The Relationship between Learners' Academic Self-Concept and the Consequential Validity of Quick Placement Test

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Abstract: *Quick Placement Test (QPT), designed by Oxford and Cambridge University, is claimed to be a valid and reliable test. However, its consequential validity is being questioned by many students. As the test was validated against the native speakers' norms for acceptability, the present study sought to investigate the relationship between non- native test takers' self-concept and the consequential validity of placement test. To this end, 297 female students from a language institute were chosen randomly. In order to assess their proficiency level, they were given a Quick placement test to be placed in the right levels in the institute. After assigning the applicants to their decided levels based on their placement scores, the participants started a three-month term program at the language institute. In the middle of term, the learners' self-concept was assessed via self-Description questionnaire-II (SDQ-II) adopted from Marsh (1999 in Marsh, Byrne, & Young). Finally, the consequential validity of Quick placement test (QPT) was examined by a consequential validity study form at the end of term. The result of Probit Regression showed no statistically significant relationship between learners' self-concept and the consequential validity of QPT. Admitting that little empirical research has been conducted on the consequential validity of placement tests, this study underscores the need for validating the argument, decision, and consequences made based on the QPT results.*

Key Words: *Academic Self-Concept, consequential validity, QPT.*

Introduction

In response to the growing need for a valid and accurate placement test to put the rapidly increasing number of people who are seeking to learn English as a foreign language in the right channel of education placement tests emerged. A commonly used placement test which is chosen by many language institutes to assess students' readiness and English abilities is the Quick Placement Test (QPT). Its popularity can be attributed to test qualities such as: being economical, easy to administer and easy to score. QPT has also been ethically tested; that is, no ethical offence exists in it. However, studies show that many of the English learners who are

placed in decided levels by this test are dissatisfied with the test results and its interpretations. In other words, the consequential validity of this test is questioned by many students.

Consequential validity is defined as the extent to which the uses and interpretations of a test will result in fair and positive social consequences for all stakeholders, including test takers (Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics, p.109). Despite this importance, however, very little attention has been devoted to this subject. The reason perhaps can be explained in terms of the convenience and practicality that QPT brings to placement process for course managers. QPT possess an easy system of level placement that makes it practical even for inexperienced practitioners.

Meantime students' motivation and achievement are closely linked to the issues of self. Self-concept as one of the oldest constructs in the social sciences (James, 1896) is widely acknowledged to play a central role in all educational programs (Denissen, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2007; Hattie, 1992; Marsh & Yeung, 1997; Pajares & Schunk, 2005). Self-concept is the image a person has of himself or herself which may affect the way learners evaluate appropriateness of the class they are placed in. Academic self-concept is formed by previous feedbacks and achievements that the learner has achieved before enrolling in any class. So his prior self - concept can be a determining fact in formation of his evaluation of the class.

The influencing power of academic self-concept in determining academic success and access has inspired the researchers of this study to examine the role of this construct in the consequential validity of QPT. To this end, 297 language learners of an institute were placed in English classes using QPT. Academic Self-Description Questionnaire-II was administered to measure learners' self-concept. At the end of the three month period term, learners were asked to answer the consequential validity questionnaires to evaluate QPT. The focus of this study is to find out the relationship between learners' academic self-concept and consequential validity of QPT test.

The literature review indicates that there has been almost no research on the relationship between self-concept and consequential validity of Quick Placement test.

Literature Review

Placement Tests

Placement test is an essential part of a language teaching process (Armstrong ,2000), because there is always a broad range of competences among students who enroll in English programs as a result of their differences in linguistic aptitude, ability, motivation and quality of instruction received. To make sure that these differences are taken into consideration, the entry level of all students should be recognized so that they may be placed in their appropriate classes.

To safeguard students' success, concerns arose regarding how valid and standardized placement tests are and how they would be used and interpreted and applied in colleges (Armstrong, 2000).

