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Malawi Teachers' Knowledge of and Attitudes Towards Standardized Tests

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Abstract

Standardized tests play a great role in education. In Malawi, results of these tests are used to make critical decisions about individuals, hence the need for students to be well prepared. Students' performance can be influenced by their teachers' attitude toward and knowledge of standardized tests. This survey was designed to establish Malawian teachers' knowledge of standardized tests and their attitude towards these tests. While the teachers displayed positive attitudes, it was found that they would benefit from more knowledge about standardized tests.

Introduction

In this study, teachers' attitudes towards and knowledge of standardized tests were examined. A hypothesis motivating this study is that, among other factors positive attitudes and good knowledge influence students' performance on these tests. As Broadfoot (cited in Mkandawire, 1989) stated, the motivation aspect of assessment is important as an agent of social control. People get motivated if they get valued rewards, which in turn are dependent on good performance. Good knowledge of and positive attitudes towards standardized tests could help boost students motivation to do well in these tests. Parker (1998) stated, teacher's attitudes and enthusiasm are as important as the classroom activities themselves.

Standardization refers to the degree to which the observational procedures, administrative procedures, equipment and materials, and scoring rules have been fixed so that exactly the same testing procedure occurs at different times and places (Nitko, 1996). Standardized tests are therefore designed to give a common measure of students' performance. Because there are common predetermined standards, comparison among students and across schools can be made. Furthermore, it makes it possible to evaluate educational programs to see if progress is there or not. Standardization improves test objectivity and the interpretation of examinees' performance on the test.

Teachers are often involved in the development, administration, scoring and interpretation of standardized tests. This requires knowledge about the characteristics of scales used to report students' performance. Lack of such knowledge results in erroneous

understanding and use of standardized test results. Mamo (1998) pointed out that the major source of error is improper interpretation of test scores. He gives an example that a teacher may distinguish between two students on the basis of one or two test-score points when such differences can be accounted for by chance and error alone.

The general performance of students during one of the standardized tests in Malawi (the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) has been declining over the past ten years. This test is administered at the end of the four years of secondary school education. In a study in 1986 to examine the trend of performance on the individual MCE (now called MSCE) subjects at credit and distinction levels, it was observed that the trend was generally downward (MCE & Testing Board, 1986). Over a decade later, in 1999, the pass rate during MSCE was 13%, and this led to the formation of the presidential commission of enquiry to investigate why the results were so poor. One of the findings was that there was a general lack of motivation among teachers as well as students (Malunga, 2000). In the 2001 MSCE, only 18% of the candidates passed.

Students' performance on standardized tests can be explained by a number of factors. These include availability of resources at school, teacher qualifications, effects of practice and coaching, and the general school environment. However, there are some psychological factors such as teachers' attitude and knowledge that also affect how well students perform in a test. One's feelings about a test greatly affect how motivated the individual will be. A teacher's knowledge of how to interpret scores from standardized tests helps the teacher carefully select material for the students taking into account their strengths and weaknesses. Positive attitudes about the benefit of tests helps ensure that teachers use test information to plan instruction for their class, as well as the manner in

which the instruction could be carried out. Such instructional improvement will help prepare students for examinations leading to better performance. Unfortunately, these factors have not yet been explored in Malawi, hence the need to carry out such a study.

Examinations in Malawi are affected by a number of problems. MSCE as well as JCE examinations face the problem of test security. Due to their national administration requirement, these test papers are delivered in schools about 10 days prior to the commencement of the examinations. This has resulted in some unfaithful school administrators opening the tests and leaking the contents to their students. This unfair practice puts other students at a disadvantage and could lead to promotion of students that do not deserve it. Connected to the problem of test security is the issue of cheating. In Malawi, cheating has become so common and widespread over the past decade. Cheating poses a threat to society's trust in the integrity of the educational system. Its effects are harmful to the society since it promotes dishonesty. As such, cheating needs to be dealt with to ensure that it does not pollute future citizens.

In 1999, the government of Malawi issued a policy statement that MANEB shall no longer administer Junior Certificate Examinations effective 2001 (Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST), 2001). Instead, school-based assessment will replace JCE and that schools will produce a certificate of attendance for students at the end of four years of secondary education. It is therefore important to assess how well prepared the teachers are for the school based assessment proposed by the government.

Statement of the Problem

The declining of performance on standardized tests is a concern to each and every Malawian since it would affect the integrity of future citizens and the country's social and

economic development. In the Nation newspaper of 7th January 2000, Kaphuka (a proprietor of a private school) attributed the declining performance to the multiple-choice format of examinations. He argued that candidates do not have enough practice with this format because Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC) and Junior Certificate examinations use multiple-choice while MSCE uses constructed-response format. However, Lipenga (Minister of Education) was quoted in the same paper as saying students were performing poorly because their commitment to education and examinations has declined. One thing clear is that there is need to have strategies that can help improve students' performance. One of the corrective measures would be to improve the motivation of students. It is evident that good grades from well-formulated assessments are a motivating factor to students. Improving teachers' knowledge of and attitude toward standardized tests might serve to increase students' motivation and their achievement. If teachers have the required level of knowledge about tests, their instruction becomes effective and can thoroughly prepare students for assessment. For school -based assessment to be successful, teachers need to know how to create good quality assessment instruments, assign grades, and use these grades to make decisions about individual students.

