

Construction and Standardisation of an English Language Proficiency Test for Upper Primary School Grades in Kenya

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the standardization of a locally constructed English language proficiency test battery, and the establishment of norms for Upper primary school grades five, six and seven. The standardization process includes determining the test battery's reliability and validity, through statistical computations for empirical evidence. While accomplishing this task, thesis examined the cumulative effect of language proficiency, through the mastery of functional language skills, as outlined in the objectives of the English course, in the 8-4-4 curriculum. The thesis is based on the claim that language proficiency is gained progressively, as one advances from one grade into another. Related topics concerning the teaching and learning of English, and its role as a medium of educational instruction have been discussed. Some major approaches in the field of language testing were highlighted as a justification of the model adopted for the battery format. The subjects for the study were drawn from 34 schools which were selected through random sampling. These schools were situated in 12 districts that were located in seven provinces. Finally, the test battery was administered to 3,054 pupils all over the country. A pilot study was first conducted in both rural and urban schools. The findings from this study were used for compiling the final test battery, which is the central focus of the standardization process. Apart from the research assistants which were used during the administration of the test, English language class teachers were also used for various tasks. The data for the study was obtained through the use of the pupil's proficiency test battery booklet, an examiner's test manual, an opinion sheet for the language teachers of grades five, six and seven and general observation by the researcher. After obtaining the raw data, it was organized in tables of frequencies and averages for statistical analysis. This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one, discusses the problem statement, the rationale, the objectives, the scope and the assumption for the study. Chapter Two, reviews literature under two sub-headings: (i) Literature related to the problem statement, and (ii) Methodological propositions related to English language testing. Chapter Three, discusses the methodology and the design of the study. Chapter Four, discusses the presentation and analysis of the data, with highlights on the research findings. Chapter Five, gives the conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for further research. It is hoped that the findings of this study, will be invaluable in the field of English language testing at the primary school level, in the Kenyan situation. Since the test battery is locally constructed with a bias towards the 8-4-4 English language course objectives, its role as a reliable and valid tool for measuring language proficiency may be instrumental in motivating new interest among teachers and other educators, to seriously consider studying testing methods, and to seek ways of improving them. And, the norms which have been established may be of some assistance in giving teachers and their pupils a yardstick towards which their efforts can be directed. The findings also may motivate language teachers to discover the loopholes in the language teaching and learning processes, which contribute to poor performance at the K.C.P.E. examination level, as is publicly claimed and attempt to rectify them.

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