The Principles of Good Test administration

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ABSTRACT

One of the most useful instruments in language teaching and learning is test. Tests are important based on two general contexts: a) in education and b) in research. In education, it can be as sources of information for making decisions within the context of educational programs; and in research, it can be as indicators of abilities or attributes that are of interest in research on language, language acquisition, language teaching. In the present study, one important side of language testing is administration of testing and in this study, the theoretical background of this concept was taken into account.

KEYWORDS:Testing, administration, Test administration

INTRODUCTION

One of the most useful instrument in language teaching and learning is test. According to Rawson and Dunlosky (2011), tests are important based on two general contexts: a) in education and b) in research. In education, it can be as sources of information for making decisions within the context of educational programs; and in research, it can be as indicators of abilities or attributes that are of interest in research on language, language acquisition, language teaching. In educational programs, the use of tests are based on three assumptions: a) Information regarding educational outcomes is necessary to effective formal education: accountability and feedback are essential mechanisms for the continued effectiveness of any educational program; b) It is probable to improve learning and teaching through appropriate changes in the program; and c) The educational outcomes of the given program are measurable. These assumptions indicate that language tests are important in the process of language teaching and learning.

It is true that the best test may give invalid and unreliable outcomes if it is not well administered. Therefore, test administrating is a crucial process in language testing. In other words, when administering a test, teachers should give learners an opportunity to carry out well. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), "test administration procedures are developed for an exam program in order to help reduce measurement error and to increase the likelihood of fair, valid, and reliable assessment" (p. 231).

TEST ADMINISTRATION

In the 1980s, language investigators and scholars preferred more to develop high quality tests for practical objectives (Bachman & Palmer 1996, 2010; Bachman 1990). According to Saville (2012), test development is observed as a process including a number of logical stages. These stages initiate with test design and item writing and then move through the administration and reporting the outcomes. The final step of this assessment cycle is the evaluation step. Test administration is necessary for all types of tests, and it should not be considered that this procedure should be carried out for a number of tests. According to Fulcher and Davidson (2007), when the process of test administration is elaborated in the testing related texts, the only concern is delivery system which is usually associated with test taking processes or the physical environment (Bachman 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996). According to Hughes (1989), test administration is a variety of procedures for giving a test to an individual or a group of persons and also for gathering empirical information in order to assess the qualities of test usefulness and make inferences about test takers' abilities.

Based on Fulcher's (2010) view, getting a right test administration involves two issues as: a) the first is replicating the meticulous conditions that the test designers set out in the delivery specifications. These are the conditions under which the test was originally piloted and field tested; b) the second issue is ensuring that these conditions are replicated for all test takers, so that no one experiences taking the test in a condition that provides either advantages or disadvantages.

For administering better the test, controlling the extraneous irrelevant variables (Fulcher, 2010). These variables can be considered as simply any factors that affect test scores which are not related to what the test is intended to measure. According to the Carroll's view about the extraneous variables (1961), in some ways, a good test is like an experiment, in the sense that it has to eliminate or at least keep constant all extraneous sources of variation. We want our tests to reflect only the specific type of variation in knowledge or skill that we are interested in at the moment (p. 319, cited in Fulcher, 2010, p. 254).

In administrating test, eliminating cannot be carried out whole extraneous sources of variation, because it is not simple to control all variables (Fulcher, 2010). Instead of this procedure, it is helpful to keep them constant. This increases the chances for test takers to carry out to the best of their abilities, and minimizes the opportunities for distraction or cheating.

PRINCIPLES OF TEST ADMINISTRATION

One of the most prominent tenets in administering any classroom test is that all testees should be given an equal opportunity to indicate their attainment of the learning results planned or intended. This indicates psychological and physical environment in which the test is occurring must be helpful for the testee to accelerate the achievement of the testing results. Also, the factors that might interfere with validity of the measurement have to be monitored. Although, the evidence regarding the impacts of environmental and physical circumstances on performance of examination is encouraging, testees should be as calm as possible and distractions should be minimized or removed. While distractions during testing are known to have little impact on the learners' scores, they may have serious impact on particularly young children (Gronlund & Linn, 1990; Mehrens & Lehmann, 1999).

