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TEACHER-MADE TEST AS A PREDICTOR OF SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE RESULT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Mrs. Erne U. Joseph & Mrs. Alice E. Udosen
Faculty of Education, University of Uyo

Abstract

Teacher-made tests occupy a very important place in the continuous assessment process. Results from these help in the evaluation of the achievement of set objectives. This study compared students performance in teacher made tests and Senior School Certificate Examination in English language to assess the strength of the former to predict the latter. The finding indicates a positive correlation between the two and suggests that when well developed, administered and scored, teacher made tests can fairly predict students' performance in the SSCE. However, TMTs should be accorded the importance they deserve when developed and administered.

Introduction

English language has assumed a number one position among the numerous indigenous and foreign languages in Nigeria. It is especially important as it is used extensively in modern science and technology. The government recognises the role played by English language and has taken positive steps to promote its development by setting up a national language centre whose objectives among others include: to develop and encourage the development of materials for both English and the various Nigerian languages.

Section 15(4) of the National Policy on Education (1981), provides that although children are required to learn their own native language in addition to English language, English should be used as the sole medium of instruction from the senior primary school through secondary and to the tertiary levels of education. As a result of this, an individual is often considered an academic failure if he cannot express himself well in English. Even these cries about the fallen standard of education are based partly on the fact that most school leavers have not acquired enough communicative competence to function well in their socio-cultural environment.

In spite of the need for efficiency in the language, the yearly performance of our students continues to decline resulting in many students not being admitted into our tertiary institutions of learning for further studies. This alarming situation has generated fears among parents and the government. To curb this problem(s), the various agencies have evolved measures to help improve students performances in the subject. The Government on its part has organised workshops and seminars to improve teachers' efficiency. During these training sessions, emphases have been laid on improved teaching methods, teacher-student interactions, evaluation techniques and test construction procedures.

Teacher-made tests (TMT) occupy a very important position in the educational system. In order to establish the extent to which learning has taken place, the teacher develops achievement tests. These among other things, help to evaluate the level to which educational objectives have been achieved. Test results also provide data for evaluating teacher's performance as well as help in providing information for decision making (Ogbazi, 1988). Despite the continuous use of tests among students, most students are not favourably disposed to it. However, Denga (1988) asserts that testing is a necessary part of the educational system, thus even if it is considered evil, it is "an evil that must be tolerated".

The importance attached to teacher-made tests have been further reinforced by the provision of the National Policy on

Education (1981) which states that the "educational assessment and evaluation will be liberalised by basing them in the progress of the individual". The importance of the teacher-made test (TMT) is further heightened by the fact that it constitutes 40% of the score of the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) result.

Despite the high premium placed on TMT some researchers like Odor, Solanke and Azeke (1986); Kissock and Iyortsun (1982) and Ogunbayo (1984) who have analysed the cognitive levels of questions included in TMT, have come to the conclusion that most test questions make use of questions at Bloom's lowest level of cognitive domain. Furthermore, TMT have been observed to fail to reflect teachers' instructional objectives and the teachers also tend to incline towards the inclusion of trivial items. With all these sub-standard characteristics, one wonders the possibility of the TMT being a good indicator of external examinations.

Therefore, to establish the predictive value or otherwise of the TMT, the researchers conducted a comparative study of students' performance in the TMT and SSCE. To guide the study, a hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the performance of students in TMTs and SSCE was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. This by inference suggests another null hypothesis that student TMT score can not significantly predict students performance in SSCE in English Language.

Research methodology

Sample: Using the stratified random sampling method, 600 students from six secondary schools made up the sample for the research. Only 526 students participated in the study. These were the only subjects whose results in TMTs and SSCE were available. Of the 526 students that participated in the study, 346 (65.4%) were female while 180 were males. Furthermore, 330 (60.2%) were in urban areas while 196 (39.8%) were in rural schools.

Instrument: The instrument used in the study were the 1996/97 SSCE results and the results of the teacher-made test for the 1996/97 first terminal examination. The first term's result was used instead of the second term's result because the second term's examination was a mock examination conducted by the State Ministry of Education. These results were collected from the school Principals with the help of the English Language teacher. Since the SSCE results are normally given in letter grades while the scores of the TMT are at times given in percentages; the researchers had to convert

the TMTs scores to letter grade to make it uniform with the SSCE for easy correlation. Scores grouping and their corresponding SSCE letter grades used by West African Examination Council are shown below.

Table 1: Conversion table of percentage scores to letter grades

Range of Scores in %	Equivalent letter grades
76-100	A1
71-75	A2
66-70	A3
61-65	C4
56-60	C5
50-55	C6
46-49	P7
40-45	P8
1-39	F9

Source: West African Examinations council (1996).

Procedure for Data Analysis

To establish the relationship, if any between the two grades, the correlation coefficient for the two sets of grades was calculated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation formula. Prediction is known to be an inferential application of correlation analysis, thus, to predict the SSCE performance of the students based on their TMT grades, the researchers conducted a regression analysis (beta weight) to ascertain the strength of predictions. Furthermore, to establish the amount of error involved in the prediction the standard error of estimate (Sesty) was calculated

Results: Below is the results based on the data gathered.

Table 2: The correlation, regression coefficient and standard error estimate of X(TMT) And Y (SSCE) for sampled schools.