Teachers' attitudes, like those of parents and other leaders, have an influence on learning and behavior (Jackson, 1971). Positive attitudes towards a task generate interest in an individual thereby motivating him/her to perform it to their best. Tuckman (1994) concluded that achievement required aptitude and motivation, and motivation required a combination of attitude, strategy and drive.

Studies in other countries have shown that teachers lack the general knowledge of standardized testing (Mamo, 1998; Plake & Impara, 1997 in Phye, 1997). In addition, many teachers have negative attitudes towards standardized test (Ansley, 1997 in Phye, 1997; Nolen, et al., 1992 in Sireci, Washington, & De Leon, 2002; Herman & Golan (CRESST Technical Report 334)).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to discover teachers' level of knowledge about standardized tests in Malawi. The results will reveal how well prepared the teachers are for the school-based assessment that the government intends to implement. The study also aims at discovering the teachers' attitudes towards standardized tests, their opinion about school-based assessment, and the problem of cheating. The results will be useful for designing strategies for improving teachers' knowledge of and attitudes towards standardized tests. It is hoped that this would assist to improve testing and students performance in Malawi.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

- What do teachers in Malawi know about standardized tests and their use?
- What are the attitudes of teachers in Malawi towards standardized tests?
- What could be done to improve teachers and students' motivation when preparing for standardized tests?
- What strategies do teachers recommend for improving standardized testing in Malawi?
- What are teachers' opinions about the proposed school-based assessment?

- What are teachers' opinions about cheating in examinations?

Significance of the Study

As stated above, teachers in Malawi are involved in various stages of the development and administration of standardized tests. In addition, it is these teachers who are supposed to implement the school-based assessment that the Malawi government intends to introduce. The school-based assessment is so crucial especially for those students who would not pass MSCE. As such those involved need to have some knowledge of the strengths and limitations of classroom tests. With such knowledge, teachers would be able to exhibit positive attitudes towards tests and therefore assist in preparation of students for these tests. This study is specifically significant in that it will establish the level of knowledge of standardized tests among a sample of teachers in Malawi and it will document their attitudes towards these tests. It will also shed some light on how well prepared teachers are for school-based assessment and what their opinions are regarding this type of assessment and the problem of cheating.

Literature Review

School levels and history of standardized testing in Malawi

The education system in Malawi includes basically four cycles. First is an eight-year primary education cycle followed by a two-year junior secondary cycle. There is also a two-year senior secondary school, which leads to tertiary education. Each of the first three schooling cycles is terminated by a national examination, results of which are used to determine who proceeds to the next level. The Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC) examination is administered at the end of the first cycle, the Junior

Certificate (JC) at the end of the second cycle and the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) at the end of the third cycle. Currently, the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) develops and administers all examinations.

MANEB is an organization responsible to the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST). It was established by the act of Parliament in 1987 and succeeded the former Malawi Certificate of Education and Testing Board (MCETB) (Bradbury, 1992). The latter was responsible for only the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) examinations and some aptitude testing. Meantime, MANEB is responsible for all school and teacher training examinations. Previously, MOEST administered PSLCE and JCE examinations. The MCETB was established in 1972 to replace the British Cambridge School Certificate Examinations, which were also known as General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary level. According to Bradbury (1992), this nationalization of the examination system was quite early by the standards of new African countries. He gives an example of Zimbabwe and Zambia, which were not completely independent of Cambridge when he compiled his report.

Uses of and educators' attitudes towards standardized tests

Standardized tests play a very important role in education and in society. To make a number of decisions, many educators use standardized tests. Firstly, these tests are used for selection purposes. In Malawi, equal access to education decreases as one progresses from one level to the next. Due to the few positions in higher levels of education, tests are used to give information regarding those that should proceed and those that should not. Tests are the only fair tool that could be used to make such a decision. This implies that

further education of students depends on how well they perform on examinations.

Standardized tests are also used to make placement decisions, where a person is assigned to a particular level for purposes of instruction (Nitko, 1996).

Another decision arising from standardized tests is classification. In classification, persons are put into categories depending on ones' ability or competence in a specified area. This is also called screening, where students are tested to discover those that have special needs. This helps teachers to pace instruction according to their ability.

Standardized tests have a variety of other roles in education. They are used to certify achievement of minimum skills (Oosterhef, 1990). Certification provides the student with a qualification, which signifies that he or she has reached a certain level of competence or knowledge. In Malawi, a candidate is awarded an MSCE certificate at the end of four years of secondary school after passing six subjects including English with at least a credit in one of the subjects. Tests are also used to provide feedback on performance of an individual student and measure a teacher's success. They also measure the success across schools. Because of the critical decisions made from standardized tests, it is important that both teachers and students put effort on preparation for these tests to ensure better performance of the students.

Despite the importance of standardized tests, some educators have criticized these tests. One of the criticisms is that standardized tests cover only a small fraction of what schools try to accomplish. Schools undertake a variety of activities, most of which are not assessed by standardized tests. As Kelleghan and Greany (1992) put it, most examinations are limited to pencil and paper and so ignore a variety of skills that cannot be measured in this way. As such, tests are regarded as biased towards those activities

that are assessed through the tests. However, Bordonaro (November 29,2001) states that it is wrong for educators to dismiss use of standardized test scores for such a reason. The paper argues that it is not the information that tests provide that is faulty but rather thinking that tests measure more than what they really do.