Leblanc and Painchaud (1985) tried to examine if self-assessment alone is enough as a placement instrument. They maintained student-centered classes imply the fact that students should be active in classes and contribute in learning process, as well as in testing as it is the other part of the learning process. Although informal assessment is not always valid, people use it to see if they are close to achieving their goals or not. McLeod (1997, as cited in Leblanc & Painchaud, 1985) claims good students usually underestimate themselves, because they are involved in process of learning and they are aware of the large body of knowledge that is remained to be learned. However, the others who have stopped learning overestimate themselves because of their narrow views of knowledge left to be covered (as cited in Leblanc& Painchaud, 1985).

There are also some other researchers who claim that self-assessments are useful instruments for placement. For instance, LeBlanc and Painchaud (1985) administered a 60-item self-assessment questionnaire with a proficiency test. They were given to 200 students of Ottawa University, a bilingual university for both English and French second language learners in their research. The results confirmed the hypothesis that self-assessment is an essential instrument for language learners' placement test.

Kane (2006, as cited in Scott-Clayton, 2012, p.4) states:" it is not the test that is validated and it is not test scores that are validated. It is the claim and decisions based on the test result that are validated". This reflects modern validation theory that emphasizes argument, decision, and consequences more than correspondence of test scores to outcomes.

Self-concept

Social comparison has an influential effect on students' self-concept. Learners compare themselves to their classmates and form a self-concept and this self-concept influences their academic achievements (William & Burden, 1997). Chastain (1988) proposed that the most influential learner variables are those related to learners' emotions, attitudes and personalities. He believes" the affective domain plays a larger role in developing second-language skills than does the cognitive because the emotions control the will to activate or to shut down the cognitive functions". Brown (1973) suggested successful cognitive or affective activity can't be done without self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of oneself and self-efficacy. Bandura (1997, as cited in Rahimi & Abedini, 2009, p.15) pointed out "our assessment of our own capabilities is basically responsible for the outcome we expect and for the knowledge and skills we seek and require. Wilson (2009) noted that perceived level of difficulty has a direct effect on students' self-concept. He mentions a study conducted in Connecticut University that showed the curriculum provided to academically talented students affected students' perception of their

ability and it also showed that there is a significant relationship between students' self-concept and future educational aspirations.

Defrain et al, Eccles et al, Gondiaetal, Stipek and Maciver, Zanobini and Usai, (2007, as cited in Wilson, 2009) claim self-concept changes over time. Children's academic self-concept decreases through their adolescence (especially girls). However, Guay, Marsh and Boivin (2003) state when children grow older their self-concept become more stable. Guay and his colleagues suggested learners' self-concept and academic achievement become related over time, while Defraine and colleagues claim that the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement decreases over time (as cited in Rosen, Glennie, Dalton, Lennon, & Bozik, 2010).

Consequential Validity

Messick (1995) suggested unitary construct validity. Its goal was to justify the use and interpretation of test, using collective of evidence. He identified 6 aspects of construct validity and the most controversial one was consequential validity. He defined it as "evidence and rationales for evaluating the intended and unintended consequences of score interpretation and use in both the short and long term" (as cited in Kwang-Lee Chu, 2012, P.1).

Messick's (1995) definition of validity included meaning and value as well as fact. In his definition of validity, he mentions some crucial points about validity such as test fairness, misuse of tests and consequential validity. With his definition the intentional and unintentional consequences of tests became crucial. He argued that misuse of a test causes adverse social consequences and raises social and political issues. Then the validity of test will be doubted. So validity of a test depends on the effects of a test on students, and society (as cited in Young-Ju Lee, 2005).

Two terms are used in Yang_Ju Lees' article "malcontented" and "malcontedness". Based on his article malcontentedness refers to learner's dissatisfaction with test results and post instruction. Malconteded is a descriptive term that can be interchangeably used with unhappy or dissatisfied. Malcontendtedness from a validation point of view corresponds to consequential validity and test effects on test taker. Little empirical research has been conducted on the consequential validity of placement tests (Lee, 2005).

