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Today's Edition

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## New test on the block

**Moumita Chakrabarti** on how Pearson's PTE Academic fares *vis-a-vis* Toefl and IELTS as a test of English language proficiency



Knowing English is not enough; to study abroad, you need to demonstrate that you know the language. Until recently, students applying to foreign universities had to take either the Test of English as a Foreign Language (Toefl) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to provide proof of their expertise in the language.

Now they have another option — the Pearson Test of English (PTE) Academic developed by Pearson, the global media, education and publishing group. So, anyone taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test, Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) or Graduate Record Examination must have a Toefl, IELTS or PTE Academic score.

Launched in October 2009, PTE Academic is recognised by more than 1,500 universities and schools worldwide.

It is a computer-based English language test that measures the reading, writing, listening and speaking skills of students whose mother tongue is not English and who want to study in institutions where English is the principal language of instruction.

"PTE Academic is now available in over 150 test centres worldwide and 15 centres across India," says John Philip, country manager, Pearson Language Tests. Philip stresses that the test is held four to eight times every month. "It is a 'choose and book test' that gives students the freedom to choose their test dates as per convenience."

PTE Academic seems to have made a decent start despite the giants in the field. Nearly one million students around the world take Toefl, said to be the most widely accepted English-language proficiency assessment. Gena Netten, Toefl brand manager, stresses that it is conducted more than 40 times a year. "We advise students to register as soon as possible as the seats at the test centres fill up fast."

First held in 1964, Toefl is accepted by more than 7,500 institutes in more than 130 countries. India accounts for the fifth largest country of test takers.

The other big player, IELTS, is recognised by more than 6,000 institutions in over 135 countries. It has over 1.4 million candidates each year. It costs about Rs 7,200, while the PTE Academic and Toefl cost Rs 7,500.

But PTE Academic too seems to be drawing patrons. "It is an excellent assessment of international English for non-English speaking students," remarks David A. Wilson, president and chief executive officer of the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC), administrators of GMAT. PTE Academic is endorsed by GMAC.

Wilson points out some advantages PTE Academic enjoys over Toefl and IELTS. "PTE Academic is available on demand, six days a week; IELTS and Toefl are available only two days a month. PTE returns scores within five days

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**SAB KUCH BIKTA HAI**

toefl are available only two days a month. PTE returns scores within five days or less (currently two days); Toefl does it in two weeks and IELTS in three weeks. PTE includes a speech sample as part of the score report. Toefl has added a speech sample that is not part of the score report, and IELTS does not provide a speech sample at all."

There is more. PTE, he adds, offers "much higher levels" of test security, reducing significantly the use of proxy candidates. The PTE tests also deal with aspects of the language that are not taken into account by the other tests, he says. For instance, it tests a student's grammar, oral fluency, pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary.

Seema Malhotra, official representative of 45 UK universities, says that 20 of these 45 institutes accept PTE Academic scores. This year, about 50 Indian students have used IELTS to gain admission to these universities, she says. "But I have already come across at least 15 who have used PTE as a test of their English skills," she adds.

Dr Sumit Gupta, set to take the Pearson test this year, has his own reasons for opting for it. "I already have an IELTS score but it seems PTE Academic greatly reduces the chances of making mistakes in the listening section." An Indian student may find a heavy American or a British accent difficult to understand. The PTE test eliminates that apprehension.

Garima Dubey, who registered for PTE Academic for August this year, says, "I like the fact that it delivers results within a few days. This gives us ample time for a future course of action." The mock tests were also helpful, she adds, referring to practice tests that are available online.

Education experts like Renuka Raja Rao, country co-ordinator, Educational Advising Services, United States-India Educational Foundation (Usief), Delhi, feel the new test holds promise. "US universities are readily accepting the PTE. Given the flexibility of the US system, it is very likely that those universities that have not yet taken a decision would be willing to consider PTE scores, should students request it," she says. Others believe that it has been formulated keeping in mind the lacunae that the Toefl and IELTS suffer from.

Of course, all this doesn't mean PTE Academic is set to replace Toefl or IELTS. As an official at Usief, Calcutta, says, "Students are beginning to opt for PTE Academic, but we cannot say universities give it preference over the others."

Arindam Roy, executive director, EdXcare International, a foreign education consultancy firm that has been training students for Toefl and IELTS for years, feels it will be difficult for any new test to challenge them. "They are like institutions," he says. "Besides, they keep upgrading themselves."

So, take your pick, but be sure to test them all first. When it comes to English tests, one size doesn't fit all.

#### OTHERS IN THE BUSINESS

**1 Test of English for International Communication** ([www.ets.org/toeic](http://www.ets.org/toeic)):

Measures the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment

**2 Test of Spoken English** ([www.ets.org/tse](http://www.ets.org/tse)): Measures the ability of non-native speakers of English to communicate effectively

**3 International Test of English Proficiency** ([www.itepexam.com](http://www.itepexam.com)): A general-purpose English assessment tool

**4 University of Bath English Language Test** ([www.bath.ac.uk/ubelt](http://www.bath.ac.uk/ubelt)): English language testing for medical professionals and students, and border and immigration purposes

**5 University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations** ([www.cambridgeesol.org](http://www.cambridgeesol.org)): Range of certificates for learners and teachers of English

**6 Trinity College London ESOL** ([www.trinitycollege.co.uk/esol](http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/esol)): Offers English language testing in five categories

**7 STEP Eiken** ([www.stepeiken.org](http://www.stepeiken.org)): Conducted by a Japanese non-profit organisation and backed by the Japanese ministry of education, culture, sports, science and technology (MEXT).

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