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Relationships Between Selected Antecedent Variables and the Language Skills Examination of the University System of Georgia

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The public is increasingly demanding that educators be accountable and that the traditional four-year college prove its effectiveness and importance in a technological society. Consequently, tax supported institutions have not only an obligation to justify their requests for more money, but also a responsibility to provide evidence demonstrating their effectiveness. Therefore, institutions of higher education must develop evaluation procedures necessary to assess the success of their college programs and to provide information for making decisions about program development and improvement (Hoyt, 1965).

The Language Skills Examination (Rentz, 1971) is an attempt by the University System of Georgia to evaluate the writing and reading competency of its students. The final form of the test includes three components: (1) an objective writing test, (2) a reading comprehension test and (3) an essay or a writing sample. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between scores on the Language Skills Examination and selected antecedent variables: (1) biographical variables, (2) academic entrance variables and (3) academic performance variables.

METHOD

The intent of the Language Skills Examination is to provide an evaluation of the writing and reading competency level of rising juniors, students in the University System of Georgia who have completed between 60-75 quarter hours. The specific sample is

drawn from five University System schools: two junior colleges, two four-year institutions and one university.

The objective writing component consists of 70 multiple-choice items. In 30 items, the student must select from among four alternatives, where the stem consists of a sentence with a word or phrase deleted, and the choices consist of words or phrases to be selected for appropriate inclusion in the sentence. Item contents include diction, sentence structure, point of view, spelling, punctuation, usage and vocabulary. In 40 items containing possible editing errors in usage, spelling, punctuation and capitalization, the student must indicate the part of the sentence, which is divided into three numbered parts, containing the error of mechanics or indicate that no error exists.

The reading comprehension section of the objective test consists of nine reading selections, each followed by five multiple-choice items. This section includes the following content categories: (1) reproducing ideas, (2) identifying ideas and making references, (3) analyzing motivation, (4) analyzing presentation and (5) criticizing a selection.

The essay, or writing sample, includes 11 topics. Each student was given one of three topics. Essays were graded according to a model essay comparative method based on a four-point scale. Raters were English Department faculty members representing 27 University System schools. Reliability in rating the essays was sought through a number of precautions. Anonymity of the writer was preserved and the essays were randomized before being sent to each of six grading centers. Essay tests were independently scored by three raters. Before coming to the scoring center each rater was supplied with a packet explaining in detail the student models to be used and the criteria used for the selection of the models. Also, prior to the actual grading, each rater was given three practice essays to score and compare the results with those of his or her colleagues at the center.

The high school average (HSA), College Entrance Examination Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT-V, SAT-M), English Composition grade point average (EGPA) and Humanities grade point average (HGPA), the Social Studies grade point average (SSGPA), freshman grade point average (FGPA), the cumulative grade point average (CUGPA) and the educational level of the parents were taken from the Admissions records and the student's permanent record card. The FGPA was computed by taking the number of hours nearest to 45 quarter hours and dividing into the number of quality points earned. The CUGPA was computed by taking the number of hours the student had completed at the end of the fall quarter and dividing into the number of quality points earned. In computing values of EGPA, HGPA and SSGPA, grades were averaged in courses applicable to each component of the core curriculum.

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between student performance on the test and the antecedent variables. Means and standard deviations for the total sample (923) and the sub-sample (531) were examined to determine whether or not the extracted cases were representative of the sample.

RESULTS

Correlations between biographical variables and the writing component for the sample showed significant correlations at the .05 level for all variables except veteran status. The correlation between the writing ($\underline{r} = -.44$, $\underline{p} < .01$) and reading ($\underline{r} = -.48$, $\underline{p} < .01$) components of the Language Skills Examination and race indicated that white students performed better on these components than did the black students. Sex ($\underline{r} = .15$, $\underline{p} < .05$) and race ($\underline{r} = .15$, $\underline{p} < .05$) share the highest correlation with the essay component. Educational level of the parent also indicates significant correlations with the writing ($\underline{r} = .17$, $\underline{p} < .01$), reading ($\underline{r} = .10$, $\underline{p} < .05$) and the essay ($\underline{r} = .08$, $\underline{p} < .05$). Marital status is significantly related with the writing component ($\underline{r} = .09$, $\underline{p} < .01$). On all three components of the test the transfer students

performed better than the native students.

