Chapter 2

Review of Relevant Literature

Testing, in education and psychology, is an attempt to measure a person’s knowledge, intelligence, or other characteristics in a systematic way. There are many types of tests. Teachers give tests to discover the learning abilities of their students. They also give tests to see how well students have learned a particular subject. Some tests help people choose a vocation, and other tests help them understand their own personality.

Testing of English Language has a long history. Survey articles on the subject are published in at the end of every decade. Alan Davies (1979) is credited with having published the first one covering the decades of the 1960s and 1970s in Language Teaching and Linguistics Abstracts. Peter Skehan had conducted the second well-known survey in 1989 covering a decade from 1979 to 1989 and it was published later in the 1990s in one of the issues of the journal, Language Testing. The survey for the last decade of the 20th century, covering the period from 1989 to 1999 is not available yet.

There is a lot of published material on discrete point tests, tests designed to measure reading ability, criterion and norm referenced tests, integrative tests including cloze and dictation tests, tests for measuring spoken and written production, and tests designed to measure communication skills. Much of the printed space in well-known journals is devoted to a discussion on proficiency tests or tests devised to quantify communicative language ability. While the former type of tests were a great attraction in the 60s, 70s and
early 80s in the 20th century when the latter type of tests pushed them into the second place.

Achievement tests are important but these have hardly been researched adequately, probably because they aim at assessing a candidate’s attainment on a given syllabus or course unit. Almost all good books on language testing like those by Baker (1989), Lado (1961, 64), Valette (1977), Henning (1987), and Hughes (1989), for instance, have small portions of chapters on types of testing devoted to achievement tests but in certain cases achievement tests are discussed under some other head. Such a situation was one reason which had prompted us to take a very close look at the testing of achievement.

“Achievement tests”, notes Henning (1987: 6), “are used to measure the extent of learning in a prescribed content domain, often in accordance with explicitly stated objectives of a learning program. These tests may be used for program evaluation as well as for certification of learned competence.” Henning uses the spelling of the word “programme” as “program” in American English. We have taken this as the standard definition of an achievement test in this research and have devoted this chapter to a discussion on a whole range of published material on the subject until the end of the 20th century.


Also, there is some work available on the testing of achievement, something that this research work has also sought to do but through a survey of teacher-response to a checklist-cum-questionnaire. Canale (1985) focuses on proficiency-oriented achievement testing.

There is a lot of work available on assessment as a subject area. Gorman and Brooks (1986) worked on the assessment of oracy. Harrison (1986) examines the question of assessing text in action. Hutchinson (1986) has worked on assessment of English language skills in the classroom. Hyltenstam and Pienemann (eds) (1985) examined...

A not very recent entry into language testing is CAT or Computer Adaptive Testing. Most of the international tests like TOEFL, GRE, GMAT have switched over to CAT. Canale (1986) explores the promise and threat of computerized adaptive testing. Another area in language testing that has become the subject of extensive research is the cloze test. Alderson (1978) made a study of the cloze procedure with native and non-native speakers of English for a PhD at the University of Edinburgh (UK). Alderson (1979) examined the cloze procedure as a measure of proficiency in English as a foreign language. Bachman (1982) dealt with the trait structure of cloze test scores.

Hansen and Stansfield (1981) studied the relationship between field dependent-independent cognitive styles to foreign language achievement.

Testing of communicative competence and communicative language testing have become buzzwords in forums where language testing is discussed. Higgs and Clifford (1982) have an important contribution in this area in the form of a research piece titled “The push towards communication”. Bachman and Canale are two prolific writers on language testing whose contribution has added to making language testing an interesting
area of study. Canale (1984b) focuses on a communicative approach to language proficiency assessment in a minority setting. Canale (1990) discusses the measurement of communicative competence. Canale (1983a) deals with the shift from communicative competence to communicative performance. Canale and Swain (1980) have made a seminal contribution in the form of their research work on the theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. These two together published many articles that pertain to the study of proficiency and communicative language testing. Candlin (1986) attempts to explain the limits of testability in communicative competence. Carroll (1980), another leading personality in the area of language testing, made a seminal contribution under the title "Testing communicative performance". Douglas (1986) takes a good look at communicative competence and tests of oral skills. Hymes (1972) was one of those who pioneered the theory of "communicative competence" in negating Chomskyan theory of (linguistic) competence and performance. Low (1981) has a working paper on communicative testing as an optimistic activity. Morrow (1979) examines communicative language testing by looking at it rather closely, and wonders whether it is a revolution or an evolution. Morrow (1986) undertakes an evaluation of tests of communicative performance. Rivera (ed) (1984a) explores communicative competence approaches to the assessment of language proficiency. Stansfield (ed) (1986a) tries to examine the process leading to the testing of communicative competence. Swain (1985a) makes a case study of large-scale communicative language testing. Swain (1985b) offers a discussion on some roles of comprehensible input and output in the development of communicative competence. Wesche (1981) discusses communicative testing in a second language.
**Concepts in Testing**