Another tenet is learners owning positive attitudes towards an examination. People are possibly to carry out better at any attempt, involving test taking, when they approach the experience with a positive attitude. Unluckily, constantly teachers fail to assist learners to develop positive attitudes toward examinations. Learners are not probably to carry out at their best when they are excessively tense. Therefore, the experience of test anxiety among some learners (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1999; Linn & Miller, 2005).

It is imperative that administrators of test are qualified enough and trusted persons. This is to ensure that tests are properly managed to obtain valid and reliable results. Test administrators require to have the chance to acquire their accountabilities as a prerequisite to accurate examination out comes (Gronlund & Linn, 1990). Also, it should be mentioned that a well-designed and prepared test is simple to administer, and the reverse is true with a poorly prepared examination. Equally, it is significant to understand that a successful examination administration exercise is a product of test planning. According to Mehrens & Lehmann (1999), Cheating is most likely to occur in a poorly planned test, thus, proving a challenge to test administration. However, a good test administration irrespective of the test preparation is paramount.

GOOD TEST ADMINISTRATION

The practices of well testing rest in the hands of the examiner, who should make certain the practice of testing, performs smoothly. Three stages should be performed like as: The period before the test, during the test and after the test should be efficiently controlled to realize a highly efficient testing period. In the next section, these three phases will be taken into account.

PERIOD BEFORE THE TEST

Security of testing instruments: All test materials used in the assessment process, whether paper-and-pencil or computer-based must be kept secure. This feature may result in some test takers having access to test questions before the test, therefore, including the quality, and invalidating their scores. To avoid irregularities and disorganization, administrators of tests should, for instance, keep testing materials in locked rooms or cabinets and limit access to those materials to staff included in the process of assessment. Also, the security of test is an accountability of test developers to make sure the test is not compromised over time. For maintaining their security, developers of test should introduce new forms of tests periodically (Gronlund & Linn, 1990). Based on security of tests, testing authorities should attempt to open cartons including the materials of test and inspect the contents to specify and verify that proper test levels and quantities have been received. After testing materials inspection, they should be securely kept since examination monitors may during unannounced visits inspect these materials to make certain the seals have not been tampered with before the due date (Gronlund & Linn, 1990). After securing a sufficient number of tests, the following considerations should be part of prior preparation checklist: a) examinees and parents have been notified regarding the test date and time. b) candidates have been reminded to bring materials necessary for the test. c) all students with special needs (e.g. glasses and hearing aids) have been considered before

the start of the test. d) all adequate invigilation has been planned. e) examination administrators have read appropriate test administration procedures such as timing, examination regulations and test modifications. f) the rooms where the test is to be conducted have adequate ventilation and lighting and have been properly arranged. g) Seats are arranged in such a way that candidates cannot look at each other's work. h) candidates have been thoroughly prepared for the examination by suggesting to them ways of studying, giving them practice tests like those to be used, teaching them test-taking skills and stressing the value of tests as for improving learning (Gronlund & Linn, 1990; National College Testing Association, 2010). i) When all is set for the exam, secure the room, including the writing "Testing in Progress, Do not Enter ."

PERIOD DURING THE TEST

The appropriate way for preparing examinations may not produce the desired results if the conditions during the test are mishandled. According to Gronlund and Linn (1990), it is the important duty of the test administrators or institutions to make sure that circumstances during testing make sure successful testing. There are some guidelines that require to be viewed to make sure needed circumstances for successful testing are performed:

   • Observe carefully in giving instructions or clarifications. When an examiner announces that there will be "a full three hours" to complete the test and then talks for the first fifteen minutes, testees sense that they are being unfairly deprived of testing time. Furthermore, just before a test there is no time to make assignments, admonish the class, or introduce the next topic. On the other hand, testees are mentally set for the test and will neglect anything not pertaining to the test for fear it will hinder their recall of information required to reply the questions. Thus, the well intentioned remarks fall on "deaf ears" and merely increase anxiety toward the test and create hostility toward the teacher.

