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PREDICTIVE VALIDITY OF THE CELT

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Editor's Note: The following report on a study of the predictive validity of the CELT (A Comprehensive English Language Test for Speakers of English as a Second Language—McGraw-Hill Book Company) is particularly interesting because of the setting in which the study was made. While most previous studies of the ability of English language tests to predict subsequent success in an academic program have been carried out at schools where ESL students eventually enter classes in which they are a minority, competing with native speakers of English, at American Samoa Community

College nearly all the students speak English as their second language, yet they attend classes in which English, for the most part, is the language of instruction. In such a setting, it is not surprising that the ability of an English language test to predict later success in a variety of academic subjects would be greater than other studies in different situations have indicated.

Most colleges which admit large numbers of ESL students use tests of English language proficiency for selection/placement purposes. Clark (1977) has emphasized the urgent need for validation studies to increase the practical usefulness of tests such as TOEFL and CELT. For example, it would be helpful to be able to predict the probability of student success in different academic programs or to estimate the amount of remediation needed by students prior to entrance into regular college programs. The study reported here is a portion of a student follow-up study conducted at American Samoa Community College in late 1977. It addresses the predictive validity of the CELT Structure and Vocabulary tests. Both tests were found to correlate significantly with "performing well in class" as measured by the percentage of A's and B's (% A & B) received by students. The tests did not predict the total number of credits earned or completion of an Associate degree.

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Research aimed at establishing the predictive validity of ESL tests with respect to future academic performance has tended

to be inconclusive. Pack (1972) reported that the TOEFL and Michigan both correlated significantly with grades earned in beginning English classes. However, she found no significant relationship between these tests and other criterion variables, including further English classes and completion of a degree. Burgess and Greis (1970) compared the Michigan and TOEFL with student grade point average (GPA). Despite a small sample size (17), they obtained significant correlations between GPA and both the TOEFL and the Michigan.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

A follow-up study was conducted of 237 students who first entered American Samoa Community College (ASCC) in 1974. The study was based on data available in student personnel records and subsequent interviews with the individuals. The validation study reported here is a subpart of this larger study.

ASCC is an open-door institution. Students are admitted regardless of the results of placement testing. The student body is composed of 20% who are bilingual or native speakers of English. The remaining 80% are ESL students, primarily speakers of Samoan. Since such a large proportion of the student body speaks English as a second language, we were interested in the extent to which future student performance could

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be predicted from a student's initial English proficiency. Three measures of student success (criterion variables) were identified: (1) Completing many credits; (2) Performing well in class (% A & B); (3) Earning a degree. These criterion variables were each correlated with three predictor variables: (1) CELT Structure; (2) CELT Vocabulary;

(3) CELT Structure and Vocabulary combined.

Complete data for the above variables was available for 150 students. These 150 students represent nearly the full range of English language proficiency among applicants to the institution. Since no one is denied admission, the only students excluded from the study were those who deselected themselves by dropping out without completing even one course. The fact that the range of scores is not appreciably restricted in this study is an important point. At institutions where a minimum score is required for admission, the lowest scoring students are not afforded the opportunity to attempt college work and probably to fail. This factor artificially reduces any correlation between scores and subsequent performance criteria. In such cases, non-significant correlations might actually be significant if appropriate corrections for restriction of the range were applied.

RESULTS

The correlations between the three CELT scores and the three criterion variables are presented in Table I. It is apparent that neither of the CELT tests alone or in combination is able to significantly predict either the number of credits earned or the achievement of an ASCC degree. However, the CELT tests are significant predictors of class performance (as measured by the percent of A's and B's earned).

DISCUSSION

Several important considerations must be kept in mind when viewing these results. First, classroom performance as measured by % A & B is a criterion which is not perfectly reliable or valid. The *validity* of this measure is threatened by the fact that different courses are graded on different standards. A student might earn an A from one teacher and a C from another for equivalent effort and learning. In addition, some teachers rarely award A's or B's while others award all A's and B's. (The average ASCC instructor, in Fall semester, 1976, awarded 47% A's and B's.) The *reliability* of this measure (% A & B) is threatened by inconsistency of student performance. Students rarely per-

Correlations Between CELT and Criterion Measures

N = 150

	Earned Degree	Credits Completed	Percent A's & B's	CELT S + V	CELT Vocabulary
CELT Structure	.02	-.03	.35*	.92*	.68*
CELT Vocabulary	.10	.02	.37*	.93*	
CELT S + V Structure + Vocabulary	.05	-.02	.38*		

* $p < .01$

TABLE I

form equally well in all classes; the able student may do poorly in a given class due to factors separate from English language or general academic ability.

A second consideration that undoubtedly served to depress the obtained correlation is the absence of recorded F or No Credit grades at ASCC. Students who do not pass a course or who withdraw have no record of their educational attempts on their transcripts. The non-recording of non-passing student performance restricts the range of the criterion measure and, again, causes the obtained correlations to be conservative.

While the range restriction problem due to non-recorded failures could not feasibly be solved, the lack of reliability in the criterion is correctable. The reliability of the measure % A & B may be estimated using the intra-class correlation coefficient. This coefficient also provides an estimate of the maximum validity of the measure. The upper limit of the validity of grades, for these students, is thus estimated as .73. Using this information, the corrected for attenuation correlations between the

criterion (% A & B) and the CELT Structure, Vocabulary, and Structure plus Vocabulary tests are .47, .43, and .44 respectively. We feel that a clear relationship has been established between a student's English language proficiency, as measured by the CELT, and the quality of his subsequent academic performance.

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