

English proficiency certification in India – the need for improved assessments

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India ATP Conference 30 Nov 2018

Outline of the talk

- Where does India stand in the international scene?
- Problematizing the proficiency - achievement divide
- Challenges in proficiency assessment
- The way forward?

EF EPI 2018 RANKINGS

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PROFICIENCY BANDS

- Very High
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

VERY HIGH PROFICIENCY

01	Sweden	70.72
02	Netherlands	70.31
03	Singapore	68.63
04	Norway	68.38
05	Denmark	67.34
06	South Africa	66.52
07	Luxembourg	66.30
08	Finland	65.86
09	Slovenia	64.84
10	Germany	63.74
11	Belgium	63.52

HIGH PROFICIENCY

13	Poland	62.45
14	Philippines	61.84
15	Switzerland	61.77
16	Romania	60.31
17	Croatia	60.16
18	Serbia	60.04
19	Portugal	60.02
20	Czech Republic	59.99
21	Hungary	59.51
22	Malaysia	59.22
23	Greece	58.49

MODERATE PROFICIENCY

28	India	57.13
29	Nigeria	56.72
30	Hong Kong SAR	56.38
31	South Korea	56.27
32	Spain	55.85
33	Lebanon	55.79
34	Italy	55.77
35	France	55.49
36	Costa Rica	55.01

37	Dominican Republic	54.97
38	Belarus	53.53
39	Senegal	53.50
40	Uruguay	53.41
41	Vietnam	53.12
42	Russia	52.96
43	Ukraine	52.86
44	Macau SAR	52.57

LOW PROFICIENCY

45	Georgia	52.28
46	Chile	52.01
47	China	51.94
48	Taiwan	51.88
49	Japan	51.80
50	Pakistan	51.66
51	Indonesia	51.58
52	Albania	51.49
53	Brazil	50.93
54	Ethiopia	50.79
55	Guatemala	50.63

56	Panama	49.98
57	Mexico	49.76
58	Sri Lanka	49.39
59	Peru	49.32
60	Colombia	48.90
61	Bolivia	48.87
62	Egypt	48.76
63	Bangladesh	48.72
64	Thailand	48.54
65	Ecuador	48.52

VERY LOW PROFICIENCY

66	Iran	48.29
67	Morocco	48.10
68	Tunisia	47.85
69	Honduras	47.80
70	El Salvador	47.42
71	U.A.E.	47.27
72	Nicaragua	47.26
73	Turkey	47.17
74	Jordan	47.10
75	Venezuela	46.61
76	Syria	46.37
77	Azerbaijan	45.85

78	Kuwait	45.64
79	Oman	45.56
80	Kazakhstan	45.19
81	Algeria	44.50
82	Myanmar	44.23
83	Saudi Arabia	43.65
84	Afghanistan	43.64
85	Cambodia	42.86
86	Uzbekistan	42.53
87	Iraq	40.82
88	Libya	39.64

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Very high

(72 %)

High

(62%)

Moderate

(57%)

Low

(52 %)

Very low

(48%)

