

Views of the Addis Ababa University Administration Heads and Candidates about IER Personnel Selection and Promotion Tests.

Abdinasir Ahmed*
Desalegn Chalchisa**

Introduction

The use of tests in personnel selection has been an area of special concern (Murphy and Davidshofer, 1994). Most human activities are directly related to testing. The instructor, the researcher, the administrator and other professionals in various areas require tests as effective tools for decision making. Specially, tests are an integral part of personnel selection and play a vital role in the process of hiring, promotion and training of employees for various work posts.

The former University Testing Center, now *Tests and Measurement Services Unit (TMSU)* of the Addis Ababa University, was established in 1966. It was established with the aim of helping the development of the University aptitude test, which could be used for admission purposes and to conduct research to improve the teaching - learning process and enhance tests and testing situations in the University. The Unit was merged with the Institute of Educational Research (IER) in 1987. Even today, most of its customers use its former name rather than its present name in their formal and informal communications.

The use of tests in hiring and promotion process is a widely accepted practice. For almost 50 years tests were believed to be valid predictors of job performance (Zeidner, 1994). Ability tests and tests of specific skills are widely used in personnel selection in both the public and private sectors (Murphy and Davidshofer, Zeidner, 1994). Employees selected by valid tests had shown better job skills and abilities. The equation for estimating costs and benefits of the selection program developed by Brogden Zeidner, 1994) demonstrated that tests

* lecturer, IER, Addis Ababa University.

** lecturer, IER, Addis Ababa University.

can save money. How much is saved depends on the prediction efficiency of the selection device, the proportion of applicants hired, and testing costs.

The effective utilization of employees hinges on matching the job and the individual. A job description states what an individual is expected to do and the degree of proficiency needed to do it. The first requirement in measurement is then to identify and describe the critical job skills. The second requirement is to determine ways of measuring the desired skills. Even if we were to select the correct job characteristics, they would be of little value if measurements representing them were expressed crudely or inaccurately (Zeidner, 1994).

The purpose of every psychological test is to measure differences among individuals (Ebel, 1979). Prediction is one of the functions of psychological tests, which is the primary purpose of personnel selection tests. Selection is a go/no-go decision. The term is most often applied to admission of students, hiring of employees and picking individuals for advanced responsibilities (Cronbach, 1990). The predictive value of a test depends on how well it can serve as an indicator of significant aspect of job performance. A close relationship must be demonstrated between the score of the applicants on the selection test and their performance on the job. If there is a close correspondence, that is, if those who have high scores on the test turn out to be good performers on the job, the test is serving its purpose. Such test is valid because it can be used to make accurate hiring decisions. Large scale, carefully planned validation studies have confirmed the power of employment tests for predicting performance and thus for increasing the productivity of the work force (Zeindner, 1994).

The predictive validity of IER tests was hardly studied. Desalegn (1991) made a study on the predictive validity of the G-III, G-II and G-I secretarial tests. The study showed that the G-III, G-II, and G-I English and Amharic typing tests and shorthand tests significantly predicted ($P < 0.05$) job performance as measured by supervisory ratings. The other tests (Arithmetic and English Tests) were not related to supervisory ratings at the 0.05 level of significance.

Jones (1973-2) expressed his dissatisfaction with the prospective users of the AAU Testing Center. He wrote that most of the users wanted the Testing Center

to develop and administer tests of prospective employees and to rank the candidates according to their scores. However, the need for follow up validation studies to determine the effectiveness of the tests and to revise them when appropriate, and the need to develop sound criteria measures have not been appreciated.

A correlation analysis between the General English Proficiency and Numerical Test developed by IER to be used in the selection of candidates for the professional certificate and Diploma in Management and the reported GPA in Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESLCE) showed significant correlation beyond 0.01 level of significance. This indicates the usefulness of the test for the selection of candidates to be admitted to the professional certificate and Diploma in Management (Desalegn, 1998).