A significant correlation ($p = .01$) exists between each of the entrance variables and students' performance on the test. The HSA relates about equally with all three components; however, the SAT-V and the SAT-M correlate higher with the writing and reading components than with the essay. The SAT-V appears to be the better predictor of performance on the Language Skills Examination of the academic entrance variables.

Of the academic performance variables, the highest predictor for the writing ($r = .36$, $p < .01$) and the essay ($r = .26$, $p < .01$) components is the CUGPA. The highest correlation for the reading component is with the SSGPA ($r = .36$, $p < .01$). The HGPA correlated lower with the writing component at one junior college than at the other institutions ($r = .13$, $p > .05$). The correlation between the essay and the SSGPA at the two four-year institutions indicates no significant relationship exists ($r = .14$, $p > .05$ and $r = .09$, $p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

The low correlation for this study, except for those relating the Language Skills Examination writing and reading with the SAT-V and SAT-M, suggest that caution is necessary in interpreting the results of the data. Results do indicate, however, that objective tests predict other objective tests and generally do not correlate as highly with performance tests, such as the essay. The low correlation of the essay with other test variables and the high correlation among the objective test variables themselves seem to support this notion. Although the essay shows a relationship with the Language Skills Examination writing and reading components and the SAT-V, the coefficients are not high enough to be meaningful. The lack of a significant correlation between composition grades and the essay might be due to several factors. The composition grade is a composite of several evaluations of students' writing abilities, whereas the essay is only one sample. Another factor is the time variable.

Most composition courses allow 40 to 50 minutes for writing an essay and some of the essays during the course of the quarter are written out of class. Given only 30 minutes to think, organize and write, the student is at a disadvantage. The fact that the student does not know his audience may also affect his performance. However, the lack of a significant correlation between composition grades and the essay might imply that a more effective system of evaluation of writing performance is needed and that research studies need to be undertaken to determine the abilities the essay performance test actually assesses. Such studies might include syntactic analyses of writing performance at different levels of competency or syntactic analyses of students' writing performance on in-class themes compared with their performance on the essay component of the Language Skills Examination.

From the significantly high correlations between the writing component and the SAT-V and the reading component, the investigators conclude that the writing component is measuring verbal abilities. The relatively high correlation between the Language Skills Examination and the CUGPA implies that the test may be related to academic experience and maturity. A follow-up study is needed to determine whether or not the Language Skills Examination may be used as a predictor of future college success.

TABLE 1
CORRELATION BETWEEN SELECTED ANTECEDENT VARIABLES
AND COMPONENTS OF THE LANGUAGE SKILLS EXAMINATION

		<u>Writing</u>	<u>Essay</u>	<u>Reading</u>
Sex	r	.08**	.15*	-.03
	N	923	892	923
Race	r	-.44**	-.15*	-.48**
	N	923	892	923
Age	r	.07*	.06*	.02
	N	923	892	923
Marital Status	r	.09**	.04	.06
	N	923	892	923
Veteran Status	r	-.00	-.09*	.05
	N	923	892	923
Transfer Status	r	-.16**	-.04	-.15*
	N	923	892	923
Ed. Level of Parent	r	.17**	.08*	.10*
	N	513	499	513
HSA	r	.27**	.23**	.21**
	N	684	660	684
SAT-V	r	.74**	.37**	.75**
	N	830	802	830
SAT-M	r	.54**	.21**	.57**
	N	830	802	830
EGPA	r	.29**	.20**	.21**
	N	901	872	901
HGPA	r	.30**	.24**	.25**
	N	776	752	776
SSGPA	r	.34**	.20**	.36**
	N	906	876	906
FGPA	r	.29**	.21**	.28**
	N	923	892	923
CUGPA	r	.36**	.26**	.34**
	N	923	892	923

* $p = .05$
** $p = .01$

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