Countries

Sweden

Poland

India

Georgia

Iran

Netherlands

Philippines

Nigeria

Chile

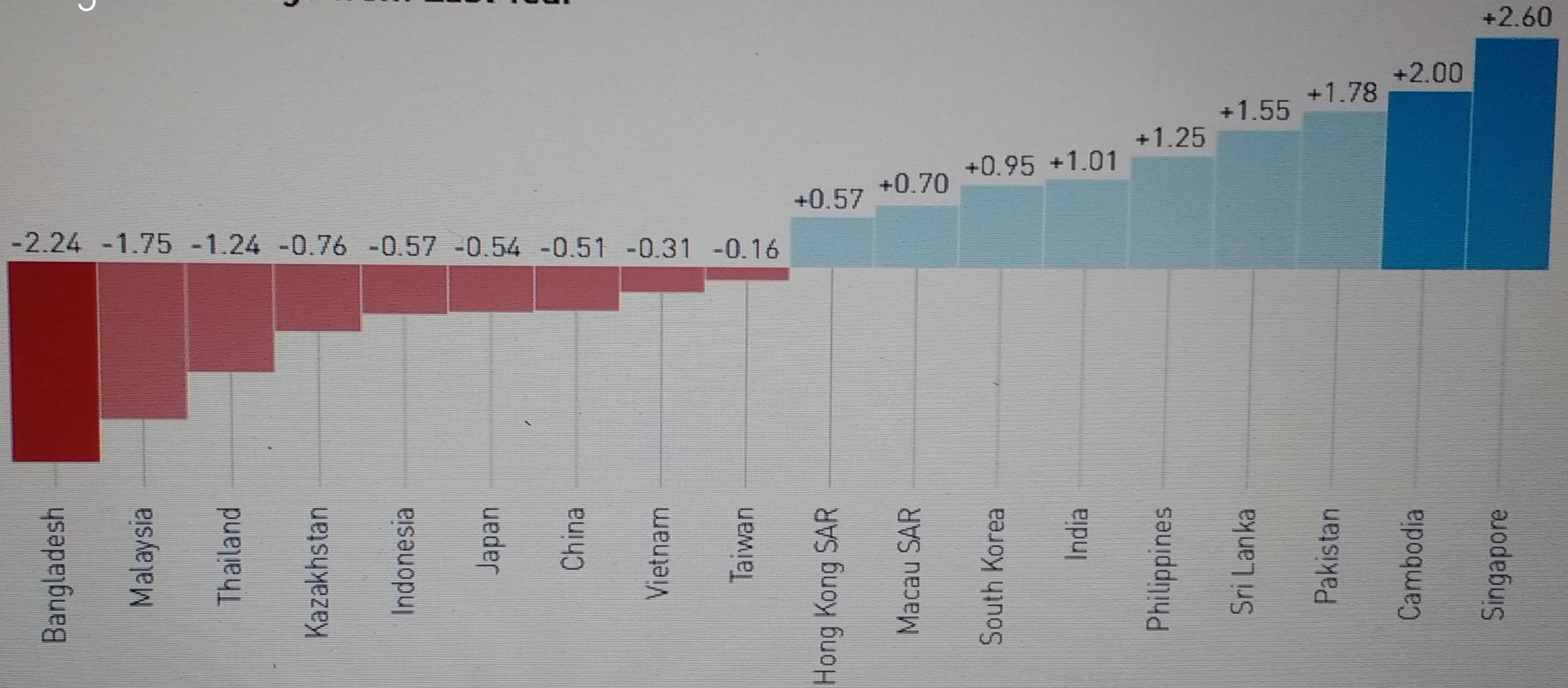
Morocco

China

Source: EF EPI 2018 Rankings

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EF EPI Score Change from Last Year



- Trending Down
- Trending Up
- Slight Decrease
- Slight Increase

Some key findings

- In 2018, the English language is as important as it has ever been. It is the de facto language of communication for all types of international exchange—goods, services, and ideas.
- English proficiency varies widely between industries and job functions. The best English speakers cluster around roles such as legal and strategy, and industries such as banking and IT. The pressures of globalization mean that almost every industry is subject to international competition. Weaker English makes competing more difficult.
- In Asia, English proficiency did not increase despite high levels of investments in English.

Key findings

contd.

- Societies that speak English are more open, less hierarchical, and fairer to women.
- English and innovation go hand in hand.
- Women speak English better than men.
- On average, adults in their twenties speak the best English.
- Managers have a better grasp of English than executives or their staff.

Where are we with our English proficiency?

- Kiran Karnik, the CEO of NASSCOM, at one of the British Council's Policy Dialogue meetings held in Delhi: only 15-17 % our graduates including engineers are employable because they lack soft skills, English language proficiency being one of the major ones should be of utmost concern.

The achievement-proficiency divide

- English exams at school and university levels are text-book/content based resulting in a negative washback on teaching and learning.
- We have no idea of where our students are at the end of 12 years of schooling or 3 more years of higher education.
- All language exams even when they are based on a prescribed curriculum need to test proficiency levels in all four skills of the language (in un-memorised un-rehearsed use of the language)

Knowledge Commission emphasizes this point: “....assessment should be based on proficiency rather than specifying achievement targets that reward mastery of single texts acquired through rote learning”.

<http://knowledgecommission.gov.in/downloads/recommendations/LanguageLetterPM.pdf>

Indian proficiency tests of English

- Two attempts at setting up a proficiency testing scheme
 - A. NELTS (National English Language Testing Scheme) at the EFL University, Hyderabad
 - B. Proficiency test at Delhi University

- What were the bottlenecks?