Messick (1995, as cited in Johnson, 2007, P.5) in his seminal chapter on validity, in the third edition of 'Educational Measurement' states: "validity is an overall evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on the test scores. This definition was the result of Messick's three years of work to define the boundaries of validity. However, it was found that validity is not confined to what happens in classrooms and the control of assessment developer. This claim attracted the attention to the other concepts like consequential, curricular and

systemic validities. He defines consequential validity as "the social consequences of testing as an integral part of validity" (as cited in Johnson, 2007, P.5). According to Johnson (2007), "Consequential validity is what happens to assessment results when used and interpreted in society. However, it should be mentioned that consequential validity does not stand alone and is part of other validities" (p.5).

One of the reasons that studies of consequential validity are rare is its not being accepted as one type of validity. After publication of educational measurement: issues and practice (Messick 1995) many researcher argued that the interpretation and use of test scores has nothing to do with test validity and it should not affect test validity (Kwang-Lee Chu, 2012). The legitimacy of the claim was examined on specific English and mathematics courses at Reedley College. In this research students' and instructors' perception of the appropriateness of placement test were collected in 2003. Survey forms were distributed among both of groups during a term. The survey gathered information about students' placement test and their satisfaction. It also studied instructors' satisfaction with each student's placement and their evaluation of each student's ability in course (Waring, Jones, & Riegel, 2004).

According to Shephard (1997, as cited in Christensen & Liu, 2014), the concept of validity of test has been evolving for years and the focus is shifting toward the relationship between test purpose, internal structure of test and test consequences. The importance of test validity increases when these tests are high stakes and the accuracy of test result becomes more important. In a similar vein, this study raises one general question: Is there a relationship between students' self-concept and consequential validity of Quick Placement Test (QPT)?

Method

To evaluate learners' academic self-concept, and to find out the relationship between learners' self-concept and the consequential validity of Quick Placement Test, this study was initiated. The following section describes its process and procedures in details.

Participants

The study was carried on 297 female students in a private institute. Almost all the subjects had a background in English either in private institutes, schools, or universities. The institute was selected based on convenience sampling. The age range of the subjects of the study was very divergent. All of the students' first language was Persian.

Instruments

To collect the essential data for the present study Academic Self-Description Questionnaire-II (ASDQ II) and Consequential Validity study forms were given to students for the aim of data collection. The Quick Placement Test was used as students' placement test.

Academic Self-Description Questionnaire-II (ASDQ II)

To measure the self-concept of learners" Academic Self-Description Questionnaire-II "designed by Marsh (1999) was administered. ASDQII measures academic self-concept of language learners. ASDQ is a multi-dimension academic self-concept instrument based on prior research on SDQ. There are three types of ASDQs based on age: ASDQ-I, ASDQ II and ASDIII. ASDQII designed for adolescent was used in the present study. ASDQI and ASDQII in order are intended for pre-adolescents and late adolescents. A review of the psychometric properties of the ASDQ was done by Byrne (1996) in which he noted the basic structure of ASDQ is patterned after the SDQ, and it is reasonable to assume that the ASDQ will yield the same high-quality, valid and reliable data (as cited in Rosen, Glennie, Dalton, Lennon & Bozick, 2010) . ASDQII is the most reliable and valid questionnaire available for assessing students' academic self-concept.

Consequential Validity Study Forms

To examine learners' evaluation of the test fairness and validity, Consequential Validity Study Forms were administered. The form comprised of eight items that measured learners' satisfaction with the Quick Placement Test. Consequential-related validity evidence was collected from students, including their perceptions on the appropriateness of placements. Student forms gathered information on student's satisfaction with his or her placement into the course.

