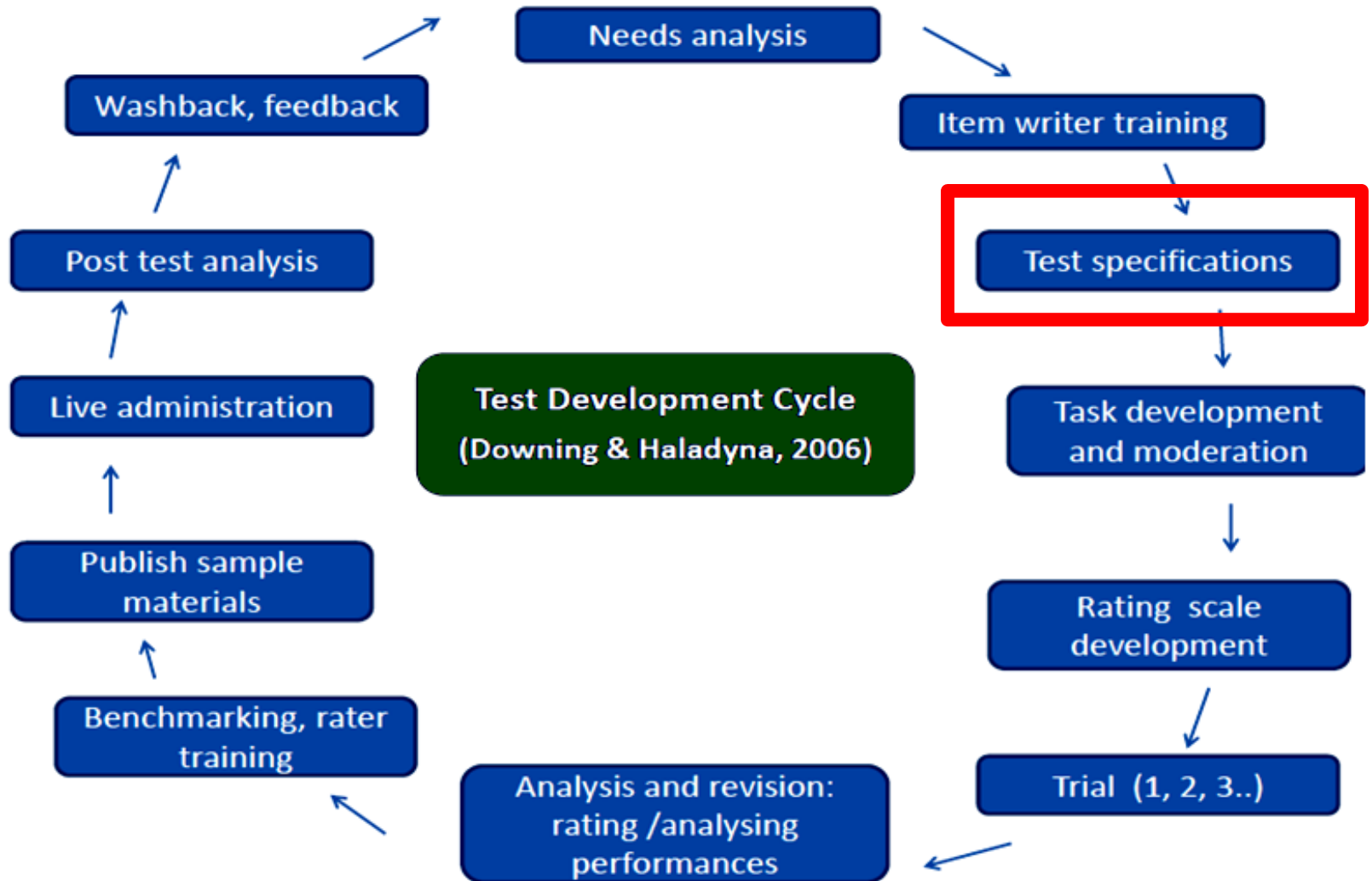
Making the CEFR local



Curriculum standards alone are not enough to define a high-stake assessment program; it is indispensable to carefully design test specifications.

(Bay-Borelli, Rozunick, Way and Weisman, 2010)

Test development cycle



Test specifications describe and define what a test tests and how it sets out to test what it tests. Likewise, they serve three main purposes: guiding the test development, forming the basis for validation research and inform potential test users.

(Harsch y Spoettl, 2016)

Test specifications

Purpose of the test

To serve as a certification of English language proficiency, a prerequisite for university graduation in the Cuban context.

Test specifications

General characteristics of the test.

Age groups:

- Mostly 18 to 24

Expected native languages:

- Mainly Spanish and Portuguese

Possible targeted situations:

- Four language skills in general and academic contexts
- English for international communication

Test structure:

- Four equally weighing sections

Test specifications.

General characteristics of the test.