The workshop conducted by IER (1987) on the *Integration of Educational Test and Measurement and Research Activities for the Ultimate Improvement of Teaching and Learning Process* forwarded the following major recommendations in order to improve IER tests:

- The validity and reliability of the IER tests should be revised and evaluated.
- The TMSU should prepare comparable tests for similar job classifications.
- Tests should be evaluated and revised once in every two years.
- Test scores should be made invalid after sometime.

In line with the last recommendation of the workshop, the regulation of Central Personnel Administration (CPA) states that a test score is valid only for a year.

The TMSU gives testing services to individuals and institutions in the country. It administers local tests to hire and promote personnel both for the Addis Ababa University and for other local organizations and ministries. Besides, it also administers foreign tests on behalf of foreign testing institutions based in UK and USA and conduct research to improve the existing tests and develop new ones.

The Addis Ababa University has been using the Center's tests in the hiring and promotion process for almost 30 years. The positions for which the University uses the tests are:

Secretarial Positions - The University uses the tests of the Unit for the following five secretarial positions ranging from copy typist to executive secretary. The kinds of the tests offered are:

- **Copy Typist** - The tests given for the copy typist position are English (comprehension, grammar, and usage); Arithmetic; English Typing (straight copy/speed and revised manuscript); and Amahric Typing (straight copy).
- **G-III Secretary and Clerk Typist** - For this position, the tests administered at the copy typist positions plus English Typing Tables and Amharic Typing revised manuscript are used. The contents of the common tests are not the same.
- **G-II Secretary** - At this position English Typing letters is added to the tests given for the G-III Secretary. The contents of the common tests are different.
- **G-I Secretary** - The tests given at this position are exactly the same as that of the G-II secretary tests with the exception of shorthand test. At this position candidates are required to take shorthand tests where they are dictated two letters for 70 words per minute for 4 minutes. They are expected to transcribe what they have been dictated and present their work accurately both in form and content. The norm used for this position is different from that of G-II.
- **Executive Secretary** - At this highest level secretarial position the same tests given at the G-I secretarial position are administered except for the shorthand tests. The norm is also different. The shorthand tests given at the executive secretarial position are dictated at the speed of 80 words per minute, i.e., faster than that of G-I shorthand tests.

Clerical Positions - The tests for clerical positions are accounting clerk, archive clerk, inventory clerk, issuing clerk and filing clerk. For these position tests of (usage, comprehension and grammar) are administered. The same tests are also used for the selection of candidates for the positions of purchaser, record officer, museum guide, house master, cash collector and storekeeper.

Accountant Positions - There are three accountant positions for which the University uses the IER tests. These are

- **Junior Accountant** - In order to select candidates for hiring or promotion to this position, tests of Arithmetic, English (Usage, Comprehension and Grammar), Accounting principles and Accounting orientation are used.
- **Junior Auditing**- To select candidates for this position in addition to the tests given for the selection of junior accountants, quantitative reasoning and auditing tests are administered.
- **Accountant** - Three tests are used for the selection of candidates at this position. These are quantitative reasoning, accounting orientation and accounting tests.

Other Positions - Positions at the lower levels including cleaners, gardeners, cooks, guards and messengers are administered with English test at elementary school level, General knowledge (in Amharic) and Arithmetic (in Amharic).

Recently, IER has developed new tests for accountant, clerical positions, public relations, cashiers, librarians, and storekeepers, and has started to use these tests in the personnel selection and promotion. Besides, aptitude tests have been developed and are in use for screening candidates for various training programs.

Purpose of the Study

From its inception up to the present, the Unit did not conduct an opinion survey of the views of test users. The present study is an effort to fill this gap and draw

important information which, it is hoped, will help to improve and enhance the professional services rendered by the Unit.

Thus, the purpose of the study is to explore the views of the Addis Ababa University administrators and the candidates who previously have taken the tests described above. It is believed that the views of the users and the candidates about the tests are valuable information in order to improve and update these tests.

