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Measuring English Language Written Performance in Algerian Higher Education: The Challenges of Subjective Scoring

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Abstract

Scoring Learners' written performance on the test is one of the most challenging issues in the field of language measurement. These challenges are relevant to test takers' written production and the way this production is rated and evaluated. On the one hand, Classical Test Theory hypothesizes that the scores obtained by learners on written tests reflect both their level of written ability as well as the factors which are external to this ability, but do affect their writing performance, whether in the positive or in the negative aspect. On the other hand, unlike in objective testing where raters tend to assess test takers' responses against prearranged sets of standards, measuring second language written ability requires raters to assign scores based on their own conceptualization of the written tasks. This implies that any rater who is invited to participate in subjective scoring is liable to be inconsistent in his/her judgments. To reinforce the quality of reliability and to adjust the judges' variability in subjective rating, the measurement specialists recommend the implementation of adjudication methods, the incorporation of rating scales as well as the Classical Test Theory score computation techniques. This paper attempts to review the literature relevant to scoring learners' written performance and to examine the extent to which the recommendations of the specialists in the field are implemented by the raters of written tasks.

Keywords: Measurement - Rating – Reliability - Scores - Written Performance