   • Avoid interruptions. At times, an examinee will ask to have an ambiguous item explained, and it may be effective to elaborate the item to the entire group at the same time. All other distractions outside and inside the examination room should be eliminated, where possible. The challenge, however, is that more often than not, the distractions are beyond the test administrators' reach!

   • Avoid giving hints to students who ask about individual items. If the item is ambiguous, it should be clarified for the entire group. If it is not ambiguous, refrain from assisting the pupil to answer it. The challenge is that at times, refraining from giving hints to examinees who request help may be difficult especially for new comers in the field of testing. Nevertheless, giving unfair aid to some learners reduces the validity of the test outcomes and lowers class morale.

   • Discourage cheating. When there is good teacher-learner relationship and learners view tests as effective rather than harmful, cheating is usually not a problem. Based on other circumstances, although, it might be essential to discourage cheating by particular seating arrangements and precise supervision. Candidates receiving unauthorized assistance from other examinees during an examination have the same deleterious impact on validity of test outcomes and class morale as does receiving particular suggestions from the teacher. We are interested in pupils doing their best; but for valid outcomes, their scores must be depended upon their own unaided attempts.

   Careful proctoring of the testing session, such as, periodically walking around the room and observing how the learners are carrying out is also of paramount importance in avoiding cheating. The obstacle is that many teachers define proctoring as "being present in the examination room" (Gronlund & Linn, 1990, p. 52). Consequently, they become physically present but spend their time reading a novel, writing a letter or marking and scoring prior tests. The best way to proctor an examination is to view learners doing the test and not being preoccupied at one's desk (Gronlund & Linn, 1990; Mehrens & Lehmann, 1999). Another way of discouraging cheating is discouraging learners from applying any form of communication tools, either in the room where the test is being administered or while on a supervised break, like as a bathroom visit. It would be better if students are reminded earlier that they may not use any devices including but not limited to cellular telephones, pagers, audiocassette players, radios, personal digital assistants, video devices, associated headphones, headsets, microphones, or earplugs while taking an examination.

   • Make sure that no eating happens in the examination hall. Learners should not be permitted to bring any food items in the examination room, unless it is on proven medical grounds. Under such conditions, it is advisable that special arrangements are made in advance for goals of securing a designated area where the food items could be kept, to prevent distracting those who do not require the food items.

   • Specify each examinee to prevent a situation where someone may attempt to take the examination on someone else's behalf. Students should, therefore, be informed in advance to bring with them their identity cards and/or examination cards (Mbarara University of Science and Technology, MUST, 2008).

• Handle emergencies appropriately. If an examinee becomes ill during the examination, and must leave the examination hall, they should not be allowed to return. The test administrator is advised to make a comprehensive report about the candidate's situation to make it possible for authorities to consider a retest for such a candidate, to be scheduled for another time.

• Announce learners on progress of testing. It is the accountability of the test supervisor or invigilator to keep the students informed of the time remaining (e.g., writing the time left on the blackboard at 15-minute intervals (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1999).

PERIOD AFTER THE TEST

Orderliness is required for a successful testing process until all the test materials are securely in the hands of the test administrators. After completing the examination, the following are expected; a) all test materials and documents, both used and unused should be collected and accounted for. They may be kept in a secure and lockable facility. b) Count through candidates' scripts to ensure their number corresponds with the names on the examination attendance register. Counting also eliminates scenarios where the attendance register shows a student attended an examination but his or her script is not accessible.

CONCLUSION

Tests or examinations are among the elements of the teaching-learning process in any public school system. Established examination bodies have set regulations and procedures in the administration of the tests or examinations to individuals, whether in the classrooms or designated settings. Just as classroom environment is vital for teaching-learning and personal educational growth and development of the individual, so is participation in examinations. Therefore, during test administration process; a) All examinees should be accorded a fair chance through the provision of conducive physical and psychological environment. b) Candidates involved in the examination should develop positive attitudes, adhere to the rules, and therefore conduct themselves decently during the examination c) The teachers' roles must be recognized because they contribute to the success of examination or test administration. d) To realize a smooth test administration exercise, the period before, during and after the test should be carefully managed.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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