Method of Data Collection

The subjects

The sample was taken from two groups: administrative department heads and faculty administrators and candidates who had previously taken IER tests and who are currently working in different offices of the University. The subjects from the first group were all the personnel administrative department heads and faculty administrators. The administrators of the Faculty of Science, Faculty of Medicine, School of Pharmacy and School of Graduate Studies were not included in this study. The subjects of the second group were purposely selected by using the list obtained from the Personnel Department of AAU. All together ten personnel administrative department heads and faculty administrators, and seven former candidates from the various positions were interviewed.

The Instrument

In this study, an interview was used to gather the data. Two interview forms were prepared. The first form, which had twelve open-ended questions, was designed for the administrative department heads and faculty administrators. The second form with eight open-ended questions was prepared for former candidates of IER tests. The questions were written in Amharic and administered by the researchers.

The interview guides for the administrators included items related to the relevance of the tests of IER. Specifically it included items related to skills and

abilities required by the different jobs, the processes of tests administration, scoring, reporting, and test security, the need for the development of new tests, weakness and strength of the IER tests and major improvements for the future.

The interview guide for the candidates consisted of items that required the candidates to provide similar responses as that of the administrators.

During the interview the candidates were tape-recorded. The results of the interview were analyzed by using action research approach.

Analysis of the Data

The data for this study was obtained from two groups of subjects using the interviews. One of the groups of subjects was the administrator and the other was the candidate from different positions who had formerly taken IER tests. This section presents the responses of these two groups.

Responses of the Administrators

Twelve open-ended questions related to IER tests were presented to the administrators. The responses of the respondents were tape-recorded and analyzed as follows.

The first question was factual question to know whether each department uses IER tests or not. The responses from all the various administrative department and faculty administrators indicated that they used IER tests for the hiring and promotion of permanent and contractual employees. They responded that tests were used in the selection of candidates for secretarial, clerical and accountant positions. They indicated that the personnel department of the University was responsible for handling this matter and it was through this department that they got the testing services for the selection of the workers.

The second question was about the usefulness of IER tests for the selection of candidates for the various positions in the University. The respondents in general agreed that the IER tests could be useful for the selection of employees. These

tests were essential because they objectively measured the abilities of employees (candidates) for various posts. The major problem they reported was that most of the candidates did not pass the tests. However, those who succeeded in passing the test were usually effective in their work. In addition, the respondents commented that since some of the candidates took same tests repeatedly until they passed it could be easy to pass the test without having the relevant abilities and skills.

The third question was about whether the specific IER tests were closely related to the specific positions or not. The heads of administrative departments responded that all tests did not have equal relevance to the actual work. For instance, secretarial and accounting tests had direct relevance. Whereas, some sections such as Arithmetic & English tests could test basic ability but could not measure special abilities relevant to the skills and abilities required by the job. Many of the respondents gave emphasis to the irrelevance of the Arithmetic tests and shorthand tests for the secretarial positions. The respondents felt that these irrelevant tests should be dropped and candidates should be evaluated on tests that reflected the requirements of the specific jobs. Some of the respondents stressed even those secretarial tests, which were administered at present needed to be improved. Some of the secretaries who succeeded in passing the tests did not have the skills for writing standard letters, report writing and proof reading. Some of them also agreed that the English language and typing tests were highly relevant for the selection of secretaries. With regard to clerical tests the respondents said that the tests of English and Arithmetic alone couldn't serve as a selection criterion. Professionals should develop relevant tests which reflect the skills and abilities required by each clerical position.

The fourth question was whether the candidates who were selected by the use of IER tests for particular positions were successful on the job or not. The respondents answered this question positively. Most of the respondents indicated that the majority of the candidates who passed the tests administered by the Unit were efficient in their work whereas few of them were not. Sometimes there were complaints of inefficiency. The inefficiency could be attributed to other factors outside the measuring power of the tests. Among these factors were lack of motivation and inadequate work conditions. Some of the employees who left

the University and joined other organizations were also found effective in their work.

Some respondents said that inefficiency came from the lack of professional training of these employees. Most of these employees came from comprehensive secondary schools and started work as clerks.

