

**CORRELATION OF THE OFFICIAL GENERAL
EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TEST WITH THE
TENNESSEE PROFICIENCY TEST**

DAN LOREN REES

CORRELATION OF THE OFFICIAL GENERAL EDUCATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT TEST WITH THE TENNESSEE
PROFICIENCY TEST

A Research Paper
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Dan Loren Rees

May, 1984

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Dan Loren Rees entitled "Correlation of the Official General Educational Development Test with the Tennessee Proficiency Test." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

Barland E. Blair
Major Professor

Accepted for the
Graduate Council:

William H. Ellis
Dean of the Graduate School

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to offer thanks to Dr. Garland Blair, Professor of Psychology, Austin Peay State University, for the time he offered as well as allowing me to review some of the articles which he had collected on this subject.

Thanks is also expressed to Mr. Carlton Robbins, Director of the Adult Education Department of the Clarksville Montgomery County School District, for his suggestions for the study as well as his help in administering the GED test.

Sincere appreciation is also extended to the author's wife for her typing of the paper and for her gentle persuasions for me to complete this study. Her help and understanding are also appreciated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	2
The Proficiency Test	2
History	2
Social Implications	6
Employment	7
Legal	8
The General Educational Development Test . . .	8
3. METHOD	11
Subjects	11
Tests	11
Analysis of Data	11
4. RESULTS	13
5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	14
REFERENCES	18

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Means and Standard Deviations	16
2. Correlation Matrix of the TSPT with the GED	17

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The students in the State of Tennessee who complete high school after the 1982 academic year have to pass the Tennessee State Proficiency Test (TSPT) which covers four basic skill subjects (Math, Spelling, Language and Reading). In March of 1983, a memorandum explaining the state policy was sent out by the Tennessee State Department of Education to the various community school district personnel (McElrath, 1983). The memorandum explained the state policies concerning graduation requirements. The memorandum indicated that students who had earned sufficient credits but had failed the TSPT in their five tries could, after graduation, take and pass the General Education Development Test (GED) and exchange their GED diploma for their regular high school diploma.

There are no data available which gives any indication of the extent to which this policy might influence the actual number of high school diplomas which could be issued to students who have failed the TSPT during their high school years. The present study addresses this question.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Proficiency Test

History. The minimum competency testing programs, referred to as the state proficiency test in Tennessee, have become increasingly popular in recent years. In 1976, only eight states had some form of minimum competency testing (MCT), but by 1980, thirty-eight states had some form of minimum competency testing program (Lerner, 1981). Most of this growth in competency testing came between 1976 and 1977. By 1977, thirty-three states had such tests for elementary and secondary students with most or all the other states having legislation pending or state board studies underway (Pipho, 1978). After 1977, fewer states adopted MCT programs because they were studying the effects (hopefully positive) that the MCT programs had on the educational performance of the students.

Pipho (1978) explained that the states usually allowed the local school board districts to establish their own graduation requirements. However, with the MCT the state superseded to set some overall state requirements. Arthur E. Wise (1978, p. 398) said, "When the local majoritarian processes fail to deliver equal opportunity, those who suffer discrimination invoke higher authorities." The students who, because of low standards, felt educationally discriminated against appealed to states where minimum competency testing programs

were implemented. The low achievement of many students became a political issue. Many believe that the rapid adoption of competency testing was due to government officials trying to gather votes (Pipho, 1978).

Not only has the state had input into the local districts, but there has been Federal input as well. In 1977, legislation was introduced in Congress that would stop national funding of states that did not have basic standards of educational proficiency in reading, writing, and math (Wise, 1978). It has been proposed that there be a national MCT program prepared and offered for the local school districts to use, if desired, but not mandatory. If this becomes the case, it is not clear what kind of pressure would be put on the local boards by the local parents to use this national test (Cawelti, 1978). As of March, 1984, several bills had been introduced in Congress which would directly involve the federal government in minimum competency testing, but no laws have been passed.

However, several states have taken legislative action which tends to move the responsibility of setting standards from the local to the state level. The state of California has taken over the right to grant diplomas with no reference at all to what the local school districts may require (Marlow, 1976). They have gone so far as to make available to 16- and 17-year-old students their diploma upon passage of the California MCT which lasts about four hours. The MCT programs in most states are not calling for early cuts for students, but are

striving for that American dream of a complete education for ALL (Pipho, 1977).

