



Kourosh Akef
Karim Hajhashemi

Validation of High School Tests

Teaching Syllabus vs. Testing Procedures



LAMBERT
Academic Publishing

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To my parents
and
To my Best Half
Daryoush

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Kouros Akef

PREFACE

Any improvement and change in teaching system should reflect its effects on testing procedures. In other words, if one expects to gain the ultimate advantage of newly developed materials, he or she will need an appropriate device for evaluation, that is, a proper testing procedure which matches this teaching material.

The present book aim to highlight one important issue before any high school teacher's eyes: it is necessary to understand the purpose of testing in high schools. What is the role of high school tests? Should they be considered as real tests? Or can they be perhaps best regarded as a ceremony, a cathartic ritual to be undergone alone with other examinations of this type before holiday?

A real testing procedure is invariably associated with the making of decisions. Only by using a careful and sophisticated testing device one can lead to appropriate decision making. Appreciation of the close link between testing and decision-making enables the test user or writer to approach the task of evaluating a group of learners more conveniently and to save considerable time and expense. In this case, the test user or writer can also prevent the loss of motivation and interest among the high school learners.

We hope that book may lead teachers to focus more on testing procedures as a complementary step in language learning and teaching. This will help them to see that everyone has areas of strength and areas of challenge, and that it is worthwhile to use every opportunity, even the testing sessions, for improving the learners achievements in language proficiency.

Kourosh Akef
Karim Hajhashemi

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Purpose

Testing is an important part of every teaching and learning experience. It also holds close relationship with teaching procedures. That is, any kind of teaching activity requires certain type of testing procedures to measure and evaluate the out-coming results of the teaching system.

Language testing is not an exception. In fact, it is a more complex subject, since several factors, such as objectives of testing, content of tests, individual variations in test takers, among many other factors have to be taken into consideration. The objectives of testing are not always the same. Some tests, for instance, have a predictive function (Prognostic tests). Where as other type of tests serve to establish what exactly a learner has learned in a given teaching context. The context of tests can be quite complex and diverse depending on the teaching material and the purpose for which the test is designed. The individuals taking the tests also exhibit different characteristics according to their needs and motives, which influence their performance on the tests. And the last but not the least, the decision making about the individuals based on the test results is of extreme importance. Why a test is used, what is tested, who is tested and when a test is set are questions, which determine the actual testing

procedures and may lead to different requirements regarding the quality of the test.

When tests are designed to evaluate what the learners have learned at the end of a course, the teaching material and methodology play a more significant role, and naturally influence the testing procedures. That's why the history of language testing has witnessed many changes from the traditional approach to psychometric-structuralist approach and then to psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic approach and so on (Spolsky, 1978). All these changes have occurred to accommodate testing with teaching procedure.

Language teaching in Iranian high schools for long had been geared to Grammar Translation methodology which dictated a subjective kind of testing mainly based on grammar with its cliché-like pattern. What Iranian students learned with such a testing procedure was to look for 'grammatical cues' in test items. Recognizing these cues was enough to help students provide correct answers for test items without further consideration of meaning. It was enough for a student to recognize 'for' or 'since' in a sentence to use the present perfect tense. This made the students overlook the meaning and only stick to some grammatical clues to answer the test items. In recent years, the high school textbooks have been revised and undergone some useful changes to the effect that

Grammar Translation is gradually being replaced by a more communicative and pragmatic methodology.

This change, however, is not that much observable in high school language tests. Although the recent tests are more appropriate in terms of scoring convenience and objectivity, they do not seem to be completely adaptable with the newly developed materials. The present test format requires the students to be looking for grammatical cues rather than meaning. This automatically decreases the efficiency of teaching material. And this is because these inappropriate tests make the teachers to focus mostly on the students' preparation for the final exam. Consequently, regardless of how well a teaching material is prepared, it will be influenced negatively by an undesirable testing procedure. On the other hand, by modifying the testing procedures, it is possible to take the full advantage of the newly developed materials and syllabuses.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Regarding the above-mentioned issues, this study aims to take a closer look on testing procedure in Iranian high school. The purpose of this study is to examine how far the functions and purposes of high school tests in final examinations are in conformity with the syllabus prepared for second year English teaching in Iran. That is, the aim is to determine

the content validity and reliability of these tests through a retrospective and descriptive study. The following steps will be taken in this study.

1. Collecting samples from the final tests administered in previous years.
2. Describing the type of test, and categorizing its items according to the points which they are supposed to measure.
3. Preparing a table of specializations which represents the general format of the tests and their items.
4. Comparing this table of specializations with the content of the text book to see which points are and which points are not included in the tests.
5. Proposing a new test format based on the results.
6. Comparing the statistical results and calculating correlation coefficient between the new suggested test and an ordinary high school test.

1.3 Hypotheses

The present study aims to examine how far the high school language tests are in accordance with the newly revised materials for teaching English in high schools. The following null hypotheses are proposed.

1. Language testing procedures in high school are not in conformity with the objectives of the newly developed second year English textbook.

2. There is no significance correlation between the test suggested in this study and one of the ordinary high school achievement tests prepared for the first term examination.

1.4 Delimitations

This study considers only the language tests prepared for final examinations of the second grade of high school administered in June 1993. Ten test samples were randomly selected from among the twenty set of English high school tests prepared by the English Department of the Ministry of Education. Three classes of high school male students of the second grade were also chosen for comparison. This study compared the scores of these students on the first term examination with their scores on the suggested test. This study, therefore, only focuses on the written examination in high schools.