



Pearson

An Educator Story:

Implementing multiple Pearson solutions leads to success

Key Findings

Ting Li, English as a Second Language Curriculum Coordinator and instructor at the American Language Institute affiliated to the University of Toledo, finds implementing Pearson’s NorthStar with MyEnglishLab, Versant English Placement Test, and the Global Scale of English (GSE) have benefited their instructors and students in a variety of ways including:

- **The Global Scale of English supports the development of a standardized curriculum and a consistent framework for teaching English**
- **NorthStar engages students through authentic and compelling content and empowers them to achieve their academic and personal goals**
- **MyEnglishLab allows instructors the flexibility to revise questions, reduces administrative burden due to the automatic grading feature and includes a variety of resources to support teaching and learning**
- **Pearson offers excellent customer support, helping build a sense of team between their representatives and the school**
- **Using GSE-aligned course contents and assessments helps support IEP students in the general program, where they perform consistently with ELLs who have not taken the IEP**

About the Courses

The American Language Institute (ALI) is located in Toledo, Ohio and is attached to the 4-year University of Toledo. ALI provides English courses and resources for those students that want to improve their English as well as for those required to take the International Student English (ISE) Exam.

There are approximately 22,000-25,000 students enrolled at the University of Toledo. The intensive language program at ALI enrolls around 50-100 students per semester and the average student is roughly between 18-20 years old. The majority are full-time, affluent, international students looking to enter undergraduate and graduate programs after the intensive language program. The average class size is close to 10, with the smallest class size in the neighborhood of 5.

There are currently 5 course levels offered at ALI including basic (GSE 36-42/A2+), low intermediate (GSE 43 -50/B1), high intermediate (GSE 51-58/B1+), low advanced (GSE 59-68/B2) and high advanced (GSE 69-76/B2+). The 3 courses offered within each level are integrated speaking and listening, grammar, and literacy. Students are able to test into levels after taking Pearson’s online Versant English Placement Test (VEPT). In general, students finishing secondary high school education test into the low intermediate (GSE 43-50/B1) or high intermediate levels (GSE 51-58/B1+).

Per level, students take 20 hours of in-class lectures every week for 7 of the 8-week semester, with the first week being orientation. In addition, students are expected to complete 2 hours of homework per class hour, equaling 40 hours per

week of learning to facilitate fast progress from a lower level to a college ready level. The program takes about 8 months to complete.

Ting Li currently works at ALI as the English as a Second Language (ESL) Curriculum Coordinator, with nearly 30% of her workload allocated as an instructor. Prior to starting with ALI, she completed her Masters Degree in Teaching English as a Second Language and taught English for 2 years at a university in China before moving to the United States. In 2009, she earned her second Masters Degree in Educational Psychology moving on to earn a Doctorate in Educational Leadership at Miami University where she also taught for a year as an adjunct professor in Educational Psychology. In 2015, she began working at ALI as an ESL instructor, working with all levels until she completed her doctorate. She now spends the majority of her time as an administrator.

Challenges and Goals

The main goal at ALI is to help students develop their English skills in a way that will facilitate their successful integration into the college community, both academically and socially. *“Our ultimate goal isn’t to teach them how to take and pass language tests, but to teach them how to use English and engage themselves with the local communities.”* With this goal in mind, in May of 2016, ALI decided it would be beneficial to restructure its program to a standardized curriculum that more closely aligned with ALI program levels. After reviewing a proposal from Pearson, ALI was particularly impressed with how the content, assessment, and courseware were aligned to international standards using the GSE, with levels and stages appropriate to achieve the goal of college ready students. ALI chose to adopt a variety of Pearson products because *“it makes sense for us to adopt a systematic structure of Pearson products rather than one product or two because they are designed along the landmarks of all levels.”*

First, ALI adopted the Global Scale of English (GSE), which extends the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) by giving instructors and students a more detailed approach to what needs to be mastered in the speaking, listening, reading and writing skills on a scale from 10 to 90. It includes the development of specific sets of learning objectives targeting English for Academic Purposes and English for Professional Purposes including over 2000 additional Can Do statements aligned to the CEFR. ALI finds that the detail of the GSE *“made the CEFR more manageable because it broke out the levels and outlined CEFR goals into different categories.”*

Second, ALI adopted the NorthStar Speaking & Listening (1-5), the NorthStar Reading & Writing (1-5), and the Focus on Grammar (1-5) textbooks in each of the 5 levels. These textbooks are flexible enough to fit ALI’s curriculum and the 3 key areas of study: literacy, speaking and listening, and grammar. Ting appreciates how the textbooks bridge between developing students’ proficiency levels and instructors’ daily teaching needs. *“The even better part is that Pearson products offer a variety of lesson planners which allows instructors to teach each unit of the textbook in different levels of depth.”*

Lastly, ALI implemented Pearson’s Versant English Placement Test (VEPT), which helps assess how an individual comprehends and uses English. This test, which is aligned to the GSE, is used to determine student placement into the 5 levels at ALI.

