Validating the Kwassui English Placement Test Using the TOEIC IP

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[Abstract]

In 2007 the Kwassui English Placement Test was first used to place students into ability groups in the English department at Kwassui Women’s University. Since that first test, it has been used to place all students from all departments entering Kwassui into ability groups. In 2011 a listening component was added to the test for the English department students in order to help place the students more accurately. The original test was validated by comparing the students’ scores on the test with the CASEC test, and since then, items in the test have been changed or deleted, and new items added in order to improve the test’s reliability. After this year’s test, the students’ scores were also compared with their scores on the TOEIC IP. The object of this paper therefore, is to describe how the Kwassui English Placement Test was validated by using the TOEIC IP. The paper will begin with a description of the Kwassui English Placement Test, and then show the extent to which the test correlates with the TOEIC IP.

Introduction

The Kwassui English Placement Test was introduced into Kwassui in 2007 and has been used every year since to place all students entering Kwassui into ability groups. The test is administered to the students through the Quiz Module of the Moodle on-line management system. Since its introduction, as should be the case in any worthwhile testing programme, the Kwassui test and its items have been repeatedly analysed in order for its validity and reliability to be improved. When it was first introduced, the test was analysed to find its reliability and was also compared with the CASEC test in order to find its concurrent (criterion-related) validity (Gorringe, “The Design” 43-48). It was later
compared with the TOEIC IP test when a listening component was added to the test (Gorringe and Mazzarelli 15-20). Since the first administration of the test, its items have been analysed after each administration using both classical test theory and item response theory, and items have been changed, deleted and added in order to improve the test’s reliability (Gorringe, “Item Analysis” 19-24; Gorringe, “Using Item” 1-11). However, the test has not recently been compared with another established test to see whether the test still has concurrent (criterion-related) validity. This paper, therefore, will present the results of a comparison between the Kwassui English Placement Test and the TOEIC IP, and show the extent to which the Kwassui English Placement Test has concurrent validity with the TOEIC IP.

**The Original Kwassui English Placement Test**

The Kwassui English Placement Test in its original form had 100 multiple choice vocabulary items. The vocabulary used to create each item was taken from the 2000 most frequently used words found in the word lists in Paul Nation’s *Range* programme. Each item followed this basic model:

Smoking is a ____________ to your health.

a. bad  
b. dangerous  
c. risk  
d. unhealthy

The original test was found to have a reliability (KR-21) of 0.80. When compared with the students’ scores on the CASEC test using Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient, it was found that there was a moderate correlation of 0.64 (Gorringe, “The Design” 47). In 2010 a listening component consisting of 76 items was piloted and subsequently added to the test in 2011. The items were all gap filling items (listening cloze) using 3 different kinds of text — unscripted conversations, an interview and a monologue. This listening component was taken by 39 students and found to have a reliability (KR-21) of 0.83. Nineteen of the students also later took the TOEIC IP and, when the results of the listening section were correlated with the listening section of the placement test, it was found there was a correlation using Spearman’s Rank correlation coefficient of 0.56 (Gorringe and Mazzarelli 18).
The Kwassui English Placement Test Today

In its most recent iteration, the Kwassui English Placement Test has 2 parts — a 70 item multiple choice vocabulary test following the model in the original test described above, and a 50 item listening test, consisting of 45 items of gap filling items (listening cloze) using 4 texts – 3 unscripted conversations and an interview, and 5 multiple choice items using 1 text – a monologue. The listening section of the test is used only with those students entering the English department since time constraints prevent it being used with students from all departments. The test was last administered to all incoming students in April 2015. Using the statistics from the Moodle Quiz Module, the reliability of the vocabulary test (using all 278 students) was found to be (Cronbach’s Alpha) 0.93 and the listening test (26 English department students) was found to have a reliability of (Cronbach’s Alpha) 0.79.

The Kwassui English Placement Test and the TOEIC IP

The TOEIC IP consists of 2 distinct sections – a reading section and a listening section and when examinees are given their results, the results are divided into 3 parts: reading, listening and a combined total. The Kwassui English Placement Test, when used for English department students, can be divided in a similar way with a vocabulary (reading) section and a listening section, so a comparison was made between the 2 sections of the tests and the overall total scores. Of the 26 English department students who took the Kwassui English Placement Test in April 2015, 23 took the TOEIC IP Test which was held in May 2015. Using Spearman’s Rank correlation coefficient we get the following results:

- 2015 Kwassui Vocabulary vs TOEIC Reading 0.76
- 2015 Kwassui Vocabulary vs TOEIC Total 0.67
- 2015 Kwassui Listening vs TOEIC Listening 0.67
- 2015 Kwassui Listening vs TOEIC Total 0.77
- 2015 Kwassui Total vs TOEIC Total 0.79

From the results, it is clear the test, including both the vocabulary and listening tests, correlates favourably with the TOEIC IP test, and overall the Kwassui English Placement test has concurrent (criterion-related) validity with the TOEIC IP.
Conclusion

For the past 8 years the Kwassui English Placement test has been used successfully to place students into ability groups at Kwassui. The test is very reliable, and as can be seen above, the test also correlates favourably with the TOEIC IP test. Each year, the test is fully analysed, and items are either improved or deleted, and newer items added. In this way the test continues to evolve and improve, making it a very efficient and fair way to place students into ability groups at Kwassui.

References


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