

Turning IELTS exercise into a lifeline for beach safety education: Enhancing migrants' knowledge of rip currents and safety strategies through an exercise for IELTS

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Abstract:

Background: The Australian summer of 2023/2024 recorded 150 coastal drowning deaths and about 9000 rescues. Beach safety education for migrants is still limited due to associated financial burdens and organisational challenges. As an alternative pedagogy, this study developed a reading exercise for International English Language Test System (IELTS), incorporating beach safety information targeted at international students studying English in Australia; it examined to what extent this material would improve their knowledge of beach safety.

Research Method: This study utilised a quasi-experimental design to measure the improvement of knowledge. Statistical data were analysed in SPSS and R Studio, utilising descriptive analysis, and Generalised Estimate Equations. A thematic analysis of textual responses was conducted in NVivo.

Results: The material significantly improved ($p < 0.01$) the participants' knowledge of rips, beach flags, and safety signage warnings. Additionally, participants started pointing out a wide range of characteristics when describing rip currents. Although some deterioration of knowledge was detected four weeks later, the improvement was still significant across all topics.

So what?: This scientifically proven material should be shared with migrants to improve beach safety knowledge. Future studies are planned to enhance the effectiveness with an additional writing exercise and to make adjustments for beginner levels.

Bio:

Dr. Masaki Shibata teaches Japanese language and researches in the areas of beach safety and linguistics. He is also a volunteer lifesaver at Tamarama Surf Life Saving Club, Sydney. Based on his expertise in linguistics and lifesaving experience, his work explores how multicultural communities interpret warning messages of Australian beach safety signage. To challenge the issues found in his study, Dr. Shibata, in collaboration with Surf Life Saving Australia, is working on developing science-based beach safety educational material for multicultural communities.