

**Shedding Light on the Predictive Validity
of English Proficiency Tests in Predicting Academic Success**

Laila Whitman Rumsey

Abstract

The project has been named “Shedding Light” because it is essentially a case study which aims at shedding light on the issues of the use of English proficiency exams as placement tests and their viability as predictors of future language performance. Most predictive validity studies achieve correlation coefficients in the range of 20-30% (and even lower... 0.19 for Hwang and Dizney, 1970), which means that the results of tests used to measure linguistic proficiency have very limited usefulness in admissions decisions. In 1988, Alan Davies suggested that 0.30 is an acceptable correlation for predictive validity studies. The CEPA (Common Educational Proficiency Assessment) is the primary focus of this research project. The results of this English proficiency exam form a major part of admissions criteria for tertiary institutions in the UAE. The CEPA has been reported to have achieved very high correlations (i.e. 0.699 in 2007). It is the aim of this study to closely examine this phenomenon and identify as many factors as possible which contribute to the success of the UAE CEPA as a placement instrument in a large, vocational college. This project will investigate the efficacy of using regionally-produced exams rather than internationally-produced ones. Therefore, it is hoped that the results will not only directly benefit the institution itself, but also provide information for the international community which may lead to improved predictive validity for placement tests in general.
