PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AND THE USE OF TESTS: NEEDS FOR ETHICAL CONSIDERATION IN TESTING AND EVALUATION

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Abstract
This paper is an attempt to examine the needs for ethical consideration in testing and evaluation, It argues that all in all, there are basically three areas of ethical consideration which pervade the literature; (i) Fairness of test-based decisions; (ii) The utility of tests for evaluating education and (iii) the implications of using test scores as labels for categorizing individuals. The paper also examines in some detail some other critical ethical issues like freedom from coercion, informed consent; limited deception; adequate debriefing; confidentiality and protection of privacy, It ends up by advocating monitoring of the use of these tools for testing and evaluation in order to avoid their abuse and misuse.

Keywords: Testing, evaluation, assessment, ethical issue

Introduction
Personnel decision such as selection, promotion and transfer are major events in individuals' careers. These decisions are often made with the aid of tests, interviews, behavioral exercises, performance appraisals and other techniques developed by industrial-organizational psychologists (Hermandez-Orallo, Dowe, & Hermandcz Lloreda, 2013). These psychologists therefore must be concerned with the issues of fairness, propriety, individual rights, as well as with other ethical issues. For example, does collecting information for personnel decision invade an individual's privacy? Who, for instance, should have access to such information and how long should it be retained? (London & Bray, 1986). This paper is an attempt to examine the needs for ethical consideration in the use of psychometric tests generally and in industrial organizational psychology in particular. Afred Binet (1905), is believed to have pioneered work in the area of the use of tests for assessment and evaluation. Binet and others, who were to follow, were optimistic that testing would help democratize society and minimize decisions based on arbitrary criteria of sex, race, nationality, privilege or physical appearance (Gcrigg ind Zimbardo, 2005).

However, despite these lofty goals, there is no area of psychology more controversial than testing and evaluation.

There are basically three areas of ethical consideration that are central to the literature viz:- (1) fairness of test based decisions, (2) the utility of tests for evaluating education, (3) and the implications of using test scores as tables to categorize individuals.

Fairness of Test-Based Decisions

Critics who are concerned with fairness of testing practices argue that the costs or negative consequences may be higher for some test takers than for others (Bond, 1995). The costs are quite high, for example, when tests on which minority groups receive low scores are used to keep them out of certain jobs. In some places such as the United States applicants seeking civil service jobs must pass a verbal test, as opposed to a more appropriate test of manual skills. In their treatise, Gerrig and Zimbardo (2005) cite Banks (1990) as saying that this is a strategy unions use to keep minorities from access to jobs. It seems reasonable to argue that sometimes, minority groups test poorly because their scores are evaluated relative to inappropriate norms. Furthermore, arbitrary cut off scores that favour applicants from one group may be used to make selection decisions, when in reality a lower cut off score that is fairer would produce just as many correct hiring decisions. In addition, our dependence on testing may make personnel selection an automatic attempt to fit people into available jobs. Instead, sometimes, society might benefit more by changing job descriptions to fit the needs and abilities of people.

The Utility of Tests for Evaluating Education

Whilst agreeing with the fact that testing helps evaluate students and other test takers, the high importance attached to test scores had led to cheating scandals in several schools (Kantrowitz and McGinn, 2000). For example, in Maryland District in USA, a primary school head mistress resigned when strong evidence suggested that primary five pupils at her school had been given several types of assistance, including extra time and second chances to improve test scores. In Nigeria, strong emphasis in mere certification or paper qualification has made many teachers and parents to encourage their wards to indulge in examination malpractice just to pass examination (Okebukola, 2002). Gbenu (2013) asserts that a large mismatch appears to exist between university output and labour market demand due largely to cheating scandals in Nigeria. As observed by Okebukola (2002), the employment prospects of recent graduates in Nigeria have clearly deteriorated the primary cause of which is the quality of the university-trained portion of the workforce.