The fifth question was whether there were tests currently administered by IER should not be given by for the selection of administrative employees. The reaction of the respondents was that most tests were appropriate but there were tests that should be replaced by other tests. For instance, in secretarial tests the arithmetic tests, and shorthand should be replaced. Since shorthand was not used any more, there was no justification to administer these tests. In the place of these tests more practical tests should be given. For example, tests such as Business English, and communication skills should be developed and administered.

The sixth question was with regard to the processing of tests, namely: test administration, test scoring, reporting and test security. The subjects indicated that test administration, scoring and reporting are done professionally and this should continued. In addition, the interviewees said that computers should replace the use of manual typewriters for testing executive and G-I secretaries.

At present, due to technological advances, there are computers in every office. The majority of the high-level secretaries use computers in their day-to-day work. Therefore, it is important at least to give a test measuring computer abilities and skills at the executive and G-I secretarial positions. Moreover, they also commented that the tests for other positions should be updated regularly.

The seventh question was about the test administration, scoring, reporting and security of IER tests. The majority of the respondents appreciated the quality of test administration, scoring, reporting of the test results and the security of the tests. Regarding security matters, the subjects said that the tests were confidential and secured. However, sometimes, there were rumors about few candidates who got unfair results. These rumors were not supported by

evidence. They suggested that for the secretarial positions, in addition to practical secretarial tests, other relevant tests such as: office management, business, correspondence and communication in English tests should be developed.

The eighth question was about the need to develop new tests other than those available at the present. The need to develop new tests or improve the existing tests is one of the major tasks confronting the TMSU of IER. Old tests need to be revised in light of the demands of the job and the technological developments.

With respect to the need for revisions the respondents were of the opinion of changing the contents of the present secretarial tests. The IER is expected to design tests for high level secretaries which measure the abilities and skills of office practices such as secretarial ethics and filing systems and effective communications with clients. Some of the respondents commented that the auditing and the accounting tests administered by IER were closely related to actual auditing and accounting practices. They recommended the tests should include practical cases the candidates may be required to handle once on the job. The tenth question was about updating the norms of the tests and coverage of costs for the improvement of the tests. To this question, the respondents indicated that they supported if the norms used by the Unit were improved and updated in a way that did not affect the standards of the tests. The norms were set two decades ago and did not reflect the present advances in knowledge, therefore, they had to be revised. The norms should go in line with the change in the orientation of the candidates and situations. Furthermore, the interviewees commented that the norms should be revised at least every two years.

The eleventh question was about whether or not the interviewees were satisfied with the work of the TMSU of IER. They responded that they were satisfied with the professional services of the TMSU. They noted that it was the only Unit in the country, which gave such professional services. It was independent from any wing of the University and these qualities contributed to its good reputation and acceptance by the University.

Although all the respondents expressed their satisfaction with IER tests in general, they also mentioned what they thought were the weaknesses. The major weaknesses mentioned were:

- The same IER tests were administered repeatedly to the same candidates until they passed the test. There was no restriction in this regard. This may make it possible for the candidates to orally remember difficult items and get prepared well for the subsequent test. Even some candidates, ahead of the testing date, collaborated with each other to copy different portions of the test and bring the items together at the end of the test.
- With regard to secretarial tests, the quality of the typewriters was not the same. The typewriters were old and defective. It was believed that differences in performance might be partly attributed to the quality of the typewriters.

Responses of the Former Candidates

The interviewees in this category were given 8 open-ended questions related to the testing practices of IER. The interviewees were asked to respond to each question. The responses of the interviewees were tape - recorded and the analysis is presented below.

Five persons were interviewed: one from executive secretary, one from G-I secretary, one from G-II, one from G-III and the other from clerical accounting. The interviewees had taken IER tests for many times. However they could not recall the number of times they had taken IER tests.

The interviewees from secretarial position said that the IER tests did have close relationship with their work with the exception of shorthand, and arithmetic tests. They also said that manual typewriters should not be used especially for Amharic typing tests. They said many candidates with appreciable secretarial ability had failed IER tests because they had forgotten to use the manual Amharic

typewriters. This was due to the fact that the arrangement of the typewriter key was not the same for the computer and the manual typewriter.

