

Getting to know STEP and the EIKEN Test

by Michael Todd Fouts

EIKEN (Test in Practical English Proficiency) has been the leading English language assessment in Japan for more than 40 years. The annual number of examinees is 2.5 million, and the test is administered at 15,000 test sites in Japan. Fouts, a representative of the STEP organization overviewed the history and purpose of STEP (a nonprofit organization) and outlined its two aims: (1) to advance English education in Japan; and (2) to encourage the study of practical English. He outlined the test contents and design of EIKEN: a comprehensive assessment of the four skills. As an open test, EIKEN is more accountable to the public than similar English proficiency tests. Questions are not reused and the papers are released for study material. Peer review is integral to maintaining quality standards.

The speaker then spoke about the growth of EIKEN. Now the test is increasingly being accepted for admissions to schools in North America and Australia. The reasons why institutions recognize EIKEN for Japanese applicants are (1) EIKEN is more accessible, affordable, and familiar than other tests in Japan; (2) with EIKEN, Japanese students can qualify for admission without taking other tests, thereby removing a potential barrier to study abroad; and (3) EIKEN has a strong correlation with TOEFL.

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