

O/L English as a measure of language competence for employment purposes

The GCE Ordinary level (O/L) examination is a national examination accepted for employment as well as for further educational purposes. This examination comprises three grades of successful attainment, viz: 'S' or simple pass, 'C' or credit and 'D' or Distinction. However although widely accepted as a benchmark, there has been no attempt to validate these levels of success in terms of compatibility for employment. This paper therefore seeks to establish a between GCE O/L results in English and those of another English test set to ascertain communicative for professional purposes.

The second test,, used as comparison is the Entry Test to programmes in General English at the Open University of Sri Lanka. This Test, like the GCE O/L is conducted into three categories. In the case of the OUSL Test however, the categories indicate which course the candidate is placed in – Beginner, Basic (lower intermediate level of proficiency) or Professional (upper intermediate level of proficiency). These courses are designed with employment purpose in mind, and hence incorporate communicative skills in English appropriate for employment/professional purposes. As candidates for the OUSL TEST are those who have completed secondary schooling, large numbers of these candidates have also sat for the O/L in English. Hence it was possible to establish a correlation between the O/L grade and competence for employment purpose as indicated by the level of placement in the OUSL Test.

The sample population so tested represented candidates from all nine provinces in the island, all major ethnic groups and both sexes. The outcome revealed that a mismatch existed between the results obtained at the O/L examination and the competencies required for effective functioning in the world of work.