International proficiency tests

➤ TOEFL iBT and TOEIC

➤ Help test takers to:

- a. Verify current English proficiency levels
- b. Qualify for a new position and/or promotion in a company
- c. Enhance professional credentials
- d. Monitor progress in English
- e. Set individual learning goals
- f. Involve employers in advancing their employees' English ability

TOEIC Bridge (Beginning to Intermediate level learners)

► It helps to

- a. motivate beginning learners by identifying strengths and weaknesses
- b. aligns with current English-language teaching approaches
- c. helps prepare students for the *TOEIC* Listening and Reading test

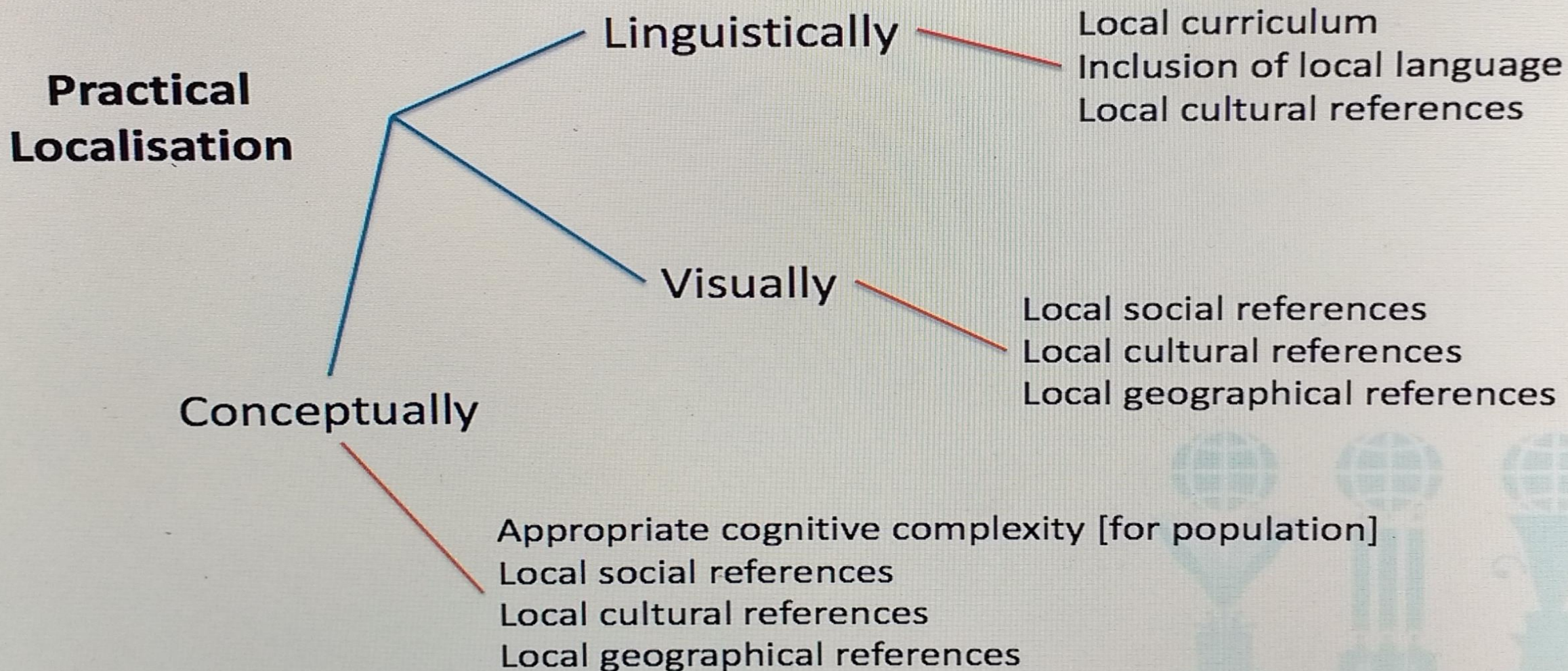
Localisation of TOEIC and TOEIC Bridge

- Is it necessary?
- Is it possible?
- No convincing validation argument can be postulated for a language test that claims to be test-taker agnostic. The argument proposed here means that for language and other tests the argument that one-size-fits-all is not supportable

O'Sullivan (in press)

Nature of Localisation

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So what are we saying?

- ▶ We need proficiency tests at all identified levels that match international benchmarks such as CEFR.
- ▶ The more Indian they are for national purposes, the better.
- ▶ We can learn lessons from international tests such as TOEIC and TOEIC bridge.
- ▶ We need to learn to localise tests by using our own experts --teachers, teacher educators and researchers.

It is a state of emergency: we will need to act now!

Thanks!