Comparing states is not even possible and comparing school districts within a state is very, very risky (Pipho, 1982). Concerned people in the local area such as parents, taxpayers, employers, government officials, and critics of the school system have gone to the state legislators seeking legislation in improving literacy and solving the problems of low achievement. Government officials maintained that the state imposed requirements were only responses to the constituencies requests (Miller, 1978).

Many people in the United States believe that the high school diploma has little meaning today because students are ill-prepared to enter the work force or college upon graduation from high school (Miller, 1978; Popham and Lindheim, 1981). The public wants proof that the educational system is doing its job and MCT seems to provide that proof. The MCT is one route which most states are taking to give the high school diploma the meaning of achievement which has been lost. James Popham suggests that even though tests are imperfect, they are sufficiently accurate to separate students that are competent or incompetent in areas of basic skills (Popham, 1981). Even though the minimum scores on the competency tests might be arbitrary, they provide a basis for evaluation (Findley, 1973).

Enoch (1973) suggested that by placing responsibility on

students, by way of the MCT and education, their learning will improve. Most states have proficiency tests which place the responsibility to learn upon the students.

MCT programs have been instituted in stages with check point exams in grades 2, 5, 7, and 9, and each year or semester thereafter (Henderson, 1978). If the test is not passed, remedial classes are then set up to bring the students back up to a minimum level. These tests are used as a requirement for high school graduation, grade level promotions, or, as noted earlier, to determine the need for remediation to bring students back to some established minimum (Mills, 1980). Pipho (1977) said:

Equal education opportunity is considered a noble goal for society as a whole, but parents are really more interested in having the schools bring their children up to grade level in reading, writing and arithmetic before they are promoted to the next grade level or graduate from high school. (p. 516)

In the article "Consideration for Retention in the Elementary Grades" by Margaret J. Hallenbeck (1981), the author explains that there might be some humiliation in being retained, but some children are already suffering great amounts of humiliation because of their inability to compete successfully with their classmates. These underachievers are likely to continue through school, which could give them a lack of self confidence. All parents want their child or children to be the best and if

retention is needed and if parents, teacher and student look at it with the right attitude it can be helpful. In some studies on non-promotion done as early as 1911 and again in 1926, 1928, 1936 and 1956, it was shown that only 20% of those retained improved their performance, while 40% showed no improvement and the other 20% did worse (Cawelti, 1978).

Social Implications. As stated earlier, many people feel that the high school diploma does not mean much. This is where MCT's step in. The cost of good MCT programs appears to be high, but the cost to society of having schools produce incompetent students in the areas of basic skills must also be considered. James Popham suggests that the discovery of students (mainly more minority students) that are failing MCT is based on the fact that these students are currently receiving an inadequate education (Popham, 1981). Whether underachievement is the school's fault or the student's fault, it does not matter. The MCT can show areas where the students are having problems, enabling the educators to reclassify them and teach them. The article, "The Minimum Competency Testing Movement-- Social, Scientific and Legal Implications," explains what implications there are to society (Lerner, 1981). With the decreasing number of unskilled jobs and increasing numbers of semi-illiterate or illiterate high school graduates, minimum competency testing can benefit both individuals and society as a whole. Most people feel that MCT is the only form of reform.

Employment. In 1975, the Gallup Poll asked adults, "What requirements, if any, would you set for graduation from high school for those students who do not plan to go on to college but who plan to take a job or job training following graduation" (Lerner, 1981). The American adults responded as follows: 96% said that students should be able to read well enough to follow an instruction manual; 92% said that the students should be able to write a letter of application using correct grammar and spelling; and 87% felt it important to be able to solve basic math problems. The Gallup Poll discovered later in 1976 that 65% of the adults sampled thought that a nation-wide test should be passed before the high school diploma is received. It has been estimated by Lerner (1981) that 20-25% of high school seniors are illiterate or semi-illiterate. Evidence does not support the claim, which has been upheld by most non-proponents of MCT programs, that the students' self-esteem will be damaged if they don't receive a diploma upon leaving high school after twelve years of schooling.

The number of blue or white collar unskilled jobs fell from about 15% of all jobs at the turn of the century to a low point of about 6.1% in 1970. The MCT programs are available to improve the basic skills and enable people to become more skilled. MCT programs suggest only what is wrong and not how to fix it. It has been shown that time on task is related to achievement levels. The MCT programs increase the time on task and the effort spent working on basic skills. These programs

offer some hope of success for the students.