In addition to being unable to measure many behaviors specifically learned in schools, tests are perceived by some educators as not measuring the objectives of innovative instructional programs. Worse still, instead of measuring an individuals' learning, some tests merely compare students (Nitko, 1996). Such comparison creates competition among learners and may result in labeling or mislabeling of students with respect to their intellectual status. On the other hand, one may argue that this competition would motivate students to aim at achieving high scores. According to Nitko (1996), standardized tests may instill fear in some examinees. Less able students will approach every test with some fear, hence affecting their performance.

Tests also have unintended consequences that affect the school. In situations where the tests are of high stakes, as is the case in Malawi, test scores are linked to grade level promotion and secondary school graduation. Because the consequence of performing well on a selection examination is so critical to students, teachers, and parents, a tremendous amount of time, attention and effort is devoted to preparing for the examination. If the examination does not reflect the curriculum, it is likely that the examination will replace the curriculum. In the same way, if the examination does not measure what policy makers and others believe is important for the student to know, it is likely that it will be neglected in the classroom. In his analysis of MCE mathematics papers, Khonje (1982) found out that some topics in the subject were not examined and

that some of the items were very difficult for an average candidate. Simbeye (1984) in Mbunge (1986) also showed that for Geography, certain topics found in the MCE syllabus were not examined during the years included in the sample. On this point, Bordonaro (November 29, 2001) denies that tests lead to a narrowly defined curriculum but instead they make an almost infinite body of knowledge more manageable considering the limited instructional time. The paper argues that well formulated standardized tests actually help teachers to remain focused and to teach a basic common body of knowledge.

It has been argued that standardized tests encourage teachers to teach to the test so as to improve students' performance. Such practices result in changes and narrowing of the curriculum (Baker, 1989; Herman, 1989; Shepard, 1990), leading to reduction in amount of knowledge that students accumulate. In the long run, the diversity of talent available in the society is also reduced. Other researchers however argue that teaching to the test is not a bad thing at all if the test is a good one. In fact teachers use tests to ensure students are learning. Schools that have register success in student achievement plan their instruction based on students' strengths and weaknesses as revealed by test results (call to action to action, November 15, 2002).

Problems faced by examinations in Malawi

There are a number of problems that surround examinations in Malawi. This section discusses problems of test security, cheating and quality of teachers.

Standardized tests in Malawi are national in nature. Such being the case, MANEB delivers the examination papers in the examination centers at least one week in advance. Reports have indicated that personnel in some schools have opened the tests before time

and conveyed the contents therein to their students. This practice affects test score validity. At present, MANEB is looking into the possibility of keeping test papers at a nearest police station where test administrators would collect them on the day of the examination.

Related to test security is the problem of cheating. Cheating during examinations has been widespread over the past five years in Malawi. In recent years MANEB has tried hard to detect and deal with candidates and institutions suspected of the malpractice. For instance, the Presidential Commission reported that 4,263 (approximately 7.1%) candidates were disqualified in 1999 (Malunga, 2000). However, evidence abounds that much more goes undetected. Research has shown that a cross section of people is involved in this malpractice, including teachers, parents and the students themselves. As the Presidential Commission reports, the attitude of some heads, teachers, examination candidates, parents and the general public is that cheating is the easy way to succeed in national examinations (Malunga, 2000). This attitude is a good indicator of the decaying moral standards among the general public. As a result, there is a decline in the integrity, honesty and in professionalism amongst the teachers and the public in general.

The practice of cheating during examinations is so rampant in Malawi because of the high stakes nature of the examinations. Test results are used to make crucial decisions about individuals and therefore about their future. Students strive to get good grades to be considered for the few positions available at the next level of education. However, cheating has many undesirable effects. It disadvantages honest students and misleads parents, teachers, employers, and admission officers who rely on grades and test scores to help them make better decisions (Trustees' Public Accountability Report). The report

also states that cheating is harmful to the public if the students who have misrepresented their qualifications enter licensed occupations like teaching, medicine, etc.

Some people feel that teachers are involved in cheating during examinations because they are not well qualified such that they have problems in preparing students for these examinations. The problem of qualified teachers in Malawi is so great. According to (MOEST, 2000), there were only 34% of teachers in Lilongwe district that were qualified. This could have an impact on the school-based assessment that is about to be introduced in Malawi. To successfully carry out school-based assessment, teachers need to have some competence in a number of areas. Firstly, teachers should be skilled in developing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions (Nitko, 1996). They should know and follow appropriate principles for developing and using assessment methods in their teaching. In addition, they should be able to use student data to analyze the quality of the assessment techniques that they use. Secondly, teachers should be skilled in administering, scoring and interpreting the results of the tests that they produce. This requires that teachers be skilled in interpreting students' performances in class and on homework assignments. Knowledge of how to analyze assessment results enables a teacher to identify their students' strengths and weaknesses. Thirdly, school based assessment shall require teachers to have a skill in developing valid pupil grading procedures. This would help teachers avoid making faulty judgments about any student. Most important, teachers should be skilled in communicating assessment results to students, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators (Nitko, 1996). This would be very important if certificates of attendance that would be issued by different schools would be considered for entry into the job market or higher education.

Method

This section discusses the methodology used in data collection. It gives a description of the sample, how it was selected, instruments used, data collection procedures, and how the data were analyzed.

Research Design

The study used a survey design to gather data. A survey design was used to have a broad understanding of teachers' knowledge of and their attitudes towards standardized tests. Questionnaires were used to collect data from participants to sample their knowledge and attitudes. This design provides for generalization of findings to a population from which the sample is drawn (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). It is therefore expected that findings from this study will be generalized to the population of teachers in Lilongwe. A survey was used also because it is fairly economical and expected to give a rapid turn around in data collection. Use of a survey is advantageous in that it enables the researcher to identify attributes of a population from a small group of individuals (Creswell, 1994).