Implementation

In the fall of 2016, ALI began utilizing the NorthStar Speaking and Listening, the NorthStar Reading and Writing, and Focus on Grammar textbooks with MyEnglishLab, GSE and Versant English Placement Test (VEPT). In order to facilitate a smooth transition, Pearson provided four, non-sequential full day workshops. *“Currently, I am very confident with the products because I was trained by a Pearson Academic Consultant from day one.”*

In class, instructors use the interactive version of the NorthStar textbooks with MyEnglishLab. Instructors use MyEnglishLab assignments as part of their assessments and students complete the assignments online. MyEnglishLab includes a teacher resource section, which provides a lot of supportive materials such as assessments, downloadables, and teaching plans. While instructors do not strictly follow the given teaching plans due to individual class needs, Ting finds they are *“a good starting point for new teachers to help them pace themselves with the textbook.”*

Another highlight Ting notes is how well students respond to MyEnglishLab. Students enjoy the interactivity of the system and being able to work on their computers to complete assignments. *“They like that MyEnglishLab provides them immediate and responsive feedback.”* In particular, students like how the speaking and listening assignments give them the correct pronunciation when instructors may not be readily available to offer that feedback.

ALI was already using VEPT as their placement instrument prior to revising their program. With the implementation of the GSE and courseware, VEPT proved even more useful as a placement instrument, given its alignment to the GSE. The test is currently offered online and is a secure and easily accessible assessment, which Ting finds *“is very user friendly for both test takers and test administrators.”* ALI is also able to use VEPT with distance learning students who were unable to be on campus, since the test can now be used with remote proctoring, ensuring test security, even at a distance.

The Instructor Experience

One of the main goals of the program is helping students be successful in their academic lives. Ting believes Pearson has been instrumental to the success of the program. Data collected by the institution shows that students have performed better since the revised program was implemented. ALI conducted a 2-year of study to determine how well students performed in academic study and their levels of achievement post the language program. Additionally, ALI wanted to check that students graduating with at least a 3.0 GPA were adequately prepared to exit the program and fully transition into academic programs, eliminating the need for an additional exit exam. According to Ting, ALI’s key findings were as follows:

- The average ALI GPA was highly related to the University of Toledo’s (UT) undergraduate GPA, which indicates that if students do well at ALI, they will have a successful academic career.
- There was no group difference between ALI graduates and UT student GPA, which indicates ALI students perform as well as other international students who have been directly admitted to the university.
- There was no difference between credits earned 2 years into the university program compared with the general UT student population.



The alignment between the NorthStar, Focus on Grammar book series, and the VEPT, informed by the Global Scale of English (GSE), enabled Ting to showcase how ALI students could begin taking courses at the University of Toledo once a 3.0 GPA had been achieved after they complete the highest level. This lowered the overall number of required assessments, demonstrating the quality of program improvement afforded by using courseware and assessment aligned to international standards.

In addition, ALI was recently granted accreditation by the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA), making ALI a nationally recognized Intensive English Program (IEP). Ting acknowledges that the use of the GSE-informed course organization helped with the accreditation process.

Ting believes Pearson products provide an additional level of support for teaching due to their alignment to the GSE and CEFR. Using the GSE, instructors are able to analyze the next levels students are progressing into, targeting exactly what skills are required to be mastered, which translates into more transparent teaching outcomes. *“This makes the transitions between levels smoother and communication among instructors about students’ progress clearer.”*

Further, Ting appreciates how well the NorthStar textbooks relate to students’ lives. She finds the true-to-life content supports engagement. The topics in the books encourage discussion which in turn facilitates communicative English practice.

“You have to relate to students’ lives. My experience as an instructor is there is no inability to engage students, you are just not engaging them in the right way. There is always a way to open their minds and give them the motivation to speak. If the teaching content is related to their lives, students would take the initiatives in using English to express their ideas.”

Ting has been especially satisfied with the customer support offered by Pearson. *“They have been very responsive to our requests. I have very strong support from the Pearson team and it’s very powerful.”* Further, she enjoys the sense of team and partnership they promote, *“Pearson was connecting us with [multiple Pearson Academic Consultants] and we all met more than once to discuss our concerns.”*

Conclusion

Ting has had a very positive experience with the variety of products ALI utilizes from Pearson. She has been especially happy with how well the GSE supports the development of a standardized curriculum. In addition, she has been very satisfied with the customer service offered. When asked if she would recommend Pearson, she said

“I have been recommending Pearson not only because it offers standardized structure for the curriculum, textbooks, assessments, teacher resources and support, but more importantly, I love the team support because it’s not just a product Pearson sold us, it’s a whole follow-up team as well as continuous support surrounding the whole process of implementing the product. Whenever we need something, Pearson will not turn their back on us.”