Quick Placement Test

The Quick Placement Test, which was given to students to place them in their right levels, is a reliable and time saving test developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL, and it can be easily corrected by an overlay. It has two versions, Pen and Paper (P&P) version and Computer-Based (CB) version. They are slightly different. The CB version has a listening component while the P&P does not. The pen and paper version is used in the present study. It consists of 60 multiple choice questions and answers are recorded directly on the paper. The test is divided into two parts. Part one is taken by all the students, and part two is for students with higher abilities. Learners are required to answer the questions in 30 minutes. This test provides teachers with the following chart to help them find students' levels accurately.

Procedures

To place the students in their right class based on their English levels, Quick placement test was utilized. Quick placement test includes two parts. Part one (questions 1-40) which is designed for all learners, and part two (questions 40-60) which is only for higher level students. Having examined the students' English proficiency levels, they were placed in appropriate classes accordingly. In the second phase of the study, in the middle of the three months period

term, self-concept questionnaire was administered in classes. Self-description questionnaire (SDQ-II) consisted of 26 items and was used to measure learners' academic self-concept. Translation and Back Translation Method were used in preparing the questionnaire since the language level of learners in the present study varied. All the questions were translated to Persian and again translated back to English to ensure that the validity or reliability of questionnaire is not decreased. Since the mother tongue of all the learners of this institute was Persian the questionnaires were translated to Persian. The final phase of the study took place at the end of the term. The consequential validity questionnaire was administered among students to assess their satisfaction with QPT decisions. The consequential validity study forms consisted of eight two-choice items. Learners were asked to evaluate the usefulness and reliability of the QPT at the end of the term. Learners were also requested to provide information about their age, years of studying English and their assigned level.

Data analysis

This section discusses the procedures followed to analyze the data. To model the significance of self-concept in the consequential validity of QPT, Probit Regression model was used. It is a technique for modeling dependent variables. Pearson Goodness-of-fit test was also utilized for data analysis. In the present study, learners' self-concept is the independent variable, and the consequential validity of QPT is the dependent variable. For analysis of learners' behavior in each assigned level a separated regression coefficient was used. The descriptive analysis of the data for data interpretation was done by SPSS social science package. The mean and standard deviation of learners' years of studying and age were calculated in each assigned level by this software.

Results

The present study investigated the possible relationship between self-concept and the consequential validity of the Quick Placement Test. Two hundred and ninety seven students were selected as the main sample. The results of all statistical analyses of the data collected from self-concept questionnaire and consequential validity study form are presented in this section.

Descriptive statistics

Based on learners' assigned levels, the sample was divided into five different groups (table 1). As you can see in the table, the dispersion of participants in each group indicates that while the intermediate group with ninety-nine people comprises the largest number of participants, the advanced group with eleven people represents the smallest number of participants.

Table 1

Sample divided by groups

Group	frequency	Percent
Advanced	11	3.7
Beginner	92	31.0
Intermediate	99	33.3
lower-intermediate	62	20.9
upper-intermediate	33	11.1
Total	297	100

