

EVALUATING THE CONTENT VALIDITY OF THE ALGERIAN ENGLISH BACCALAUREATE EXAMINATION*

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Abstract

In large-scale testing, validity stands out as a cornerstone in developing and evaluating tests. This is because it helps in designing tests that yield meaningful results. In this respect, this study seeks to examine whether the English tests of the BAC examination assessed the content that test designers intended to assess. To achieve so, the present article employs a descriptive content analysis, following Bachman and Palmer's model of test usefulness. The data are analysed through curriculum mapping to compare test tasks against learning objectives. Importantly, the obtained results have revealed partial content validity as the exam aligns adequately with the curriculum content. The findings highlight key strengths and gaps in the test's design. Thus, a list of recommendations are offered to strengthen the two validities in the English Baccalaureate tests.

Key words: *Baccalaureate English tests, Content validity, Scientific streams, Validation.*

1. Introduction

When we think of a valid test, we inherently expect it to be well designed. The usefulness and effectiveness of a test lies greatly in its design. But how often do we stop to consider whether the exam truly lives up to these expectations. Is it designed to serve its intended purpose, or does it fall short of its promise? The question, interestingly, resounds deeply with whether the test's content aligns perfectly with the curriculum intended learning outcomes. Content validity is, indeed, paramount in the design of meaningful tests. Content validity has much to do with tests relevance and comprehensiveness. When test items are well-formed to comply with the curriculum objective, students are more likely to be evaluated on material that

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reflects their educational preparation, and thus supporting more focused and fair test outcomes (Alderson, Clapham, & Wall, 1995; Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

In high-stake exams, where results can open doors, or limit access to higher education, content validity become even more pressing. Therefore, this study seeks to analytically validate the 2024 Algerian English Baccalaureate Exam (BAC), focusing specifically on content validity as two critical aspects of test design.

1.1. Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions: To what extent does the Algerian English BAC Exam fit with the curriculum content objectives specified in the curriculum? To what extent does the test cover the skills prescribed in the curriculum?

1.2. Research Hypotheses

As tentative to answer the aforementioned questions, we hypothesize the following:

- If the 2024 Algerian English BAC Exam lacks content validity, it may not fully align with curriculum goals.
- If content validity is improved, the exam design will better assess students' skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language Test validity

In language testing, the conceptualization of validity has been discussed from multiple angles, most notably within the traditional validity framework perspective. For the latter, a valid test should measure what it is designed to measure (Henning, 1987; Lado, 1961). The concept of validity came to be seen as the property and the sole focus of the test itself. In this respect, Henning (1987) mentioned that validity "refers to the appropriateness of a given test or one of its components parts as a measure of what it is purported to measure" (p. 89). In this trend, validity is conceptualised as multifaceted, encompassing distinct subtypes: content, construct, concurrent, and predictive validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1995; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007), each of which contributes uniquely to giving an approach that help test writers to evaluate various facets of learners' linguistic competencies (Brown, 2005; Cronbach & Meehl, 1995).

2.2. Traditional Perspective on Content Validity

In the traditional perspective, content validity refers to the extent to which the test's content aligns with the skills, knowledge, topics, or materials that learners are expected to master based on the curriculum or test specifications. A test content may involve "the themes, wording, and items, tasks or questions on a test, as well as the guidelines for procedures regarding administration and scoring" (AERA, APA & NCME 1999, p. 11). According to the traditional perspective, a test is said to have strong content validity when it fully represents language skills that the test aims to assess. That is, having relevant sample of the target content. Language testers, in here, need to "show that the content of the test is a representative sample from the domain that is to be tested" (Fulcher and Davidson 2007, p. 5).

Interestingly, two aspects of content validity are defined: content relevance and content coverage (Bachman, 2005; Henning, 1987; Messick, 1989). For the former, the test's content must be representative of the skills and knowledge to be assessed. In here, tester must examine whether test items or tasks are relevant to the construct being measured. In a test that is designed to measure communicative ability, for example, tasks should focus on real-world language use, rather than, say, memorizing grammar rules out of context. As for the latter, it refers to the breadth of the test. Test users check if the test includes all the skills, topics, or abilities from the curriculum. If the test, for instance, is meant to assess writing, listening, or speaking skills, these should be adequately represented in the test. Put it simple, content relevance checks "is everything there appropriate and meaningful?" while coverage content checks "is everything there?".