Sample

This study targeted qualified Malawian secondary school teachers in Lilongwe district. Qualified teachers in this study refer to holders of a Diploma in education (Dip.Ed.), a Bachelors degree in education (B.Ed) and a general degree (Bsc, Bsoc, PA, BAH, etc) plus a University Certificate of Education (UCE). These qualified teachers were chosen because they take a course of evaluation, testing and measurement in the course of their training. Lilongwe district was chosen for proximity and accessibility, since it is where the researcher lived. Stratified random sampling was used to determine

the schools. A total of 6 secondary schools were involved in this study. The schools proportionally represented national, district and day secondary schools. Private and community day secondary schools were included in the sample because these did not have many qualified teachers. Demographic information of the participants is provided in the results section.

Instruments

To measure teachers' knowledge of and attitudes towards standardized tests, two scales were used. The scales were adapted from Sireci, De Leon and Washington (2002). The knowledge of tests scale (KOT) measured teachers' knowledge of standardized tests. This scale consisted of 19 items, some of which were modified to fit the Malawian context. The items comprised close-ended items that measure fundamental measurement concepts such as reliability, validity and interpreting test results. A pilot study of the modified questionnaires was done in two schools in Lilongwe for the purpose of assessing their feasibility and identifying any problems that could be encountered during data collection. These questionnaires were also reviewed by the academic advisor to assess their validity and reliability. The KOT instrument is shown in appendix B.

The second scale measured attitudes towards tests (ATT). This contained 28 items in two parts A and B. Part A consisted of 12 items containing statements pertaining to standardized tests. Teachers were asked to respond to each statement by indicating their agreement along a six point Likert scale where "1" indicated strongly agree and "6" indicated strongly disagree. The second part contained 5 items that asked for background information of the respondents and 11 open-ended questions which asked respondents to outline problems of testing in Malawi, strategies to improve tests by MANEB and the

type of test information that could help teachers improve their efficiency. The open-ended questions also sought respondents' opinions regarding cheating and school-based assessment. The instrument is reproduced in appendix C.

Procedure

Questionnaires were hand delivered to the respondents by the researcher. Teachers were given two days to respond to the questionnaire after which the researcher collected them. Completed questionnaires were coded ready for data entry.

Access to sample

A letter was sent to MOEST officials, divisional manager for Central West educational division and all head masters of secondary schools in the sample. This was done to inform them about the study and its intentions, and also to ask for permission to carry out the study.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. Mean and median responses were used to summarize teachers' knowledge of and attitude towards standardized tests. In addition, comparisons were made across school type (i.e., national, district, and day) using analysis of variance. Correlations between KOT and ATT scores were also calculated.

Results

A total of 53 teachers were involved in this survey. Out of these, about 47% were females. The teachers came from six secondary schools in Lilongwe. Of the six schools, three were national, two day and one district. All teachers in this survey had an education

background, that is, they had a tests, measurement and evaluation course either during pre-service or in-service. The level of qualification of the teachers and their sex is as shown in Table 1. The teachers also had various years of teaching experience ranging from one to twenty-six. This is outlined in table 2.

Knowledge of tests survey results

The mean performance on the 19-item instrument was 11.32 with a standard deviation of 3.12, which represents a percent correct score of approximately 60%. Mean performance on each item is given in Appendix A. The results indicate that teachers involved in this survey had more knowledge in the area of recognizing unethical issues than in the other four areas tested. As indicated by the proportion correct per competency area, the average performance on this standard was 73.58% followed by an average of 67.92% on choosing an assessment. By making similar comparisons, teachers' responses also revealed that they had the least knowledge in the area of developing assessment methods (see Table 3).

Table 4 shows that teachers who had a general bachelors degree and a university certificate in education performed better than the others. However, this difference was found to be statistically insignificant ($F = 1.34$, $p = 0.27$) as shown by results of a one-way ANOVA presented in Table 5.

Results also indicate that teachers in national schools outperformed those in district and day secondary schools. The one- way ANOVA turned out that the observed difference was significant ($F = 10.00$, $p = 0.00$). Pair- wise comparisons revealed that the significant difference was between national schools and day schools. Respondents in national schools performed better and the delta effect size was 1.39 indicating that this

difference was greater than 1 standard deviation. These results are summarized in Tables 6, 7 and 8.

Attitude toward tests

Given the six point scale and 12 items, the possible score range for attitude survey was 12 to 72. The mean score for all respondents was 33.91, which is slightly below the mean that would be obtained if all respondents were agreeing slightly with positively worded statements. The teachers therefore tended to show generally positive attitudes towards standardized tests. Teachers' responses indicated that they disagreed that there was gender bias in standardized tests as 94.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this opinion. About 90.6% expressed the feeling that they actually liked standardized tests. When asked whether teachers whose students perform well should be given higher pay or not, 60.3% disagreed. It was also interesting to note that the teachers felt that standardized tests force them to teach to the test. Fifty percent strongly agreed to this while 34.6% agreed slightly or moderately. Most teachers indicated they expect the performance of their students to improve in a few years to come. This is closely related to the teachers liking of standardized tests. Teachers' attitude results are summarized in Table 9.

The correlation between ATT and KOT scores was close to zero ($r = -0.026$, $p = 0.86$), an indication that teachers attitude is not related to their knowledge of tests. No relationship existed between qualification and type of school and attitude towards tests.

