

# Characteristics of CAEL Test takers

## Introduction

Individual test takers take the CAEL Assessment for a variety of reasons. Most CAEL Assessment test takers write the test as part of the process of applying for admission to a university program. They take the test to demonstrate that their level of English language is adequate for university study. Some test takers take the test as part of their registration in an English as a Second Language (ESL) or an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. Occasionally test takers write the test in order to satisfy a personal desire to know more about their level of English language. Given the variety of reasons that test takers have for completing the test, we generally find that our test population has diverse characteristics.

CAEL Assessment test takers are asked to provide some background information as part of the registration process (see Chapter One, p.13). This information helps us to gain a better understanding of the diverse characteristics of our test population. We use this information to monitor the performance of the test for various groups of test takers and to guide the selection of pilot test groups used when developing new versions of the CAEL. The information is stored in a secure database and is summarized at regular intervals. In this Chapter we describe a sample of over 7000 test takers who completed their CAEL Assessment at the main test centre at Carleton University from January 2002 through January 2008. Information describing gender, age, student status, first language and country of origin is presented.

## Gender, Age and Student Status

The sample of test takers described in this chapter is composed of 57.7% males and 42.3% females. Throughout the history of CAEL testing we have found this approximately 60/40 ratio to be quite consistent at the main test centre. By comparison, the full-time student population at Carleton University is 48.9% male and 51.1% female (OIRP, 2007). Clearly, the proportion of male students completing the CAEL Assessment is higher than the proportion of males registered for full-time study at Carleton University. Of course, when testing is undertaken at overseas test centres the proportion of males and females may differ considerably from that which is observed at the main test centre. An analysis of test performance by gender is presented in Chapter Five, *Score Distributions*, pp.71-74.

Table 3.1 provides some descriptive statistics for the age of this sample of CAEL Assessment test takers. The majority of test takers are students applying for entrance to a university program. However, from time to time students who are still studying at the high school level take the test in order to assess their level of English language. This explains the minimum age of 14 years shown in the 1997 – 1998 column of Table 3.1. Note that in the 2002 – 2008 column, the minimum age is 17, which better reflects the expected population of CAEL Assessment test takers.

In addition, a number of adults returning to the university setting to take courses of interest complete the CAEL Assessment. This explains the maximum age of 67 years reported in both samples. The mean age of between 26.6 and 27.2 years reflects the fact that the CAEL Assessment is used for both undergraduate and graduate students. It may also suggest that students with English as a second language requirements tend to be a little older than other university applicants.

**Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics for Age (Years) of CAEL Assessment Test takers**

Statistic	Age (Years)	
	1997 - 1999	2002 - 2008
Mean	26.6	27.2
Median	25.0	25.0
Mode	19.0	25.0
Minimum	14.0	17.0
Maximum	67.0	67.0

While Table 3.1 provides an overall impression of the age of the population, it is also useful to look at the frequency distribution of ages. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the frequencies observed for various age ranges in both sample populations. The majority of CAEL Assessment test takers (81.3%) are between 17 and 29 years of age in both groups.

**Table 3.2: Frequency Distribution of Ages (Years) of CAEL Test takers**

Age Range (Years)	Freq.		%	
	1997 - 1999	2002 - 2008	1997 - 1999	2002 - 2008
14-23	905	2466	42.8	31.5
24-29	877	3900	26.8	49.8
30-35	384	669	18.3	8.6
36-41	176	433	8.4	5.5
42-47	56	221	2.7	2.8
48-67	24	144	1.0	1.8
Total	2111	7833	100%	100 %

When we refer to the student status of a test taker, we are referring to the level of study the student has been accepted into at a Canadian university. 79.3% of the test takers at the main test centre are identified as undergraduate. Approximately 9% of the test takers are identified as *Special* students. This category includes students who are not registered in a degree program but wish to take courses of interest at the university.

This category also includes those students who are interested in registering for ESL/EAP courses only, as well as those who have not yet applied or been accepted to a university. 7.5% of the students tested at the main test centre at Carleton University have been accepted into a graduate program at the university level. This number has grown by approximately 3% since 2002.

### First Language

Test takers are asked to indicate their first language on the registration form. The information reported has been summarized as Table 3.3. Because of the great diversity in first languages, over 70 different first languages have been reported, Table 3.3 presents the frequency of test takers as a percent, for the 20 most commonly reported first languages. These 20 languages include approximately 88% of the test takers for the years of 1997 – 1999 and 95% of the test takers for the years of 2002 - 2008.