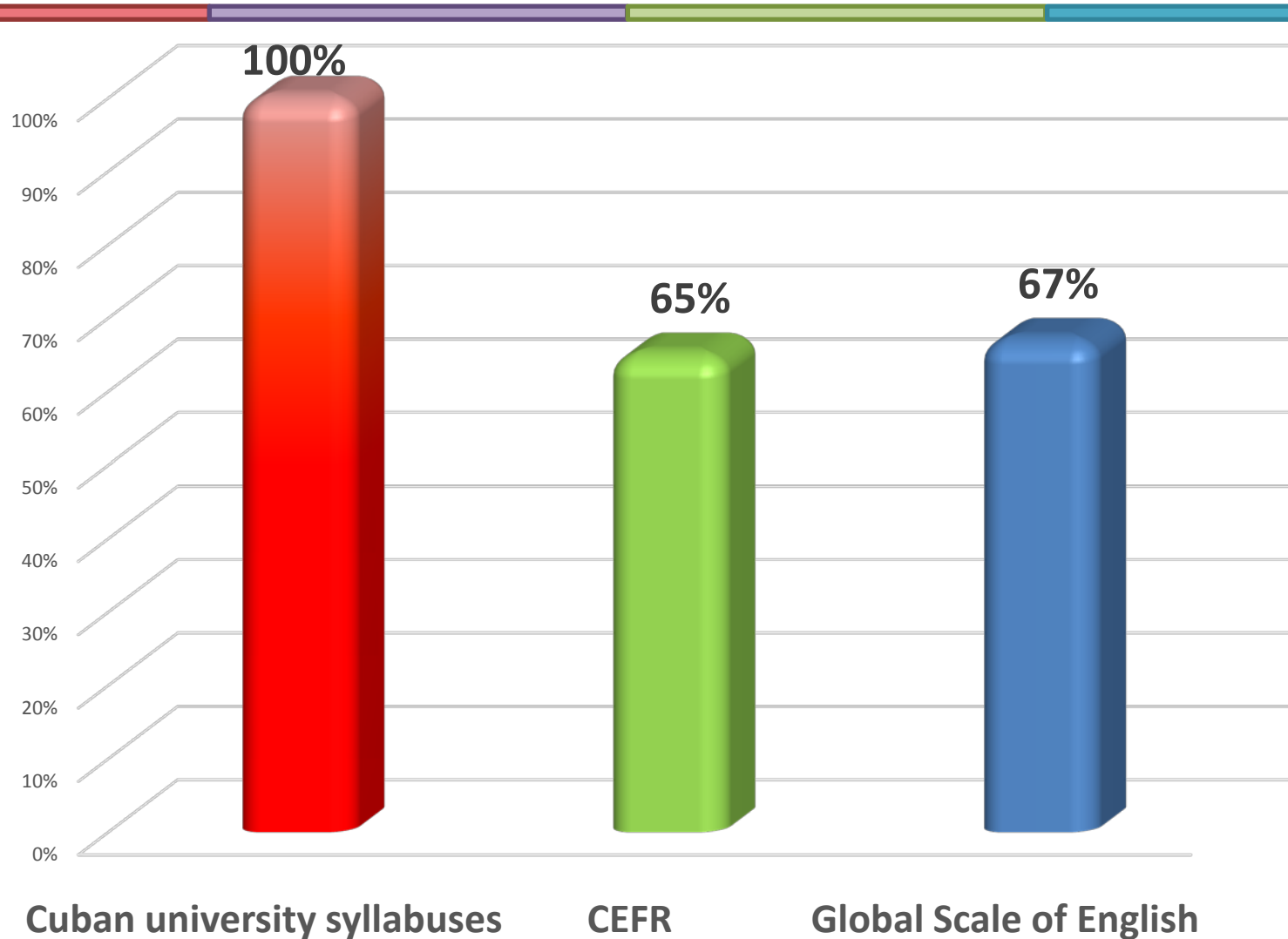
Targeted CEFR levels:

- A2 and B1

Topic areas:

- Mostly general, professional or academic, accessible to a general audience
- From concrete to mostly concrete
- Distressing topics avoided

Test specifications. Sources for specs formulation



Test specifications. Examples

The students can

READING

understand the gist of straightforward factual texts related to topics students are familiar with (skimming, expeditious global) [CEFR B1 ORC, GSE, curriculum]

Expected behaviors

Sources

LISTENING

recognise supporting details / examples in audio materials on familiar general or academic texts accessible to general audience (explicit; careful local) [curriculum, GSE, CEFR OLC B1]

Expected behaviors

Sources

SPEAKING

express and respond to personal opinions, different feelings, plans and actions on a variety of subjects on familiar topics, academic field [CEFR B1+, curriculum, GSE]

Sources

Test specifications. Examples

The students can

READING

understand the gist of straightforward factual texts related to topics students are familiar with (skimming, expeditious global) [CEFR B1 ORC, GSE, curriculum]

Expected behaviors

Sources

CEFR

Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, et
C.

(Council of Europe, 2001)

GSE

Can identify the main topic and related ideas in a structured text.

(Pearson, 2015)

CURRICULUM

Can identify the main topic and related ideas in a structured text on familiar topics related to general, professional or academic areas.

Test specifications. Examples

The students can

LISTENING

recognise supporting details / examples in audio materials on familiar general or academic texts accessible to general audience (explicit; careful local) [curriculum, GSE, CEFR OLC B1]

Expected behaviors

Sources

CEFR

Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job-related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated...

(Council of Europe, 2001)

GSE

Can distinguish between main ideas and supporting details in familiar, standard texts.

Can identify details that support a point of view in a simple presentation or lecture...

(Pearson, 2015)

CURRICULUM

Can identify specific information in an audio text about a familiar general or academic topic.

Test specifications. Examples

The students can

SPEAKING

express and respond to personal opinions, different feelings, plans and actions on a variety of subjects on familiar topics, academic field [CEFR B1+, curriculum, GSE]

Sources

CEFR

Can enter unprepared into conversation on familiar topics, express personal opinions and exchange information on topics that are familiar...

(Council of Europe, 2001)

GSE

*Can express and respond to feelings
Can express opinions and react to practical suggestions...*

(Pearson, 2015)

CURRICULUM

Express and respond to personal opinions, feelings, plans and actions on familiar academic and professional topics.

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Wrap up

The test specs resulting from this project have:

- laid the basis for standardised test development at institutional and national levels.
- provided teachers of Cuban higher education with a valuable tool for classroom assessment.
- set the ground for future validation efforts.
- served as an instrument for curriculum revision criteria, since they are based on learning outcomes and teaching goals.

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