2.3. Bachman and Palmer's model of test usefulness

Building on the unitary concept of validity, Bachman and Palmer's (1996) introduced a model of test usefulness. The latter, as a holistic framework, sees test validation through a more practical lens of six well put interrelated qualities like: Authenticity, reliability, validity, interactiveness, practicality and impact (see Fig. No. 1). "all of which contribute in a unique, but interrelated ways to the overall usefulness of a given test" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 18). Importantly, in their model, at its basis, focuses not only on tests validity but also their practical use in real world contexts. At this level, this framework does not only create a balance between theory and application but also between test usefulness qualities. This balance, importantly, depends on the test's specific context. That is, certain exams give priority to validity rather than authenticity, or vice versa. While the model includes six criteria, it recognizes that test evaluation is flexible and content-driven based on the exam's intended purpose and the nature of the content being assessed. Content validity is particularly relevant of the Algerian English Baccalaureate Test as it directly address the alignment between the test and the curriculum. Thus, it is essential to painstakingly review this criterion through the modern lens of this model.

2.3.1. The Modern Perspective on Content validity

Bachman and Palmer (1996) redefine content validity by incorporating both by content coverage and real-world applicability. For their side, content validity goes beyond just aligning test items with the curriculum; it also considers how well the test tasks reflect the language use required in real-world contexts. In their model, focus is on how authentic the test items are, meaning whether they reflect language use outside the academic environment.

Bachman and Palmer's model introduces a more dynamic view of content validity, emphasizing that tests should not only reflect what has been taught but also assess the relevant skills that learners will need outside the classroom. For them, a test can be valid only if its items are closely tied to the language skills that learners will use in their real-life communication, thereby ensuring that the test tests practical language competence.

3. Methodology

The study at hand adopts a descriptive content design to evaluate content validity in the 2024 Algerian BAC Examination. According to Cohen (2007) "content analysis are careful to identify appropriate categories and units of analysis, both of which will reflect the nature of the document being analysed and the purpose of the research" (p. 164). As to go through the analysis, the research opts for curriculum mapping as it helps in making a direct comparison between the test content and the curriculum content, including thematic topics, objectives, knowledge, skills and learning outcomes, as well as, the required cognitive processes. We have chosen to analyse the 2024 BAC English Exam (see appendix), because it is representative of recent exam designs. It is to that end that we intended to narrow the scope as to provide a strong, specific and deep insights accordingly. The documents we refer to in having this are the 2024 Algerian BAC Exam paper administered to 3rdAS students in scientific streams, the SE3 curriculum and Examiner's guide (available online).

3.1. Describing the Algerian English Baccalaureate Test (AEBT)

The Algerian English Baccalaureate Test is a university entrance exam designed to third year secondary school students (3AS). It is typically considered as standardized test that serves both an achievement and comprehension-based exam. Achievement in determining how well students have mastered the curriculum learning objectives and comprehension based in a sense that the exam measures comprehension skills, making from the analysis of content validity high worthwhile.

Structurally speaking, the exam is designed to have two main sections: reading comprehension and written expression. The reading comprehension section is divided into two parts: comprehension and text exploration. Comprehension tests students ability to understand, interpret and analyse the given text, which involves various tasks. Test exploration, however, puts emphasis on assessing their grammar knowledge, vocabulary, and language use. Lastly, the Written Expression Section proposes two topics to students, who are expected to choose one topic only so as to produce a short writing task. Topic one is semi-guided writing task in which directions are given to the examinees to help them do the task. The second topic is a free written task; which requires test takers to produce a piece of writing based on their own perceptions and skills.

4. Data Collection

The English national curriculum for third-year secondary education (SE3), specifically for scientific streams (experimental sciences, mathematics, technical mathematics, management and economics) is designed with an exit profile that 3AS students at the end of the academic year would have the ability to produce oral and written texts across different discourse types. As it mentions, students "at the end of SE3 will be able to produce oral/written messages/ texts of descriptive, narrative, argumentative, expository and prescriptive types about 20 lines, using written or oral support" (SE3 curriculum, 2022-2023, p. 3). The emphasis, here, is directed to the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing). As to engage

meaningfully with these skills, the curriculum is structured around four thematic units (see figure 1) which include: (1) ethics in business, (2) advertising, consumers and safety, (3) astronomy, (4) feelings and emotions.

