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Piloting a method for comparing examination question paper demands

Conference Paper Abstract

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Abstract

Background

International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) qualifications are sat by candidates from around the world. To help maintain examination security the world is divided into three time zones each with a different question paper. It is important that the demand of the question papers is similar over sessions and/or between time zones.

This research aims to pilot a method for comparing the demands of an academic qualification over sessions and/or between time zones.

Method

The research was conducted using IGCSE Geography examined in four sessions and three time zones.

Six experts familiarised themselves with the question papers and a demands framework. Each expert made three paired comparison judgements which required participants to decide which of two stimuli fit a criterion; in this case which question paper is more demanding according to a demands framework. The experts also listed examples of how they used the framework. Researchers summarised the responses. Next the experts made paired comparison judgements in a complete design. The experts subsequently completed an evaluative questionnaire.

Crisp and Novaković (2009) piloted a method for comparing the demands of assessments from vocational qualifications. In a departure from their original method Rasch was used to model the paired comparison data and place the question papers on a scale from the most to the least demanding. Approximate 95% confidence intervals were used to indicate which question papers were significantly more or less demanding than average.

Findings

The analysis clearly showed which question papers were significantly more or less demanding than average. No time zone or session was consistently affected by significantly demanding or undemanding question papers. Any variations in question paper demands may be addressed when grade boundaries are set.

The experts felt that the initial judgements familiarised them with the materials and that the summary supported subsequent judgements. Most experts felt that the method was satisfactory for comparing question paper demands in an academic qualification. Therefore, it is recommended that this method is used in future research.

Reference

Crisp, V. & Novakovic, N. 2009. Are all assessments equal? The comparability of demands of college based assessments in a vocationally related qualification. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 14, 1-18.