In addition to KOT and ATT surveys, open response items were incorporated to find out teachers opinions regarding various testing issues in Malawi. Results of the analysis of these responses are presented in the sections below.

Things that could improve motivation of students

Forty-six percent of the teachers suggested that students' motivation could be improved if they had some practice tests in preparation for the MANEB exams. Students would have a feeling of the main exam and build up self-confidence. Three teachers also proposed that it could help if students had an external exam at the end of a semester that was prepared by a separate teacher who is an authority in the subject area. Rewards for students were also cited as a motivating factor by 21% of the respondents.

The need for coaching was expressed as one of the strategies that could be employed to improve students' performance. About 19% of the teachers claimed that some students fail examinations because they do not know how to take the test. If this were done, cases of cheating would be reduced.

Testing problems in Malawi

One problem cited by 56% of the teachers was that most teaching syllabi are too long for teachers to cover hence the poor performance of students. Teachers are unable to teach the entire syllabi due to shortening of the school sessions that occurs due late release of examination results. Related to this, a quarter of the teachers expressed the concern that they had no knowledge of the examination syllabi. As such there is some degree of mismatch between what gets taught and what is examined to the extent that some content that is taught in school is not assessed.

It was spelled out that MANEB sometimes contracts administrators that are not qualified to handle examinations. This concern was expressed by 31% of the teachers. This implies that administration of examinations varies from one center to another. Problems of cheating and leakage of examinations were cited by 27% and 25% of the teachers respectively. Since most examinations in Malawi take the supply response format, 15% of the teachers were concerned about the objectivity of marking.

Ways to improve tests and students performance

It was interesting to note that the majority of teachers (69%) had an expectation that performance of their students will improve in several years to come. This could be an indication that teachers were committed to improving students' achievement. Close to 21% of the teachers indicated they lacked appropriate and timely feedback and support from MANEB because there was no proper coordination between MANEB, Ministry of Education and the teachers. They cited materials such as chief examiners reports, scoring rubrics, examinations syllabi, and revision kits as some of the resources that could help them work more effectively. On quality of tests, teachers advised that test items should contain as few typos and technical errors as possible.

Out of the 48 teachers that responded to this section, 29% indicated that most teachers lack the knowledge of how to assess students. Thus they suggested that teachers be provided with a guide for better testing which they could use in creating classroom test, information on how to set cut off points and assignment of grades to students.

Treatment of cheating teachers and students

Examinations in Malawi have very high stakes. Promotion and entry into university decisions are made on the basis of test scores from these exams.

Approximately 42% of the respondents expressed the view that some students cheat because unqualified teachers teach them. The poor quality teachers and the inability of teachers to cover the syllabi make students feel ill prepared for exams. Test anxiety increases in the students and so they resort to cheating to achieve better grades. In private schools, cheating is more serious because proprietors would like to get more students to pass and so they can attract more students. This idea was cited by 38% of the teachers. Some teachers get involved in cheating due to corruption, an indication of lack of professionalism.

It was suggested by 42% of the teachers in this sample that teachers found cheating should be convicted and be heavily fined or imprisoned and that such teachers should not be allowed to administer standardized tests. Forty-six percent suggested that teachers involved in cheating should be dismissed from the teaching service. For students, almost all teachers suggested that they should be allowed to take a different test after conviction.

Opinions on school based assessment

Sixty-five percent of the teachers expressed the feeling that they do not have enough skills to carry out school-based assessment. They cited lack of knowledge of testing, poor qualification of teachers, grading inconsistencies, subjectivity, corruption and high pupil-teacher ratio as some of the factors that could undermine the success of this exercise. Thirty-one percent were specifically concerned that critical decisions about students would be made based on varying degrees of grading procedures. Teachers were also concerned about the acceptance of the certificates of attendance by the employers.

School-based assessment would shift the decision-making role from MANEB to individual teachers. Twenty-seven of the teachers stated that for fear of being blamed and to maintain good relations, teachers might be forced to promote failing students. This would reduce the passing rate during MSCE.

Discussion and conclusions

Results of this survey show that teachers in Lilongwe would benefit from more knowledge of standardized tests. Most teachers in Malawi are not qualified to teach. For instance, only about 34% of the teachers in Lilongwe are qualified (MOEST, 2001). However, even the qualified teachers as those used in this survey displayed low levels of knowledge of tests. This implies that students are not well prepared for these tests, and this could be one of the factors that could explain the decline in students' performance. In a study to investigate what teachers in the sample know about assessment it was also found that teachers had low knowledge (Plake & Impara, 1997; Sireci, De Leon & Washington 2002).

Results of this survey indicate that teachers are not ready to effectively handle the proposed school-based assessment. For school-based assessment to be effective, it requires teachers to make accurate judgment about students' achievement and performance. In this manner they would properly guide students learning. This requires knowledge about tests. It is therefore imperative that teachers get trained in assessment issues to ensure effective and successful implementation of school-based assessment.

This study has also revealed that there is limited communication between MANEB and teachers. As revealed, there is a lot of information regarding tests that

teachers would like to get from the testing board, which is currently not accessible or not available. Teachers need to be updated continuously about examination requirements and other important information about examinations. Currently, the advisory section at the MOEST collaborates with MANEB on issues of the curriculum and moderation of examinations. It is this section that is responsible for disseminating information to schools. To improve this process, there is need to have examination specialists in the advisory sections to look into matters of examinations, monitor teacher classroom assessment practices and give advice to teachers. The specialists could also be entrusted with the duty to produce a newsletter that could help teachers come up with reliable tests and have better knowledge about tests that MANEB administers.