School	N	\bar{x}	S_x	\bar{y}	S_y	R	B	Sesty
A	110	8	1.79	9	1.02	0.73	0.44	0.48
B	35	6	2.56	9	0.53	0.27	0.06	0.49
C	51	6	2.13	9	0	0	0	0
D	126	8	1.64	8	0.88	0.50	0.27	0.66
E	121	7	1.69	9	0.92	0.32	0.17	0.83
F	83	8	1.09	9	0.36	0.57	0.16	0.29

Except for schools B ($r=0.27$); C ($r=0.32$) with relatively low correlation coefficients. Schools A ($r=0.73$), D ($r=0.50$) and F ($r=0.57$) show a good correlation in the grades of TMTs and SSCE. On the basis of the significant values of b in the six schools (at 0.05 level of significance), students' SSCE grades can be predicted using their TMTs grades. Based on the above finding therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between the grades stand rejected. The researchers also reject the null hypothesis of no significant predictive power of TMTs over SSCE performance. Despite this, caution must be exercised in the prediction for schools D and E as their standard error of estimate is high (Sesty 0.66 and 0.83 respectively).

Table 3: Correlation, Regression coefficient and standard error of estimate of X (TMTs) and Y (SSCE) for all the students

x	y	s_x	s_y	r	b	Sesty
7	9	1.9	0.82	0.40	0.17	0.75

When the data for the students are pulled together, a moderate correlation of 0.40 between the two sets of grades was observed. The strength of prediction ($b=0.17$) was ascertained to be

significant for all the students at 0.05 level of significance. But worthy of note is the high error of estimate of 0.75 which calls for caution during prediction.

Discussion

Results on Table 2 show that there is a high correlation between TMTs and SSCE grade in school A ($r=0.73$). For school D and F there is a moderate relationship between the two sets of grades, that is, 0.50 and 0.57 respectively. But the correlation coefficient for schools B and E are quite low 0.27 and 0.32 respectively. On the whole, school C records a no relationship situation between the two variables under study

The regression coefficient (b) for all the schools have been found to be significant at 0.05. This implies strength of prediction of TMTs for SSCE for each school, thus the rejection of the null hypothesis. The significance of the strength of prediction obtained for schools ABC and F is further enhanced by their relatively low standard error of estimate (Sesty). This portrays that TMTs results could be used to reasonably predict the students grade in the SSCE results.

Even though it has been established that TMTs scores can be used to predict students performance in SSCE English Language in all the schools, the high standard error of estimate (0.75) in Table 3 calls for attention.

The researchers observed the need for caution during prediction as this high Sesty (0.75) indicates a possibility of prediction error. This high prediction error may be traced to factors like lack of coverage of some areas of the curriculum (Ansa, 1992).

It is often the case that teachers do not cover adequate areas of the syllabus before the end of the school year. But, while testing the students, concentration is usually on the areas taught, whereas, the SSCE examines on all aspects of the syllabus. Thus even though the students' TMTs result could be used to predict their results in SSCE, this inadequate coverage limits the strength and scope of the prediction.

Another possible factor which could be responsible for the high standard error of estimate in the disparity is the nature of tests and the scoring scheme for the two examinations. Due to lack of or inadequacy of stationeries, objective type tests are not usually set by teachers during the students' terminal examinations. Infact, some students may be seeing some aspects of English language objective tests for the first time in the SSCE examination halls. English Language teachers mainly test the students on comprehension, letter writing, and essay writing at the expense and sometimes to the neglect of the objective type questions. This lop-sided test pattern may be responsible for the disparity which allows room for prediction error.

Although TMTs have been ascertained as a predictor of SSCE grades, the high Sesty can also be attributed to the inclusion of trivial and low level cognitive questions in the TMTs. This has been confirmed by Ogunbayo (1984).

Teacher made tests scripts are often scored without the use of a standard marking scheme. However the need for a marking scheme for a testing procedure cannot be over emphasised (Ipaye, 1982). This lack of marking scheme introduces some error in the scoring system which may also account for the disparity in the assessment of the two examinations. This scoring pattern contradicts the well developed and controlled system of scoring used by West African Examination Council (WAEC) during SSCE marking sessions. Here the markers are exposed to a period of

preparation on the mode of marking using a prepared marking scheme. Other checks and balances are also employed such as, the vetting of marked scripts by team leaders and checkers to minimise error and subjectivity in scoring.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to ascertain the extent teacher-made test in English language can predict students' performance in public examinations. Specifically, Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE). It was found that, students who perform well or poorly in teacher-made tests were more likely to perform similarly in SSCE examinations in the same subject. This finding suggests that TMT can be used to fairly predict Students' performance in external examination, provided such tests were properly planned, developed and administered. The challenge therefore is that TMT sometimes not accorded enough importance, should be taken more seriously by teachers. Without such seriousness, however, the continuous assessment process on which much emphases has been laid, would have lost its usefulness since it is essentially the product of TMTs.

Recommendations

Teacher made tests are unavoidable tools that are as important as lesson notes for teachers to be very successful in the continuous assessment of their students. These tests need to be prepared with utmost care and diligence. Although many teachers may have been trained and exposed to the same rudiments of test development and administration, they still require occasional refresher courses and seminars at which they can exchange notes, update their experiences and develop new skills. This is a challenge to consultants, research institutions and Universities who should be mounting these courses and seminars to which school proprietors should as a matter of course, sponsor teachers, to attend. Attendance at such workshops should even be considered as a precondition for the advancement of teachers to higher ranks or appointments unto higher positions.

Teachers on their part need to be painstaking in their jobs, especially in designing and administering tests. There is no gainsaying that good tests development starts at the time

lessons are prepared and the methods by which they are presented. Teachers require conducive atmosphere to do these successfully. Such atmosphere should therefore be presented through adequate, prompt and regular remunerations and incentives that would motivate them to put in their optimum. This way, they can always settle down to plan, organise and administer tests that do not only cover the syllabus in scope, but whose results can be used to fairly and reliably predict students performance at other external examinations. When results of teacher-made tests can reliably predict performance in subsequent public examinations, it would then be possible to avoid failures by ensuring that problem areas are attended to before the students write the external examination. Learning the subject will not only be the purpose of passing examination, but also for being proficient in it.

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