**Table 3.3: Test takers Most Commonly Reported First Languages**

<b>1997 - 1999</b>			
<b>First Language</b>	<b>Freq.(%)</b>	<b>First Language</b>	<b>Freq.(%)</b>
Arabic	19.0	French	2.2
Cantonese	12.9	Vietnamese	2.1
Mandarin	11.4	Somali	1.9
Korean	5.6	Amharic	1.5
Farsi (Persian)	5.6	Urdu	1.3
Tamil	5.0	Turkish	1.2
Spanish	4.8	Romanian	1.1
Japanese	4.0	Indonesian	1.0
Russian	3.2	Bengali	.8
Serbo-Croatian	2.3	Polish	.8
<b>Total (20 most common languages) = 87.7%</b>			

**2002 - 2008**

<b>First Language</b>	<b>Freq.(%)</b>	<b>First Language</b>	<b>Freq.(%)</b>
Mandarin	47.9	Urdu	1.0
Cantonese	12.5	French	.9
Arabic	11.3	Taglog	.7
Farsi (Persian)	5.3	Tamil	.7
Spanish	2.2	Bengali	.7
Russian	2.0	Romanian	.7
Korean	2.0	Amharic	.3
Vietnamese	1.9	Indonesian	.3
Turkish	1.2	Portuguese	.3
Japanese	1.1	Serbo-Croatian	.3
<b>Total (20 most common languages) = 95.3%</b>			

The first language most frequently reported by CAEL test takers during the last 5 years at the main test centre is Mandarin (47.9%). When taken together, Cantonese and Mandarin account for 60.4 % of the sample. In comparison, the other language groups are not well represented. However, it is important to recognize that these distributions reflect test takers completing their test at the main test centre at Carleton University. Of course, when testing is undertaken in overseas locations the composition of first languages reported differs greatly.

### **Country of Origin**

The country of origin reported by CAEL test takers is summarized in Table 3.4. To date, test takers at the main test centre have reported over 112 different countries of origin. Table 3.4 shows the frequency of test takers as a percent for the 20 most commonly reported countries of origin. The largest single country of origin is still China although the percentage has jumped from 16.3% to 58.2% (statistics for Hong Kong are reported separately). There has also been some shift in the 20 most commonly reported countries of origin which now account for about 87% of the test takers at the main test centre.

**Table 3.4: Test takers Most Commonly Reported Countries of Origin**

<b>1999 - 1997</b>			
<b>Country</b>	<b>Freq (%)</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Freq (%)</b>
China	16.3	Vietnam	2.2
Korea	5.6	Russia	2.2
Iran	5.6	Lebanon	2.1
Sri Lanka	5.5	Saudi Arabia	2.1
Hong Kong	4.6	India	1.9
Japan	4.0	Ethiopia	1.8
Taiwan	2.5	Yugoslavia	1.7
Kuwait	2.4	Jordan	1.6
Somalia	2.4	Palestine	1.6
Egypt	2.3	Pakistan	1.5
<b>Total (20 most common countries) 69.9%</b>			

<b>2002 - 2008</b>			
<b>Country</b>	<b>Freq (%)</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Freq (%)</b>
China	58.2	Lebanon	1.1
Iran	5.1	Palestine	1.1
Saudi Arabia	2.3	Japan	1.0
Korea	2.0	Hong Kong	1.0
Vietnam	1.9	India	.9
Russia	1.2	Philippines	.9
Jordan	1.2	Libya	.9
Turkey	1.2	Sri Lanka	.9
Pakistan	1.1	UAE	.8
Taiwan	1.1	Egypt	.8
<b>Total (20 most common countries) 82.7%</b>			

## **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the characteristics of typical CAEL test takers. Test takers complete the CAEL Assessment for a wide variety of reasons, and this means that their characteristics are quite diverse. Information is collected from test takers at the time of registration in order to help the test developers monitor test performance and determine the composition of pilot test groups. The data presented in this chapter were collected at the main test centre at Carleton University. In general, we can say that our test population is 60% male, 40% female. Most of the test takers are between 20 and 30 years of age and are applying for undergraduate study.

The test population is largely composed of individuals whose first language is Mandarin, Cantonese, or Arabic. Most of the test takers have come from East Asia, the Middle East, or North Africa. Of course, the characteristics of test takers completing the CAEL Assessment in overseas locations are quite different.