Ministry of education, 2022-2023, p. 3

Unit	Theme / Topic
1. Ill-Gotten Gains Never Prosper	Ethics in Business
2. Safety First	Advertising, Consumers and Safety
3. It's a Giant Leap for Mankind	Astronomy and the Solar System
4. We are a Family	Feelings and Emotions

Figure 1. Units and Themes in Scientific Streams Curriculum

4.1. Target Skills in the 2024 Algerian English BAC Exam

The Algerian English Baccalaureate Exam, as the ‘Examiner’s Guide’ (National Office for Examinations and Competitions [ONEC], 2017) sets out, is built under two main sections: “reading comprehension” and “written expression”. Each section measures specific skills or language abilities as illustrated in table 1. The reading comprehension section focuses on learners’ ability to critically engage, read, understand, and interpret informational authentic texts, specifically those related to the aforementioned thematic units. The text exploration, as a sub-part, tests their linguistic competence by evaluating their ability to deal with grammatical rules, vocabulary and stylistic devices (tasks related to language structure). In the written expression section, however, production is a central language ability. Students are tasked with producing well-structured argumentative and descriptive pieces related to their critical engagement with topics covered in the curriculum. To that end, the skills the exam targets are: interaction, interpretation and production as competencies, which prepare 3rdAS students for real-world contexts (examiner’s guide, 2017).

Table 1. the Structure of the 2024 Algerian English BAC Exam

Reading Comprehension	Sub-section	Skills tested
Reading Comprehension	Comprehension	Understanding, analysing, and interpreting texts
Reading Comprehension	Text exploration	Grammar, vocabulary, language structure
Written Expression	Argumentative/descriptive writing	Producing coherent, structured essays

Organized from ONEC, 2017

4.2. Validating the Content of the AEBT

The analysis of content validity was analysed by comparing the 2024 AEBT tasks with the thematic units and objectives in curriculum and test construction

guidelines with two main sections: reading comprehension and written expression, following Bachman and Palmer's mode of test usefulness.

4.2.1. Validating the Content Validity

4.2.1.1. Reading Comprehension Section

The reading comprehension passages, as presented in the 2024 English BAC exam paper, introduce topics on 'processed and fast food' and 'piracy and its goal impact'. The comprehension-type tasks involve selecting appropriate answers, identifying key paragraphs, answering comprehension questions, choosing the most fitting title, saying whether statements are true or false and finding what the underlined words in the text refer to. These require students to engage with main ideas, extract and synthesize relevant information from the text. In keeping with the objective of 'Unit 2: safety first' in the curriculum, the passages, indeed, treat a globally relevant issues and mirrors everyday language usage, complying with the curriculum thematic focus on public health and intellectual property rights. Additionally, the tasks align well with effectively developing students' awareness of public health safety issues. Content relevance and content coverage are strong accordingly.

However, most of reading comprehension tasks, unfortunately, focus on lower cognitive demand (surface-level understanding), asking students to spot factual evidence from the text, missing the opportunity of evaluating deeper and complex analytical skills like textual analysis, inferential reasoning and problem solving skills that paves the way for more deep and active interpretations.

4.2.1.2. Text Exploration Sub-section

The text exploration part in the 2024 BAC English contains tasks on vocabulary, grammar, morphology, sound system and discourse. Candidates are asked to identify antonyms, manipulate word structures (roots and affixes), transform sentences (so...that, although), fill-in the gaps, reorder sentences to form a coherent passage, and complete sentences. The activities, perfectly, go strongly with the curriculum-objectives of developing language constructs across various units. This include developing candidates ability to master grammatical knowledge, understand vocabulary, manipulate sentence structures and particularly recognizing word formation as to comply with the exam guidelines, each task is deliberately structured to assess not only their understanding of linguistic forms, but also their ability to apply and internalize these forms in meaningful contexts similar to that of authentic language use.

At this analytical level of analysis, the text exploration section implicitly promotes, to some extent, tasks authenticity. Students, in here, are required to get engaged with grammar and vocabulary in ways that simulate real-life language usage. This seems, to some measure, practical in tasks of transforming and recognizing sentences, as skills directly use every day communication, aiming at making students a prepared version for both academic and non-academic contexts. Although these tasks continue to content relevance, this may not fully sample the objective of language use that the focus should be on the practical application of these isolated skills in real authentic situations where language is used communicatively. The tasks actually work well for language accuracy, but they fall

much than desired in encouraging students to apply their knowledge in real conversations or texts. Then, we come to understand that authenticity, in its fullest sense and as an important principle for the overall test validity is presented but weakly covered, limiting content validity in this part.

4.2.1.3. Written Expression Section

The written expression section assesses candidates' ability to produce a well-structured and coherent text on real world issues within two tasks. Candidates are required to write a speech about the dangers of unhealthy food, denounce piracy, explain the benefits of artificial satellites in telecommunications, and engage in argumentative writing article on nepotism, where they are required to supply persuasive evidence and logical reasoning which, by its very nature, encourages higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis and evaluation, the skills that are much needed in academic and professional communication, and thus strengthen the quality of authenticity in the exam. This directive ties directly into the curriculum emphasis on developing writing proficiency in both argumentative and descriptive forms, giving students the chance to communicate complex ideas as they critically engage with ethical and social issues. As such, these tasks reflect a high degree of content and procedural validity.

