

Implementation of the SAT type test in Turkmenistan

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ABSTRACT

A college admission process is an issue in almost all countries. While some countries have more objective admission process, others still need lots of improvements. Turkmenistan is among them. The country has gone through the various political and governmental changes which significantly affected the education system as well. Admittance into universities in the Central Asian Region overall often is extremely competitive, and there is a risk that personal connections and bribes can play a main role in being admitted and the later advancement. Prospective students must pass a long test based on the continuously changing curriculum. Like all of the other assessments in the educational system of the region, this examination consists of both written and oral parts. Oral part is the main part of the test. There is no standardized test that can be used for college admissions in the country.

In United States, two tests are used; SAT and ACT. Both of these tests are standardized and used as criteria for the college admissions. However, the structure, grading, and the content being measured are different.

The proposed name of the test is the DBS (Dusunjelik we Bilim Synagy, which is translated as the “measurement of the reasoning and knowledge). DBS is proposed as the “SAT type”.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan, a country slightly larger than California, is the farthest southwest of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. It is located on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. To the south is Iran, to the southeast is Afghanistan, and to the north are Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The population is estimated as 5,179,571 according the CIA Factbook 2008.



In 2003 the population of Turkmenistan was 85% Turkmen, 5% Uzbek, 4% Russian. Smaller ethnic groups, in order of size, are

Tatar, Kazakh, Ukrainian, Azeri, and Armenian.

In 2003 officially 72% of citizens spoke Turkmen, which is the official state language. 12% spoke Russian and 9% spoke Uzbek. Russian is mainly spoke in urban areas, and Uzbek is spoken mainly in northern part of the country.



Literacy rate, the rate of age 15 and over can read and write, is reported as 98.8% according to the CIA Factbook 2008.

Education in Turkmenistan

Education is universal and mandatory through the secondary level, the total duration of which was earlier reduced from 10 years to 9 years. With the new President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov it has been decreed that the 2007-2008 school year will be of 10 years as will all subsequent years.

Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan is engaged in development of national system of education, perfection of moral and patriotic education of youth, revival and development of spiritual traditions of a society. (www.tacistm.org)

In 2007 Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov signed the decrees “On the Academy of Science of Turkmenistan” and “On improving the system of scientific establishments in Turkmenistan”. He also signed a special resolution in January 2008 aimed at training highly skilled academic staff as well as providing state support for academic researches.

In April 2008 Turkmenistan announced the procedure for admission of research students to graduate studies at a number of higher educational and scientific institutions of the country.

There are total of 15 higher education institutions in Turkmenistan, which are:

State Academy of Arts

Turkmen State Pedagogical Institute

Turkmen Institute of National Economy

Institute of World Languages

Turkmen State Medical Institute

Policy Academy

Institute of Transport and Communication

Turkmen National Conservatory

Turkmen State Institute of Culture

Turkmen State Institute of Energy

International Turkmen-Turkish University

Turkmen State University

Turkmen Agricultural University

Turkmen Polytechnic Institute

Institute of Sport and Tourism

Proposal: Construction of the SAT type test in Turkmenistan



This proposal is intended to be the idea initiator of the standardized university admissions test, the Supreme Science Council and Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan are to discuss this proposal in order to make the final decision about the purpose, content, length and the administration methods of the test.

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extremely competitive, and there is a risk that personal connections and bribes can play a main role in being admitted and the later advancement. Prospective students must pass a long test based on the continuously changing curriculum. Like all of the other assessments in the educational system of the region, this examination consists of both written and oral parts. Oral part is the main part of the test. There is no standardized test that can be used for college admissions in the country.

In United States, two tests are used; SAT and ACT. Both of these tests are standardized and used as criteria for the college admissions. However, the structure, grading, and the content being measured are different.

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Why SAT type test?

The proposed DBS test is suggested to be the SAT type test rather than ACT type test, or put in other words, to be more aptitude test rather than achievement test. The main idea comes from the fact that the content and the curriculum taught in Turkmenistan high schools have gone significant alterations for the past 15 years. However, the ACT type test would be more closely tied to the high school curriculum. The actual ACT test is based on an analysis of material which is taught in grades 7 through 12.

Another argument is the fact that high schools in Turkmenistan are very diverse in terms of language of instruction and curriculum. There are schools where the language of instruction is in Turkmen, Russian, Turkish, and English languages. While the most common language is Turkmen, not every high school student is instructed in Turkmen language. The

reliability of the test will be questionable when the language of assessment of taught material is different from the language of instruction.

In addition to all these, there is a lack of teaching professionals in Turkmenistan high schools for the past 15 years, especially in rural areas, which was the biggest factor of incapability to follow the specified curriculum, followed by the significant decrease in the quality of education.

There is and always has been a controversy between aptitude tests and achievement tests, especially when they are intended to be used as college admissions criteria. Lohman (2004), suggests that “aptitude tests that go beyond prior achievement have an important role to play in admissions decisions, especially for minority students.” He presents evidences that scores on “well-constructed measures of developed reasoning abilities” show smaller disparities among ethnic groups than scores on good

achievement tests, and argues that tests of reasoning ability can help to identify students who do not do well on curriculum based tests but able to succeed academically if they try harder. The reported distribution of ethnic groups in Turkmenistan is: Turkmen 85%, Uzbek 5%, Russian 4%, other 6%. Therefore, this is another argument to propose the DBS as an SAT type test rather than ACT type test.

Need for DBS

Admissions in Turkmenistan four-year colleges are very competitive. DBS will give a clear description of the admission criteria along with the other letters of recommendation and high school GPA. Test preparation programs can be implemented in high schools during the senior year or separate test preparation courses can be started

Because of the very diverse high schools in terms of language of instruction, and curriculum density and difficulty, the high school GPA may not be the most reliable factor in admissions. Therefore, DBS will have to be a main factor.

DBS may also serve for scholarship purposes.

Structure

DBS is proposed to start as paper-and-pencil test. Complexity and difficulty to start it as a Computer Adaptive Test is due to the lack of technical resources, particularly in terms of software. Also, the small size of the item bank at the beginning phases will not allow CAT. DBS is proposed to consist entirely of multiple-choice questions at the beginning phases, in order to facilitate scoring.

After the DBS items are prepared, they are going to be reviewed by the experts and

test editors, who will check the grammar, spelling, the format, and the “sensitivity” of the items. By the sensitivity check, it is implied that the DBS must not contain words, phrases, and examples that are negative to any group or nationality. While preparing test items, item writers are advised to pay attention to the cultural, language, and geographical factors. Words that are used in the east of Turkmenistan are not used in the west of Turkmenistan. Therefore, the usage of words that are specific to the particular regions is advised to be avoided. The spoken languages in Turkmenistan are Turkmen 72%, Russian 12%, Uzbek 9%, other 7%. Consequently, the usage of Turkmen language in the DBS is advised to be as simple as possible, and be avoided from the complicated Turkmen words used in the literature while preparing questions for the quantitative section. After the items are passed through the careful review, the

experimental administration of the test is to be conducted.

DBS test is proposed to have only verbal section and quantitative section. Including the writing section is not advised at this point in order to avoid language advantage for native Turkmen language speakers. In addition, it costs more. Also, the scoring process will be much faster without the writing section. The weight to put on each section of the DBS is flexible and may vary for each program. Keeping the scores of the section separate is advised since each advised section measures different construct

It is advised to open 12 test centers in Turkmenistan, 2 in each of administrative capitals of all 5 states and 2 in the capital of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat. The testing is advised to be held 4 times a year. Undergraduate studies in Turkmenistan universities all start in fall only, which is why there is no need for more frequent testing.