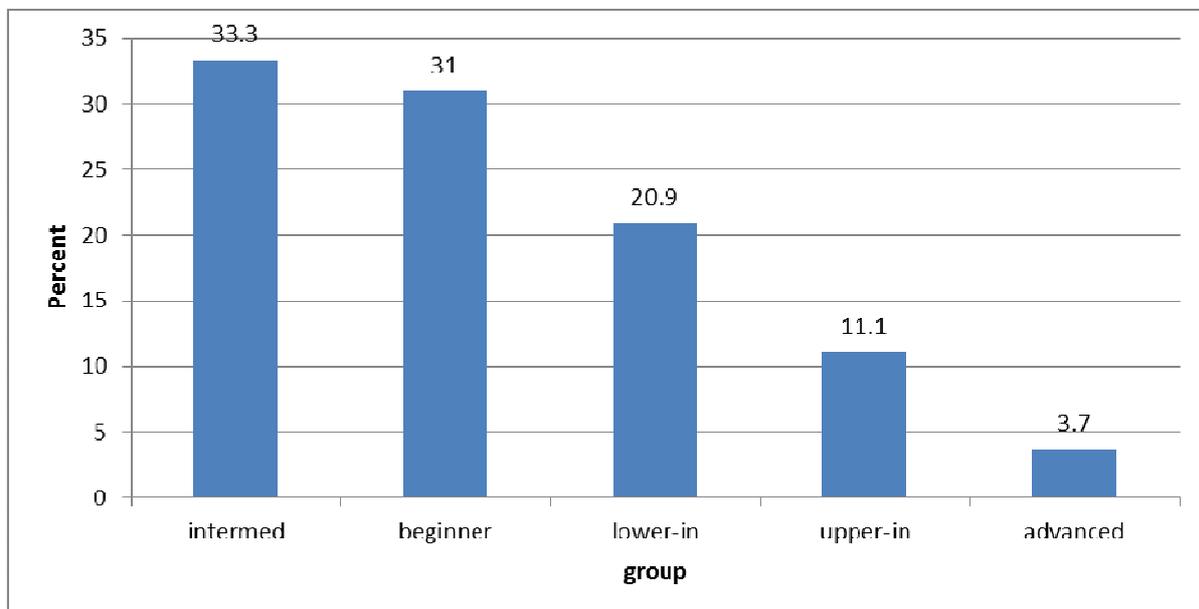The schematic representation of each assigned level under study is illustrated in figure 1

Figure 1. The percentage of participants in each assigned group

The standard deviation and mean of learners' years of studying English and age are presented in table 2.

Table 2

Mean and standard deviation of learners' years of studying English and age

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation

Years of studying English	297	1	9	5.23	1.45
Age of learner	297	15	43	23.62	6.13

Based on table 2, the minimum and the maximum years of learners' studying English were 1 and 9 years. The statistical analysis also showed that, the number of years of studying English in average was 5/23 years, with the standard deviation of 1.45. As it can be seen in table 2, the youngest and the oldest learners in the sample were 15 and 43 years old. These numbers are indications of the wide age range of learners under study.

In table 3, standard deviation and mean of learners' years of studying English and age in each assigned level is demonstrated. The results of the statistics show that learners in advanced level have studied for bigger number of years compared to learners in lower levels. The mean of years of studying English in advanced level is 5.97 while in beginner, lower- intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate level they are 5.04, 5.53, 5.09 and 5.33.

As it is represented in table 3, the mean of age in advanced level is bigger than the other levels. This number is 26.18 in advanced level, while in other levels it is not more than 24.

Table 3

Mean and standard deviation of years of study English and age in each of the five assigned level

Group	Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
advanced	Years of studying English	11	5	7	5.91	.83
	Age of learner	11	20	32	26.18	4.17
beginner	Years of studying English	92	1	9	5.04	1.52
	Age of learner	92	15	40	23.02	6.38
intermediate	Years of studying English	99	3	9	5.09	1.39
	Age of learner	99	15	43	23.57	6.36
lower-intermediate	Years of studying English	62	2	9	5.53	1.47
	Age of learner	62	15	40	23.98	6.13
upper-intermediate	Years of studying English	33	2	7	5.33	1.49
	Age of learner	33	15	36	23.88	5.15

Learners' average years of studying English and age in each assigned level is provided in figure 2