Briere and Hinofotis (eds) (1979) have done some very interesting work on concepts in language testing by taking a closer look at some recent studies.

**Criterion-referenced Testing**


**Effect**

Politzer and McGroarty (1985), and Scott and Madsen (1983) take up for discussion the test effects.

**ESP**

Murphy (1980) worked on Engineering lecture discourse and listening comprehension as a part of a Report of English for Specific Purposes Project of King Abdul Aziz University.

**Factor analysis**

Factor analysis has entered into language testing via statistics. Long (1983b), Sholz et al (1980) examine the question of whether language ability is divisible or unitary.

**Fallacy**

Farhady (1979) is an excellent piece of work on the disjunctive fallacy between discrete point and integrative testing. *TESOL Quarterly*. 13. 3. 347-57.
**Foreign Language Acquisition**

Carroll (1981) has an excellent book to his credit on twenty-five years of research on foreign language aptitude. Skehan (1988) makes a comparison of first and foreign language learning ability.

**Formative Evaluation**


**Functional Language Testing**

Farhday (1980), taking a cue from Halliday, wrote a doctoral thesis on justification, development, and validation of functional language testing at the University of California in Los Angeles.

**Generalisability**


**Graded objectives**

Bloom et al (1956) have published groundbreaking work on the taxonomy of educational objectives, especially with regard to the cognitive domain. Page and Hewett (1987) take a good graded objectives in the UK which deals with language step by step.
IELTS

Carroll (1978) discusses specifications for an English language testing service in a preliminary work for the now famous IELTS for the British Council.

Individual differences

Genessee and Hamayan (1980) look at the role of individual differences in second language assessment. Skehan (1989) deals with the same subject but adds foreign language learning to it. Wolf et al (1986) is also a major work in this area.

Innovation

Alderson (ed) (1987b) deals with the question of whether or not the microcomputer helps in language testing in a special report for Language Testing Update.

Interlanguage

Bialystok and Sharwood-smith (1985) find that interlanguage is not a state of mind.

Item Response Theory

Issues

Knowledge sources
Bialystok (1982) offers some evidence for the integrity and interaction of two knowledge sources.

Measurement
Bachman (1986), Dulay et al (1978), Dulay et al (1975), Firth (1982) are two important additions to what we have in measurement.

Needs
Water (1983) tried to identify the language needs of overseas students in tertiary education in the United Kingdom for his PhD at the University of London.

Notions
Byrnes (1984) has made a very useful contribution in the area of grammar with reference to communicative competence, functions/notions in examining the implications for and from a proficiency orientation.
Oral Proficiency

Principles
Douglas and Selinker (1985) worked in the area of principles for language tests within the ‘discourse domains’ theory of interlanguage with regard to research, test construction, and interpretation.

Procedures

Proficiency
Reading Comprehension

Alderson (1987a, 1988), Fillmore (1982), Lewkowicz (1983), and Shohamy (1984a) have done some of the relatively important research work in the area of reading comprehension taking a look at readers, readers' response, comprehension etc.

Research


Review


Self-Assessment

Oskarson (1988) deals with the self-assessment of language proficiency providing a rationale and application for it.

Skills

Clark (1979) looks at direct vs. semi-directs tests of speaking ability, Powers (1986) at academic demands related to listening skills, Rea (1988) with the relationship between
grammatical abilities and aspects of communicative competence: with special reference
to the testing of grammar.

We have not discussed here any of the works on validation and reliability studies
because these do not really seem to have a direct bearing on this research work.