ABSTRACT

Assessment is widely recognized as an integral part of the learning process for students at all levels; therefore, it should be implemented according to the most effective and useful methods. Evolving Information and Communication Technology now offers ways of reducing the burden of assessment work on teaching staff, and gives pupils timely and directed feedback to complement and enhance the benefits associated with assessment.

Traditional assessments result in a high workload for teachers, and yet may do little to encourage learners or improve their ability to learn. Computerization of second language tests has been of interest among language testing experts for the past 15 years, but few empirical studies have evaluated the comparability of the computerized and conventional second language tests. This study investigates empirically the potential of applying computerized assessment in Iraqi schools so as to assess its effectiveness in comparison with the current one (i.e. the conventional method).

To achieve the aim of this study, the following hypothesis has been posed: There is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the sample when tested by the computer and their mean score when tested by the conventional method, i.e. paper-and-pencil.

To verify this hypothesis, two versions of a test have been carried out in this study, one on computer and the other on paper. Distinguished schools have been chosen for this work since computer labs are available there. The sample of the study consists of forty pupils chosen randomly from the first-year intermediate grade to sit both tests. The final test administration comes after a pilot administration done on a sample of thirty pupils in the same grade.

The scores of the final administration have been correlated with those of the sample in the English subject at the end-of-year examination of the academic year 2009-2010, which stand as an external criterion. The statistical tools of mean score, t-value, correlation coefficient and reliability coefficient have been used to report, present and interpret the results of the two tests and help make a comparison between them. The empirical validity coefficient of the computerized test is 0.546, and that of the paper test is 0.847. The reliability coefficient of the computerized test is 0.889, whereas the reliability of the paper test is 0.921.

The findings of the study indicate that the pupils' level is generally good obviously because the study is dealing with distinguished schools. The results also indicate that the difference between the mean scores of the two tests is significant in favour of the paper test, being (2.935).

Among the conclusions the study arrived at are the following:

- The computerized assessment has found general acceptance by the testees as it enhances their motivation, for example using coloured backgrounds for questions, giving each testee a computer or a laptop to sit the test, and showing the results of the test immediately after having it.
- The results have shown that some language testing techniques like grid, cloze, labelling, and rearrangement have proved to be more favourable by most pupils in this study than other techniques like transcoding, error-recognition, and scanning simultaneously two texts, rather than one.
- The results have shown that reading from the screen seems somewhat more difficult than that from paper, as the former may probably cause discomfort to the eyes. This has been confirmed by a number of testees after having the test.
- The mechanisms of answering questions on the computer including timing, inability of going back to previous items or questions, and inability of

changing answers once they are confirmed, have contributed to the weak results on Computer-Assisted Assessment compared to that on Paper-and-Pencil test. It seems that pupils need training in decision making and self-confidence.

In the light of these findings, the researcher recommends that despite the slightly better results pupils have got on the traditional test, technology will open wide scopes for education in Iraq in future. As a result, this study may be regarded as the first step towards encouraging people to use technology in testing English as a foreign language in Iraq.