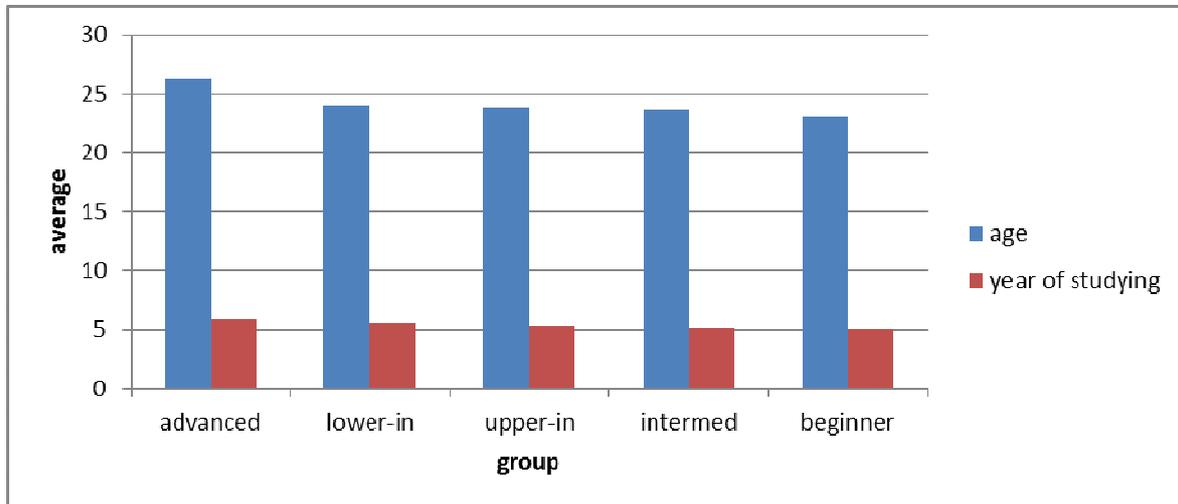
Figure2. Learners' average years of studying English and age in each assigned level

Inferential Statistics: Probit Regression Analysis

As the aim of the study was to examine the relationship between learners' self-concept and the consequential validity of QPT to model the significance of each in the consequential validity of QPT, so it was decided to use the probit regression. Probit regression model is a technique for modeling dependent variables. The difference between this model and logistic model is their link function. In the present study, students' self-concept is the independent variable and the consequential validity of QPT is the dependent variable. Consequential validity of QPT was examined by calculation of learners' true answers to the items. Table 4 shows the output of probit model. It should be mentioned that for each of the five assigned levels a separated regression coefficient was used.

Table 4

The relationship between learners' self-concept and the consequential validity of Quick placement test

Parameter	Estimate	Std. Error	Z	Sig.
students' self-concept	-.004	.005	-.850	.395
Intercept_ beginner	-.802	.428	-1.872	.061
Intercept_ lower-in	-.876	.422	-2.076	.038
Intercept_ intermediate	-.972	.437	-2.226	.026
Intercept_ upper-in	-.840	.450	-1.868	.062
Intercept_ advanced	-.926	.458	-2.023	.043

The results indicate that there is no meaningful relationship between learners' self-concept and consequential validity of QPT (z = -0.850, sig.>0.05).

Conclusion & Discussion

The findings of the study verify that there is no significant relationship between learners' Academic self-concept and the consequential validity of Quick placement test. In other words, it refuted earlier claims (Denissen, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2007; Hattie, 1992; Marsh & Yeung, 1997; Pajares & Schunk, 2005) that learners' perception of their capabilities does affect their assessment of the test fairness. However, as most of the participant evaluated the QPT test as unfair, which in turn questions its popularity by stakeholders and practitioners, the present investigation might be a caveat for those who utilize the QPT unquestionably. The least is to have them give a second thought to its validity. The analyses of consequential validity study forms of Oxford Placement Test (QPT) indicated that about 58.37 percent of learners assessed QPT not valid and 41.33 percent of them evaluated it as valid.

Besides, as this study showed that QPT possesses low consequential validity, it is suggested that other stake holders should reconsider its use. Also the study showed that learners' evaluation of QPT fairness was independent of their academic self-concept. However, due to the limited scope of research, there is this possibility that the consequential validity of QPT might vary when learners form a better understanding of language learning process during their study after several terms.

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