Legal. Wise (1978) stated that there would be many legal problems with MCTs. He suggested that the MCT programs would open the doors to lawsuits about what the students should be able to do but cannot. He went on to say that there would be lawsuits, in the judicial version, of educational malpractice. Action already taken in Florida's court system requires that MCT must test only those things that have been taught in the school and that it must be fair (Popham and Lindheim, 1981). This ruling implies that lessons last taught in the sixth grade must be presented and reviewed by the teacher and student just before a test can be given in the 11th or 12th grade (Pullin, 1981).

The General Education Development Test

In a memorandum sent to superintendents of school districts and state special schools, and principals or headmasters of public and state approved nonpublic schools, Robert L. McElrath, Commissioner of the Tennessee State Department of Education (McElrath, 1983), made it known that the state would accept the passing of the General Educational Development Test (GED) as equal to the passing of the TSPT exam. This would only apply to those students who had sufficient credit hours and had failed any part of the four part proficiency exam during all five attempts. The students to whom these guidelines apply could then take the GED test and, if passed, exchange their GED diplomas for their regular high school diploma.

The history of the GED has been explained in a study done by the New York State Education Department and other departments thereof (1981). The GED was first produced in 1942 to help post-war veterans. By 1959, more non-veterans than veterans were taking the test. It was first called the Veteran's Testing Service, and then in 1963 the name was changed to the General Education Development Testing Service. The GED uses national norms developed in 1945, 1955 and 1977 by testing high school seniors. About 20% of those seniors tested scored below the passing score of 35 on each test or a 45 average on the five tests. The New York State Education Department has estimated that less than half of the population of the United States has a high school diploma (New York State, 1981). According to the 1970 census, 80,000,000 adults over the age of 26 do not have a high school diploma. More and more young people are dropping out of school or are failing to receive a diploma while industries, employment centers and the Armed Forces are placing greater and greater emphasis on this credential. Just under one half (47.5%) of the people pass the GED test when taking it for the first time. There are more people taking it now because it is the acceptable thing to do. Reading is emphasized throughout the test, requiring an eighth grade reading level mastery.

In the Newsfront section of the PHI DELTA KAPPAN, 1981) some interesting statistics about the GED have been shown. In 1980, one half of all those tested with the GED were under 21 years of age with the average being 25 years old. The average

in 1970 was 29.1 years old. While most people (74%) tested in 1980 were white, only 70% had completed the 10th grade and about 75% of those tested had average or better high school grades.

Those who pass the GED test, according to Lawrence Moore (1982), are more employable, more productive in terms of income, usually seek further education or training, and tend to be more responsible toward civic responsibilities (they tend to vote more). This seems to be somewhat similar to what was said earlier about the MCT programs. The official predictor test for the GED is the official GED Practice Test which was used for this study (New York State Education Department, et al, 1981).

Chapter

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects used for this research were thirty-seven seniors from the four high schools in Montgomery County, Tennessee. These seniors had not passed all parts of the Tennessee State Proficiency Test, and therefore would not be eligible for a regular high school diploma. Twenty-three (62%) were male and 14 (38%) were female.

Tests

The TSPT had been administered earlier by local school personnel. The Official GED Practice Test (GED) was administered to groups of students in their local school during a two-week period in April of 1983. The test was administered in the morning and three hours were allowed for completion of the tests. Forms A and B were used in a group setting.

The TSPT yields four scores: mathematics, spelling, language and reading. The scores are expressed as a percentage of the items on the test which are answered correctly. The highest score for each part was used. The GED yields six scores: writing, social studies, science, reading, mathematics and a total battery score.

Analysis of Data

The relationships among all possible pairings of these scores were examined using Pearson product moment correlations.

These correlations were computed by the Digital Equipment Company's VAX II/780 computer at Austin Peay State University. The alpha level of .05 for a two-tailed test was used to determine levels of significance.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The means and standard deviations of the 10 scores are reported in Table 1 of the Appendix. As would be expected from such a selected sample, the mean is lower than average on both tests and the standard deviations were smaller. Under these conditions, the low correlations reported in Table 2 are not surprising. Only 10 of the 45 correlations were significant at the .05 level, and only one of these was between a TSPT subtest and a GED subtest. The reading score on the TSPT correlated significantly with the total battery score on the GED.

As indicated earlier, this sample of students made very low scores on both tests. In fact, they had failed the TSPT even after four attempts. Also, none of the students attained a passing score on any of the GED subtests. It is doubtful that many students who are denied a regular high school diploma because of low scores on the TSPT will be able to get a GED diploma (McElrath, 1983).