5. Results

The analysis of the 2024 English Baccalaureate Examination has brought to light important findings into how well the exam matches with the curriculum objectives and real-world language use. In this line, notable strengths and gaps have been identified across the exam sections, especially in terms of the complexity of tasks and realistic language use. These observations help set up a deeper dive into the exam's test design.

Based on the evaluation, content validity of the 2024 BAC test can be rated as partial to strong. The reading comprehension and writing sections demonstrate significant alignment with the curriculum objectives and real-world language use. Themes, such as health, safety and intellectual property rights are well represented across the test sections. Additionally, the grammar exercises reflect the curriculum focus on linguistic accuracy, assessing students' ability to master grammatical structures. The writing tasks are well-structured to evaluate students' ability to engage in descriptive and argumentative writing, laying them the groundwork to demonstrate their skills.

However, there is a bit more to consider. While the exam engages students in critical reading and persuasive writing, it does not consistently push them towards higher-level thinking constructs like critical thinking, inference and problem solving skills, especially in the text exploration part, which tends to favour more straightforward tasks. So, while it perfectly covers basic language skills, it fails to evaluate more complex cognitive processes.

Moreover, while the authenticity of the exam remains strong in the reading comprehension and writings sections, where students engage with real life world themes like public health and workplace ethics, the text exploration is less authentic.

The tasks are primarily limited to assess disconnected language structures, without integrating them into more natural communicative contexts, which would reduce the overall authenticity of the exam.

Furthermore, the absence of oral production testing is another highlighting gap in the exam design. Although the curriculum places considerable emphasis on speaking and listening skills within the exit profile (achievement of targets), yet they are still under-assessed in the exam. Actually this mismatch not only weakens the exam' content and construct validity, but it also undermines their ability to fully assess students' communicative abilities.

6. Recommendations

As to have a more valid and well-designed version of future Algerian English Baccalaureate exam in both content validity, and as to remediate the gaps, the present research is in favour of many recommendations. The reading comprehension section could benefit from incorporating tasks that engage skills, such as inferential reasoning and evaluative judgement. Similarly, the text exploration would achieve stronger content validity by designing grammatical and vocabulary exercises within communicative, real-world contexts. Moreover, as we believe, varying the questions formats to include error correction or completing texts would better reflect real-life language use. What is more, it is preferable to balance grammar tasks with other language skills as to have a more holistic evaluation. For the written expression section, it can be further enhanced by engaging students with more writing structural guides for a clear presentation of their arguments, and thus having somehow clear criteria for evaluating their performance. Furthermore, giving the communicative nature of language, we suggest that test designers direct more interest to testing both speaking and listening skills, as part of the curriculum, to give more comprehensive evaluation of students' language proficiency. Actually, students need to practice the language more than just knowing about it, therefore, test designers should break away from the traditional approach and focus more on practical language use. To this end, we strongly suggest that curriculum developers and test designers adopt Bachman and Palmer's model of test usefulness for developing and designing the AEBT. We are, indeed, in a need for more practical input and output in language assessments.

7. Conclusion

The present study set out to evaluate the content validity of the 2024 AEBT administered to scientific streams. The analysis was guided by Bachman and Palmer's model of test usefulness. Through a deep analysis of the exam's sections—reading comprehension, test exploration, and writing - this research paper aimed to assess how well the exam addresses both linguistic and thematic goals outlined in the curriculum for third year scientific streams. The findings, importantly, demonstrates partial content validity, the three sections effectively cover the curriculum thematic units and linguistic objectives. However, the tasks, particularly in the test exploration section gives importance to mid-level cognitive skills and lacks authenticity. We have also other gaps in the test's design. The communicative

skills, are totally ignored like the speaking and listening skills. Therefore, several recommendations are provided.

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APPENDIX The 2024 Algerian English BAC Exam

امتحان بحتوي التعليم الثانوي
الشعبة: علوم تجريبية، رياضيات، تقني رياضي، تسيير واقتصاد، فنون
اختبار في مادة: اللغة الإنجليزية
دورة: 2024
المدة: 02 سا و 30 د
على المترشح أن يختار أحد الموضوعين الآتيين:
الموضوع الأول

Part One: Reading (15 points)
A/ Comprehension: (08 points)

Read the text carefully to do the activities.