The Implications of Using Test Scores as Labels to Categorize Individuals

Another ethical issue is that test outcomes can take on the status of unchangeable labels (Kaplan, 2008) People too often think of themselves as being an IQ of 110 or a B student as if the scores were labels stamped on their foreheads. One implication of a state of affairs like this is that such labels may become barriers to advancement as people come to believe that their mental and personal qualities are fixed and unchangeable; that they cannot improve their lot in life. At the other extreme, for those who are negatively assessed, the scores can become self-imposed motivational limits that lower their sense of efficacy and restrict the challenges they are willing to tackle.

It is important to realize that the tendency to give test scores a sacred status has both societal and personal implications. Thus, when test scores become labels that identify traits, states, maladjustment, conflict and pathology within an individual, people begin to think about the "abnormality" of individual children rather than about educational systems that need to modify programme to accommodate all learners.

In addition to what have been enunciated in the preceding pages, there are other key ethical issues that are worth mentioning in the use of tests and evaluation to assess human participants. These issues are more elaborately spelt out in the American Psychological Association's ETHICS IN RESEACH WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (Sales and Folkman, 2000). Below are some of these issues.

Freedom from Coercion: It is not ethical to coerce or pressure an individual into participating in experiment or study. For example, students in college courses cannot be required to participate in testing and assessment as part of their course requirements. They must be given an alternative way to meet this requirement.

Informed Consent: The test administrators must under most circumstances give potential participants a full description of the procedures of the study and its risks and benefits in language they can understand before they are asked to participate. Thus, it is not ethical to allow individuals to participate in an experiment without knowing what they are getting into. Moreover, once the study or experiment has begun, it must be made clear to participants that they are folly free to change their minds and withdraw from the study without penalty, such as embarrassment or loss of course credit.

Limited Deception: If the nature of the experiment is such that telling participants everything about the study would bias the findings, then limited deception must be applied (Lahey, 2004). The current APA guidelines suggest that deceptions can be used only if two conditions are met. First, the potential participants must be told everything they could reasonably be expected to need to know to make an informed decision about participation. Second, the nature of the deception must be folly revealed to individuals immediately after their participation in the study and/or experiment. Only under these conditions is it considered ethical to deceive research participants.
Adequate Debriefing: Research participants have a right to know the results of the study. Current practice dictates that all persons should be provided with a summary of the study in language they can understand. If the results are not immediately available, the participants have a right to receive them when they are available.

Confidentiality: Researchers have an obligation to keep everything they learn about the research participant absolutely confidential. This means that the data from the study must be published in such a way that protects the anonymity of the participants (no names or detailed descriptions of individuals). In addition, the information must be stored without names attached, in most cases, to protect against future abuses of the information.

Protection of Privacy: Closely related to confidentiality is the concept of protection of privacy of test takers. Invasion of privacy is most visible with personality tests. Anastasi and Urbina

(1997) define the right to privacy as the right to decide for oneself how much one will share with others one's thoughts, feelings, and facts about one's personal life.

Although concerns about the invasion of privacy have been expressed most commonly about personality tests, it seems reasonable to argue that the logic applies to any type of test. Certainly any intelligence, aptitude, or achievement test may reveal limitations in skills, and any knowledge that an individual would rather not disclose. Moreover, any observation of an individual's behaviour as in an interview, a casual conversation or other personal encounter, may yield information that the individual would prefer to conceal and that he or she may reveal unwittingly. It should be noted however that all behavioural researches, whether employing tests or other behavioural procedures, present the possibility of invasion of privacy.

Conclusion

Psychology depends heavily on research conducted with human participants for its data base (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2010). In doing so, psychologists have an ethical responsibility to protect the welfare of their participants by judging the study's risks and potential benefits. Often the ethics of research with human being poses complicated issues for the researcher. These are issues that do not have simple solutions. In addition to the three key areas that are of ethical consideration that psychologists have to grapple with: fairness of test based decisions, the utility of tests for evaluating education, and the implications of using test scores as labels to categorize individuals, some other critical ethical issues such as freedom from coercion, informed consent; limited deception; adequate debriefing; confidentiality and its sister-concept of protection privacy were also examined in some detail. Finally, the use of psychometric tools for testing and assessing personnel decision should be closely monitored to be sure that these tests are not misused and abused.

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