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Tennessee State Proficiency Test did not correlate with the GED practice test for this sample. This is probably due to the limited range of scores on the two tests. The students' guidance counselors did not expect these students to pass their fifth and last attempt at passing the proficiency test. The scores on the GED may not be representative of their best work. As the test was administered, some of the students seemed to be bored with the test and marked answers without reading the questions. Some of them completed 30 to 50 reading questions in less than 15 to 20 minutes when for the average reader it would have taken at least an hour. One student finished the complete three hour test in a little over one hour probably because he could not read it. Upon starting the test he said that he could not read, and during the test he asked for an explanation of the meaning of many of the words. It would be beneficial to have a random sample of students take both tests. Apparently these students need more educational help before they take the GED test if they are to have any chance of passing.

TABLES

Table 1
TSPT and GED Sample Test
Means and Standard Deviations

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Means</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
1. Proficiency Test - Math	72.32	8.48
2. Proficiency Test - Spelling	81.00	10.97
3. Proficiency Test - Language	68.97	6.92
4. Proficiency Test - Reading	76.57	8.85
5. GED - Writing	36.51	5.20
6. GED - Social Studies	36.35	8.95
7. GED - Science	37.00	5.77
8. GED - Reading	38.38	7.82
9. GED - Math	34.94	4.38
10. GED - Total	36.62	4.14

REFERENCES

- Cawelti, C. National Competency Testing, A Bogus Solution.
PHI DELTA KAPPAN, Volume 59, No. 9, May, 1978, pp. 619-625.
- Enoch, J. C., Medesto, California: A Return to the Four R's.
PHI DELTA KAPPAN, Volume 59, No. 9, May, 1978, p. 609.
- Findley, J. Westsides Minimum Competency Graduation Requirements:
 A Program That Works. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, Volume 59, No. 9,
 May, 1978, p. 614.
- Hallenbeck, M. J. Considerations for Retention in the Elementary
 Grades. PHI DELTA KAPPAN RECORD, February, 1981, p. 66.
- Henderson, D. J., Gary, Indiana: High School Diplomas with
 Meaning. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, May, 1978, Volume 59, No. 9,
 p. 613.
- Lerner, B. The Minimum Competency Testing Movement--Social,
 Scientific, and Legal Implications. American Psychologist,
 Volume 36, No. 10, October, 1981, pp. 1057-1066.
- Marlowe, J. Testing, Testing . . . Can You Hear Me? PHI
DELTA KAPPAN, Volume 58, No. 3, November 1976, pp. 256-257.
- McElrath, R. L. (Commissioner Memorandum of the Tennessee
 State Department of Education, March 16, 1983.)
- Miller, B. S. Minimum Competency Testing: A Report of Four
Regional Conferences, January, 1978. (ERIC Document
 Reproduction Service No. ED 156 724).

Mills, G. H. State Minimum Competency Testing Programs; Resource Catalog; Final Report. February 28, 1980.

(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 190 657).

Moore, L. A Follow-up Study of Adults Who Were Administered the General Educational Development Test in Kentucky During 1976. June, 1982. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 222 583).

Newsfront Department. GED: Earning High School Credentials by Test. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, September 1981, p. 6.

New York State Education Department, Albany Bureau of General Education Curriculum Development; New York State Education Department, Albany Division of Continuing Education. Managing the GED Program for the High School Equivalency Candidate, 1981. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 205 570).

Pipho, C. Minimal Competency Testing: A Look at State Standards. Educational Leadership, Volume 34, No. 7, April, 1977, pp. 516-520.

Pipho, C. Minimum Competency Testing in 1978: A Look at State Standards. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, May, 1978, Volume 59, No. 9, p. 585.

Pipho, C. Variety Marks State Efforts in Testing. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, November, 1982.

Popham, W. J. and Lindheim, E. Implications of a Landmark Ruling on Florida's Minimum Competency Test. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, September, 1981, pp. 18-20.

Popham, W. J. The Case for Minimum Competency Testing.

PHI DELTA KAPPAN, October, 1981, Volume 63, No. 2, pp. 89-91.

Pullin, D. Minimum Competency Testing and the Demand for Accountability. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, September, 1981, pp. 20-22.

Wise, A. E. Minimum Competency Testing: Another Case of Hyper-Rationalization. PHI DELTA KAPPAN, May, 1978, Volume 59, No. 9, p. 596.