

Oral English tests

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Response to “Officials call for English test in university exam” (October 8).

Including oral English tests at the university level is not the way to improve English oral proficiency. Yes, such testing will encourage more English-language use, that is: more “speaking English” by students in class.

However, research consistently shows that more speaking does not improve speaking: The ability to speak fluently with accurate grammar and appropriate vocabulary comes from input, from listening and reading.

Also, oral English tests are difficult to evaluate and are anxiety-provoking for students. They are also expensive.

The NT\$3 billion [US\$97.06 million] that the Ministry of Education is eager to spend on oral English tests would be much better used to improve libraries, increasing the holdings of interesting reading material at all levels, as well as TV shows, films, and, above all, audio stories made comprehensible for people who are acquiring English.

I suspect that the real problem Taiwan has with English is that policymakers are not aware of the research.

At the English Language Teacher conference in Taiwan next month, my colleagues and I will be presenting several papers on improving English, including the problems with forcing speech and the advantages and pleasures of listening to stories, all supported by serious academic research.

Stephen Krashen

Los Angeles, California