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Dong Wan Cho is Professor in the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Pohang University of Science and Technology, Pohang, Korea. He earned his doctoral degree in language testing from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1995 and published many journal articles on ESL/EFL writing assessment, ESP/EAP writing for publication purposes, and ESL/EFL curriculum development in international and domestic journals. He now serves as the Vice President of the Korea English Language Testing Association, KELTA and editorial board of English Language Assessment, Language Testing in ASIA, the Journal of ASIA TEFL, and Studies in English Education. He also worked as a member of the advisory panel of the National English Ability Test, NEAT and was involved in developing the rationale of the test and constructing items for the test.

Why do we need a criterion-referenced English test on the KSAT?: Revisit to the NEAT

The English test on the Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test has been administered based on a norm-referenced test in which the test takers are given a certain level based on their comparative standing on the test. This evaluation system has caused severe competition between students, leading to their extreme dependence on private education. Facing the complaints of parents for the high expense of English education of their children, the Korean government has initiated a non-educational and unprofessional test item development strategy, in which about 70% of the questions appearing on the KSAT should be the same as and/or very similar to those developed and broadcast by a government-owned educational broadcasting station. This system, however, fails to reduce the high dependence on private education of high school students in Korea. Thus the Korean government has decided to implement a criterion-referenced test, with a wish to reduce the expense spent on private education for English. The primary goal of a criterion-referenced test is to see whether test-takers have mastered a set of predetermined criteria. This paper presents rationale behind the implementation of a criterion-referenced test, issues concerning establishing the criteria, and possible effects of the new test on English education in Korea.