The interviewee from the clerical position responded the tests were based on very old editions of books for clerks. The items included in clerical tests were hardly related to clerical jobs.

The interviewees from the secretarial position agreed that the English typing and English tests were useful to select more able candidates but they had doubt about the usefulness of arithmetic, shorthand and the Amharic typing tests for higher secretarial position. Among the subjects interviewed one of them indicated that although she had passed the test and promoted to G-II, she had been assigned to non-secretarial position. She commented that the tests should correspond to the actual work assigned to the employees and tests should not be taken for the sake of promotion alone.

In addition to the existing tests the interviewees from the secretarial position recommended that the tests should be developed in the area of office practices and secretarial ethics. The interviewee from the clerical position said that the existing tests should be improved along with books of new editions. It was suggested that high school textbooks in the vocational schools that deal with clerical works should be consulted in order to improve these tests.

All the former candidates appreciated IER with respect to test administration, scoring, confidentiality, impartiality and secrecy of IER tests.

The candidates mentioned the following as weaknesses

- The typewriters were very old and defective
- The tests were constantly used for long time.
- Because of obsolescence clerical tests did not match with the abilities and skills required by clerical positions.
- The same norms were in use for a long time.

They recommended that IER should endeavor to update the existing tests and develop computer tests for higher secretarial positions.

Major Observations and Suggestions for Future Action

On the basis of extensive data from the interviews of administration department heads, faculty administrators and former test takers, the following major observations were made.

- The Personnel Department used IER tests in hiring and promotion of employees to the accounting, auditing, secretarial, clerical and other related positions.
- The subtests of the test administered for the specific position were reported as not directly related to the abilities and specific skills the particular position required.
- The majority of the candidates who were hired or promoted by the use of IER tests were successful on the job.
- For the hiring and selection of secretaries the use of arithmetic and shorthand tests were not directly related. Tests measuring office practices and secretarial ethics would be more relevant than arithmetic and shorthand tests. Manual typewriters were not appropriate in testing G - executive secretaries and I.
- The IER tests and the norms for the tests were reported to have been overused without any revision for a long time.

The following suggestions were forwarded for improving the tests conducted by IER.

- The IER had to revise its tests; it should have several parallel tests, specially tests which were used repeatedly. To this end the University for the updating and improving and developing parallel tests should allocate budget.

- IER should be strengthened with trained and qualified staff and should collaborate with the Faculty of Education and other faculties to improve the quality of the tests.
- IER should improve the condition of typewriters by frequently checking and maintaining them and also provide computer-testing services for higher secretarial positions. Actually, IER has recently started similar actions to this effect

References

- Anastasi, A. (1988). **Psychological Testing**. (6th ed.). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1990). **Essentials of Psychological Testing** (5th. Ed.). New York: Harper and Colins Publishers, Inc.
- Desalegn Chalchisa (1991). The Predictive Validity of Tests Given by the Institute of Educational Research in the Addis Ababa University. Masters Thesis, School of Graduate Studies, Addis Ababa University, (Unpublished).
- _____ (1998). *The correlation between the results of English Proficiency and Numeracy tests of IER and the GPA in ESLCE*. **IER Flambeau**, 5(2):50-55.
- Ebel, R.L. (1979). **Essentials of Educational Measurement**. (3rd ed.). Englewood: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Institute of Educational Research (1987). **Proceedings of a National Workshop on Integration of Educational Test and Measurement Research Activities for the Ultimate Improvement of Teaching and Learning Processes**. IER, Addis Ababa University, (Unpublished).
- Jones, R. L. (1994). *Testing in Business and Industry*. In Sternberg R. (ed.). **Encyclopedia of Human Intelligence**. 2(1):1068-1073.
- Zeidner, J. (1994). *Testing in Business and Industry*. In Sternberg, R. (Ed.). **Encyclopedia of Human Intelligence**. 2(1):1068-1073.