Processed and fast foods are high in salt and include high fructose rate in most of them. Sugar and salt create a taste that makes people crave for these foods, a sensation that many describe as an addiction. Both sugar and salt intake increases brain attack risks, especially when consumed daily for years. Additionally, high salt does not merely raise blood pressure; it also causes microvascular haemorrhaging.

We know that people have the power to change when significant effort and attention are directed to their lifestyle problems. With good information, emotional support, increased healthy food availability and food preparation instruction, we have found people motivated and willing to work together for change. They do not have to be convinced of the tragic dangers of fast food; they see the obesity, diabetes, leg amputations, strokes, and blindness all around them. The more people know the critical importance of eating healthfully, and the more they take a stand, the greater the effect will be on improving the health of all; thus saving millions of lives.

Adapted from: The American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine, vol2, no5, by Joel Fuhrman, MD, Oct 2017

I. Choose the answer to complete each statement.

A. People's addiction to fast foods is due to the of salt and sugar they contain.

a. smell b. savour c. character

B. Regular consumption of salt and sugar brain attack risks.

a. reduces b. stabilizes c. augments

اختبار في مادة: اللغة الإنجليزية // الشعبة: // علوم تجريبية، رياضيات، تقني رياضي، تسيير واقتصاد، فنون // بكالوريا 2024

B/ Text Exploration (07 points)

1. Find in the text words or phrases that are opposite in meaning to the following.

low (§1) ≠ lack (§2) ≠ losing (§2) ≠

2. Divide the following words into roots and affixes.

sweeten - blindness - unhealthful

Prefix	Root	Suffix

3. Combine each pair of sentences with the connectors given between brackets. Make changes where necessary.

a. Processed food is salty. It endangers our cardiovascular system. (so ...that)

b. People know about the bad effects of fast foods. People still crave for fast foods. (although)

4. Reorder the following sentences to get a coherent passage.

a. They can be accessed easily and quickly.

b. Fast foods do not just refer to the foods in fast food restaurants.

c. that people often eat multiple times per day.

d. They include all high calorie, low-nutrient foods

Part Two: Written Expression (05 points)

اختبار في مادة: اللغة الإنجليزية // الشعبة: // علوم تجريبية، رياضيات، تقني رياضي، تسيير واقتصاد، فنون // بكالوريا 2024

الموضوع الثاني

Part One: Reading

(15 points)

A/ Comprehension:

(08 points)

Read the text carefully to do the activities

Piracy derives from a wilful determination not to respect the rights of others. Pirates often violate the rights of authors, publishers, and broadcasters whose livelihoods depend on the recognition of copyright. They intentionally attempt to profit from their creations. There is no doubt some people do not understand the rights of others, and may negligently infringe copyright.

A leading expert in the field of intellectual property says that pirates of intellectual property are criminals usually engaged in the theft of the products of other peoples' talents, skills and investment. Since 1992, the problem of piracy has grown and has been understood as a worldwide phenomenon often involving the most advanced forms of organised crime. In addition, piracy has in the past decade revealed a new aspect through its emergence and unprecedented growth over the internet.

The problem of piracy has attracted repeated and sustained attention from governments and law enforcement officials. Treaties and international agreements have focused on its elimination. The UNESCO in particular has long recognised that the rights of authors and artists are endangered by the spread of piracy and that measures to prevent it were crucial.

Adapted from secureswissdata.com

1. Say whether the following statements are true or false.

- a. Piracy infringes others' rights and creations.

اختبار في مادة: اللغة الإنجليزية // الشعبة: // علوم تجريبية، رياضيات، تقني رياضي، تسيير واقتصاد، فنون // بكالوريا 2024

B/ Text Exploration

(07 points)

1. Find in the text words or phrases that are closest in meaning to the following:

intentional (§1) = lawbreakers (§2) = threatened (§3) =

2. Complete sentence (b) so that it means the same as sentence (a).

1. a. Digital piracy harms creativity.
b. Creativity
2. a. If governments do not fight piracy, businesses will suffer big losses in revenue.
b. Unless

3. Classify the following words according to the pronunciation of the final /ed/.

revealed - advanced - repeated - endangered

/t/	/d/	/ɪd/

4. Fill in each gap with the appropriate word from the list given.

- achievable - promote - effects - victims

Cultural industries - including books, audio-visuals and multimedia - generate jobs, income and revenue. They also ...1... cultural diversity at local and international level. However, they are at the same time often ...2... of copyright theft. While the full eradication of piracy in this field may not be ...3..., it is possible that its worst ...4... be limited or neutralised.