Generally teachers have positive attitudes towards standardized tests. This could be because they view these tests as a very important tool in making selection decisions.

The generally positive attitudes found by this study are in agreement with findings from the study by McCaslin (n.d.) in which attitude of vocational teachers toward tests was being investigated. In a similar study, it was found out that teachers had generally negative attitudes (Sireci, De Leon & Washington, 2002).

Limitations

This study is limited by two main factors. First, it only concentrates on knowledge and attitudes of teachers towards standardized tests. However, what teachers would report as their level of knowledge and their attitude does not signal how much of that knowledge they actually put into practice. It would have been more interesting if this component was included. This was not be possible due to limitations of time and resources. Second, the study involved a small sample from one geographical area. This

affects the generalizability of the findings. Given time and resources, this study could be done at a larger scale so that the results could be generalized to a larger population.

Suggestions for future research

It is suggested that research be carried out teachers' attitude toward different examination formats. This is an important topic due to conflicts that have arisen recently between educators and test developers. Another area of great importance would be a research to investigate the effect of pre-service training in assessment on teacher classroom practices and student achievement.

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Table 1

Level of teacher Qualification

Qualification	Number of teachers			
	Males	Females	Total	%
Bachelor of Education	8	15	23	43.34
Diploma in Education	14	8	22	41.51
University Certificate in Education	6	1	7	13.21
Master of Education		1	1	1.89
Total	28	25	53	100
%	52.83	47.17	100	100

Table 2

Number of years of teaching experience

Number of years	Number of teachers			
	Males	Females	Total	%
1 - 5	11	15	26	50.00
6 - 10	10	5	15	28.85
11 - 15	1	2	3	5.77
16 - 20	2	2	4	7.69
21 - 26	3	1	4	7.69
Total	27	25	52	100
%	51.92	48.08		100

Table 3

Teachers average performance according to competency area

Competency area	No. of items	Mean Proportion correct	SD
Recognizing unethical procedures	1	73.58	0.44
Choosing an assessment	5	67.92	0.47
Administering, scoring, interpreting	7	62.26	0.48
Using results	3	54.72	0.50
Developing assessment methods	3	39.62	0.48

Table 4

Teacher performance depending on qualification

Qualification	N	Mean	SD	% correct
University Certificate in Education	7	13.14	3.16	69.17
Bachelor of Education	23	11.22	3.34	59.00
Diploma in Education	22	11.00	3.16	57.89

Table 5

Results of ANOVA between performance and qualification

Source	SS	df	F	p
Qualification	25.54	2	1.34	0.27
Error	468.77	49		
Total	494.31	51		

Table 6

Performance by school category

School Category	N	Mean	SD
National	27	12.85	2.13
District	7	11.00	4.55
Day	19	9.26	2.58

Table 7

Results of ANOVA between performance and school category

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
School type	144.55	2	72.23	10.00	0.00
Error	361.09	50	7.22		

Table 8

Results of pairwise comparisons for performance between school type

School Type		Mean Difference (I - J)	Std Error	p	95% Confidence Interval	
I	J				Lower Bound	Upper bound
National	District	1.85	1.14	0.11	-0.44	4.14
	Day	3.59	0.80	0.00	1.97	5.21
District	National	-1.85	1.14	0.11	-4.14	0.44
	Day	1.74	1.19	0.15	-0.65	4.12
Day	National	-3.59	0.80	0.00	-5.20	-1.97
	District	-1.74	1.19	0.15	-4.12	0.65

Table 9

Summary Of Teachers Attitude Towards Standardized Tests

N = 53

Attitude Statement	Median Agreement
Standardized tests are the best way to evaluate teachers effectiveness	Agree slightly
Standardized tests assess important educational outcomes	Agree moderately
Standardized tests waste valuable instructional time	Disagree moderately
Standardized tests force teachers to teach to the test	Agree strongly
Standardized tests are biased against females	Disagree strongly
Teachers whose students score higher on Standardized tests should receive higher salaries	Disagree moderately
Standardized tests serve useful purposes	Agree strongly
Standardized tests are not valid indicators of students achievement	Disagree slightly
I hate Standardized tests	Disagree Strongly
Standardized test information should be used extensively to enhance instruction	Agree moderately
I am very comfortable interpreting information from Standardized tests	Agree slightly
Standardized tests encourage students to cheat	Agree slightly

