

Aviation English Requirement Implementation in the Republic of Korea

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Background

Aviation language proficiency requirement is important to the Republic of Korea which is the 8th largest air transportation country in the world. Ensuring that around 3,000 pilots, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators who work within airspace where English proficiency is essential for effective communication are properly qualified to meet ICAO language proficiency requirement is one of the issues on which Civil Aviation Safety Authority of the Republic of Korea is focusing in these days. Airlines and government authority have been working together to find out the best practice to implement this language requirements in a time and cost effective way. As a result of studying and discussion, the Republic of Korea has introduced the English Proficiency Test of Aviation on October 27, 2007.

Aviation English policy in the Republic of Korea

To meet ICAO Aviation English requirements defined at Annex 1,6,10,11 and etc., the Republic of Korea has amended Aviation Act and its decrees and issued a new notice in order to describe detailed methods and procedures to implement the requirements in an effective and efficient way. By these regulations, properly qualified test providers which meet specific conditions described at the new notice were mandated to conduct the English Proficiency Test of Aviation (EPTA) by Civil Aviation Safety Authority. The regulations waive pilots who have been working at airlines at the time of implementation. Their English proficiency certificate is effective for 3 years (level 4) or 6 years (level5) from the date it has issued in order that they are continuously able to conduct international flights. Moreover, for the pilots and controllers who achieved level 4 and higher at EPTA, the regulations enable the effective date of their validation to defer till March 5, 2008.

< Table 1. Number of aeronautical personnel as of March 31, 2007 >

	Pilots	Air Traffic Controller	Aeronautical Station Operator
Total number	2,960	320	20
Proficiency Required for Int'l Operation	2,800	250	7

Outline of English Proficiency Test of Aviation

The EPTA which seeks proficiency balance between aviation English and plain English requires listening and speaking ability sufficient for pilots and air traffic controllers to response to unexpected turns of event. Test developers which are willing to be designated as an official test provider are required to submit 20 sets of 25 questions for both pilot group and air traffic controller group. Once a test developer designated as a test provider, the submitted sets of questions are posted up on the internet and opened to the public. The applicants can review the question bank and prepare for his/her future test. To meet ICAO's intent of language proficiency requirements which were aimed at ensuring that personnel could responsible to an unplanned, non-routine situation, questions are randomly selected from the question bank. Currently, there are two designated test providers in the Republic of Korea, and pilots and controllers are checked their proficiency through 25 questions picked up from 1,000. Taking applicants' convenience into consideration, the EPTA is available in a form of the periodic test as well as the on-the-request test. As a method to be fair and objective, tape-recorded applicants answers are reviewed by three different raters individually, and any pilot or controller who does not agree with his level can appeal to the test provider.

< Table 2. Contents of EPTA >

	Title	Task No.	Contents	No. of Question	Time Allocation
Semi-direct	Introduction	Task 1	Giving personal information	3	2 min
	Read Message	Task 2	Read radiotelephony message	5	2 min
	Situation Description	Task 3	State own idea about a situation	2	3 min
		Task 4	Answer to questions about a conversation	2	4 min
		Task 5	Create a story from illustration	1	3 min
	Emergency Response	Task 6	Response to a communication problem	2	2 min
		Task 7	Response to an emergency	2	5 min
		Task 8	Handle system malfunction	1	3 min
	Express an Opinion	Task 9	Express opinion	1	2 min
		Task 10	Express opinion	1	2 min
Direct	Interview			5	5-10 min
	Total number of question and time			25	35-40min

Support for pilots and air traffic controllers

By new regulations, KCASA requires air traffic service provider and air operators to provide their employees of aviation English training program. Two major airlines, Korean Air and Asiana Airlines, and air traffic service provider are running own aviation English training programs by which their pilots and controllers who failed to achieve level 4 can have opportunity to be trained focusing on the specific fields at which they have scored lower level such as structure, pronunciation and interaction. Beside of training, on the purpose of encouraging more pilots and controllers to apply for the EPTA earlier, application fee is provided by airlines and air traffic service provider as a financial support. In the mean while, airlines and air traffic service providers require job applicants to submit an aviation English proficiency certificate which shows level 4 or higher.

Challenges and difficulties

Currently, in the republic of Korea, around 3,000 pilots and 300 controllers are working at their special field, and for international operation, almost 92% of them must achieve level 4. As of March 31, 2007, only 960 pilots applied to the EPTA and 77% of test takers succeeded in achieving level 4 and higher. Both airlines and pilots are discouraged by the low passing rate, and pilots avoid or delay application because they are afraid of failing to pass the test. Although, thanks to the intensive training and pilots' better understanding about the EPTA, the passing rate has recently been increased up to 90%, still almost 70% of pilot seat back and expect waiver which they believe they deserve. The pilot union is not friendly with aviation English policy, and media likes to talk about the passing rate. On the other hands, most of air traffic controllers, which are government employees, have applied to the EPTA. Passing rate of controllers was around 40%. For recovery, air traffic service provider has trained the level 3 controllers, which are almost 80% of dropout, through the intensive courses since February 2007. To meet the ICAO applicability date of the new language proficiency requirements, the Republic of Korea has the responsibility to ensure that 70% of pilots and 60% air traffic controllers to be trained and timely qualified within the next 10 months. To do this, specialists with knowledge and skills in the field of aviation English testing and training needs to be allocated to airlines, air traffic service providers and government authority, so that they can work as a team devoted to implementing the requirements.

Future plan

The Republic of Korea is willing to ensure that at least 90% of pilots and air traffic controllers achieve level 4 or higher by the end of this year. To accomplish this goal, KCASA will monitor airlines and air traffic service provider to ensure that they provide pilots and controllers of training program which satisfies ICAO language requirements. After March 5 2008, a taskforce team will be organized to review current question bank and upgrade it by reflecting suggestions filed by pilots and air traffic controllers in order to increase degree of customer's satisfaction. Moreover, by end of next year, the EPTA will be

transformed into a complete computer based test format, so that the test takers can enjoy the user friendly test environment such as checking his/her level immediately at the end of test.

Suggestion

The Republic of Korea has implemented the ICAO language requirements competitively earlier. As a country which does not use English either native language or second language, it seems more difficult and complex to be agreed among pilots and air traffic controllers on the necessity of demonstrating level of individual English proficiency by specific date. Specially, under the circumstances which allow high degree of flexibility to contracting State allowing different kinds of type in implementing this requirement, it could bring confusion and misunderstood. To facilitate implementation of the ICAO language requirements in a way ICAO originally intended to, a guideline which suggests an ideal model of the test and the training with the scope of responsibility of each stake holder, such as, government authority, airlines, test provider and training provider needs to be provided.