Appendix A

Mean performance for each KOT item

Item	Proportion correct	SD
What is the most important consideration in choosing a method for assessing students?	0.96	0.19
When scores from a standardized test are said to be reliable, what does it imply?	0.62	0.49
Miss Zagwa wished to assess her students' understanding of the method of problem solving she had been teaching. Which assessment strategy below would be most valid?	0.42	0.50
Which of the following actions would most likely increase the reliability of a multiple-choice end-of-unit examination in physical science?	0.30	0.46
Many teachers score classroom tests in a 100-point percent correct scale. In general, what does students' score of 90 on such a scale mean?	0.79	0.41
Students in Mr. Phiri's science class are required to develop a model of the solar system as part of their end of unit score. Which marking procedure below will maximize the objectivity of assessing these student projects?	0.83	0.38
When the directions indicate each section of a standardized test is timed separately, which of the following is acceptable test taking behavior?	0.55	0.50
When the directions indicate each section of a standardized test is timed separately, which of the following is acceptable test taking behavior?	0.75	0.43
When planning classroom instruction for a unit on arithmetic operations with fractions, which type of test has more potential to be helpful?	0.43	0.50
Students' scores on standardized tests are sometimes inconsistent with their performance on classroom tests (e.g., teacher made tests of other in-class activities). Which of the following is NOT a reasonable explanation for such discrepancies?	0.40	0.49
Ms. Mwenda observed that Janet's score on national examinations indicate that she is performing better in mathematics concepts than in mathematics computation. This probably means:	0.28	0.45
On a standardized mathematics test Joseph received a standard score of 36. The standard deviation of the standard score scale is 10 units. What can Joseph's teacher conclude from this information?	0.66	0.48
Which of the following types of validity evidence is most valuable for defending use of a reading test for evaluating instructional effectiveness?	0.60	0.49
A country uses its national examinations as a basis for distributing resources to schools. To establish an equitable distribution plan, the criterion set by the National Examinations Board provides resources to every school system with student achievement test scores above the national average. Which cliché best describes the likely outcome of this regulation?	0.73	0.45
Test scores are not perfectly reliable due to errors associated with them. What is the appropriate course of action for persons using the scores?	0.81	0.40
Which of the following statements is true regarding test reliability?	0.45	0.50
A teacher compares the items on a standardized test to his course objectives to see if the test covers his objectives. What type of validity is the teacher concerned about?	0.79	0.41
When 62% of the candidates taking a test receive a failing grade, what can be concluded by about the quality of the test?	0.43	0.50
If a test was administered and found to be too difficult, one way to adjust the scores would be to add 10 points to each score. In so doing, this would affect the	0.49	0.50

Appendix B

Teachers Knowledge of tests

This survey attempts to measure your knowledge of standardized tests. A standardized test is a test whose administrative procedures, equipment and materials, and scoring rules have been fixed so that exactly the same testing procedure occurs at different times and places. Examples of this test are JCE and MSCE examinations. Please answer all Questions. Your answers to this survey are completely confidential.

Please read item 1 –20 carefully and circle the responses you think best answers the question.

1. What is the most important consideration in choosing a method for assessing student achievement?
 - a. Ease of scoring the assessment.
 - b. Ease of preparing the method of assessment.
 - c. Accuracy of assessing the attainment of instructional objectives.
 - d. Acceptance by the school administration.
2. When scores from a standardized test are said to be reliable, what does it imply?
 - a. Student scores from the test can be used for a large number of education decisions.
 - b. If the student retook the same test, he/she would have a similar score on each retake.
 - c. The test score is a more valid measure than teacher judgments.
 - d. The test score accurately reflects the content of instruction in classes where the test is administered.
3. Miss Zagwa wished to assess her students' understanding of the method of problem solving she had been teaching. Which assessment strategy below would be most valid?
 - a. Select a textbook that has a "teacher's guide " with a test developed by the authors
 - b. Develop an assessment consistent with an outline of what she has actually taught in class.
 - c. Select a standardized test that provides a score on problem solving skills.
 - d. Select an instrument that measures students' attitudes about problem solving strategies.
4. Which of the following actions would most likely increase the reliability of a multiple-choice end-of –unit examination in physical science?
 - a. Use a blueprint to develop test questions.
 - b. Change the test format to true-false questions.
 - c. Add more items like those already on the test.
 - d. Add an essay component.

5. Many teachers score classroom tests in a 100-point percent correct scale. In general, what does students' score of 90 on such a scale mean?
 - a. The student answered 90% of the items on the test correctly.
 - b. The student knows 90% of the instructional content of the unit covered by this test.
 - c. The student scored higher than 90% of all the students who took the test.
 - d. The student scored 90% higher than the average student in the class.
6. Students in Mr. Phiri's science class are required to develop a model of the solar system as part of their end of unit score. Which marking procedure below will maximize the objectivity of assessing these student projects?
 - a. When the models are in, Mr. Phiri identifies the most attractive models and give them the highest scores, the next most attractive get a lower score, and so on.
 - b. Mr. Phiri asks other teachers in the building to rate each project on a five-point scale based on their quality.
 - c. Before the projects are turned in, Mr. Phiri constructs a scoring key based on the critical features of the project and assign scoring weights to those features.
7. Performance on MSCE is expressed as a relative ranking with reference to a group. Scores on MSCE are therefore called
 - a. Content- referenced
 - b. Criterion- referenced
 - c. Norm -referenced
 - d. Curriculum -referenced
8. When the directions indicate each section of a standardized test is timed separately, which of the following is acceptable test taking behavior?
 - a. John finishes the vocabulary section early; he then rechecks many of his answers in that section.
 - b. Zion finished the vocabulary section early; she checks her answers on the previous test section.
 - c. Lucia finishes the vocabulary section early; she looks ahead at the next test section, but does not mark her answer sheet for any of those items.
 - d. Andrew did not finish the vocabulary section; he continues working on that when the testing time is up.
9. When planning classroom instruction for a unit on arithmetic operations with fractions, which type of test has more potential to be helpful?
 - a. An individually administered IQ test.
 - b. A norm-referenced elementary mathematics test.
 - c. A criterion-referenced elementary mathematics test.

10. Students' scores on standardized tests are sometimes inconsistent with their performance on classroom tests (e.g., teacher made tests of other in-class activities). Which of the following is **NOT** a reasonable explanation for such discrepancies?
- a. Some students freeze up on standardized tests, but they do fine on classroom tests.
 - b. Students often take standardized tests less seriously than they take classroom tests.
 - c. Standardized tests measure only recall of information while classroom tests measure more complex thinking.
 - d. Standardized tests may have less curricular validity than classroom assessment.
11. Ms. Mwenda observed that Janet's score on national examinations indicate that she is performing better in mathematics concepts than in mathematics computation. This probably means:
- a. Janet's score on the computation test was below average.
 - b. Janet is an excellent student in mathematics concepts.
 - c. The percentile bands for the mathematics concepts and computation tests do not overlap.
 - d. The mathematics concepts test is a more valid measure of Janet's quantitative reasoning ability.
12. On a standardized mathematics test Joseph received a standard score of 36. The standard deviation of the standard score scale is 10 units. What can Joseph's teacher conclude from this information?
- a. Joseph performed above average on the test.
 - b. Joseph performed below average on the test.
 - c. Joseph's performance on the test was not significantly different from the average.
 - d. Not enough information is give to interpret Joseph's performance.
13. Which of the following types of validity evidence is most valuable for defending use of a reading test for evaluating instructional effectiveness?
- a. Content validity
 - b. Face validity
 - c. External validity
 - d. Concurrent validity

14. A country uses its national examinations as a basis for distributing resources to schools. To establish an equitable distribution plan, the criterion set by the National Examinations Board provides resources to every school system with student achievement test scores above the national average. Which cliché best describes the likely outcome of this regulation?
- Every cloud has its silver lining.
 - Into each life some rain must fall
 - A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
 - The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.
15. Test scores are not perfectly reliable due to errors associated with them. What is the appropriate course of action for persons using the scores?
- Interpret only very high and very low scores
 - Double each student's score
 - Divide each student's score by two
 - Consider any score as an estimate of the characteristic of interest
16. Which of the following statements is true regarding test reliability?
- Longer tests are generally more reliable than shorter tests
 - Very hard tests lead to more reliable scores than tests of average difficulty
 - Reliability of scores increases as the range of scores decreases
 - All of the above statements are true
17. A teacher compares the items on a standardized test to his course objectives to see if the test covers his objectives. What type of validity is the teacher concerned about?
- Content validity
 - Construct validity
 - Criterion referenced validity
 - Face validity
18. When 62% of the candidates taking a test receive a failing grade, what can be concluded by about the quality of the test?
- The test is doing a good job identifying competent and not yet competent students
 - The test is too difficult and should be revised
 - The quality of the test is average
 - Not enough information is provided to judge the quality of the test
19. If a test was administered and found to be too difficult, one way to adjust the scores would be to add 10 points to each score. In so doing, this would affect the
- Variability of scores
 - Mean
 - Standard deviation of scores
 - Z scores

Appendix C
Teachers attitude towards standardized tests

Dear Respondent,

This survey attempts to measure your attitude towards standardized educational tests. A standardized test is a test whose administrative procedures, equipment and materials, and scoring rules have been fixed so that exactly the same testing procedure occurs at different times and places. Examples of this test are JCE and MSCE examinations. Your responses to this survey are completely confidential.

Part 1: Please record your responses to question 1 through 12 by circling a number along a six- point scale indicating your agreement to the statement presented. For all questions a response of 1 indicates “strong agreement”, a response of 6 indicates “strong disagreement” and intermediate responses indicate intermediate level of agreement.

1. Standardized tests are the best way to evaluate teachers’ effectiveness.

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

2. Standardized tests assess important educational outcomes

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

3. Standardized tests waste valuable instruction time

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

4. Standardized tests force teachers to “teach to the test”

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

5. Standardized tests are biased against females

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

6. Teachers whose students score higher on standardized tests should receive higher salaries.

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

7. Standardized tests serve a useful purpose.

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

8. Standardized tests are **NOT** valid indicators of student achievement.

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

9. I hate standardized tests.

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

10. Standardized test information should be used extensively to enhance instruction

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

11. I am very comfortable interpreting information from standardized tests.

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

12. Standardized tests encourage students to cheat.

1	2	3	4	5	6
strongly					strongly
agree					disagree

Part 2: Background questions

13. How many years experience as a classroom teacher do you have? _____ years

14. What is your qualification? (Tick one).

BED	UCE	DIPED
-----	-----	-------

15. Which statement below indicates your interest in becoming more proficient in interpreting test score?

- a. I am very interested
- b. I am somewhat interested
- c. I am really interested
- d. My level of proficiency is high; I don't need any more proficiency in student assessment

16. About how well do you expect your students to perform on MSCE and/or JCE this year?

1	2	3	4	5	6
far below					far above the
the national average					national average

17. Looking ahead several years, do you expect the performance of your students on MSCE and/or JCE to improve?

18. What could be done to improve students' motivation when preparing for Standardized tests?

19. What do you think are the main problems associated with testing in Malawi?

20. What could be done to improve tests administered by MANEB?

21. What information about tests would you like to have that could improve performance of your students in MANEB tests?

22. What do you think should be done to students that are found cheating?

23. What do you suggest should be done to teachers that are caught cheating during MANEB tests?

24. What do you think are the reasons why some students and teachers cheat during MANEB tests?

25. There is a proposal to replace JCE with school-based assessment. What are your opinions about this proposal?

26. Do you think that teachers in Malawi have the necessary skills to effectively carry

out school-based assessment?

27. What problems do you foresee in as far as school-based assessment is concerned?

28. In your opinion, what are the strengths of school-based assessment?

Thank you for your cooperation

