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ABSTRACT

The role that achievement testing plays in the educational system of Trinidad and Tobago and results from the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) tests administered in 1989 are discussed (for these tests, students generally sit for five to eight examinations on subjects they have taken throughout their secondary schooling). The educational system of Trinidad and Tobago is based on British tradition. Education is free, and competition for secondary school openings is keen. The educational system begins at age 5 years, with 2 years of infant school, followed by 5 years of primary school. At the end of elementary Standard 5, decisions are made about which students will go to secondary school or vocational and craft training, and which will end their formal education. There are 5 years of secondary schooling, with a sixth form for an additional 2 years for some students. Significant decisions are made on the basis of scores received at the end of the elementary Standard 5 and the secondary Form 5, as well as at Form 3 and Form 6. Classroom testing has less impact, but is considered indicative of performance on comprehensive tests. The Common Entrance Examination (CEE) at the end of Standard 5 and the CXC examinations at the end of Form 5 are extremely important for students. Since students are solely held responsible for their performance on examinations and since entrance to subsequent educational levels is solely based on these test scores, the stakes for students and their parents in Trinidad and Tobago are far higher than those for students in the United States taking achievement tests. Two tables contain specifications for the CEE and results of the 1989 CXC. Seven references are included. (SLD)

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Results of Student Achievement Testing in Trinidad and Tobago

Background

Trinidad and Tobago is a relatively new republic, having received its independence from Britain 30 years ago. The educational system is steeped in the British tradition. The majority of the population of Trinidad and Tobago has its roots in slavery or indentured servitude. Initially, many black Africans were brought to Trinidad and Tobago to harvest the sugar cane and perform other manual labor. After the abolishment of slavery by the British Commonwealth in 1835, indentured laborers were imported from India. Today, about 41 percent of the population is black, 41 percent Indian, 1 percent white, 16 percent mixed, and about 1 percent is classified as other (Central Statistical Office, 1989).

For those whose lineage had been slavery or indentured servitude, the only chance for upward mobility was through education. On gaining independence, this notion was furthered. Competition became very keen for limited openings in secondary schools and even keener for the limited opportunities at the selective "prestige" secondary schools. Education is free, except students must buy the school uniform and purchase all of their textbooks.

The Educational System

The educational system begins at age five with two years of infant school, called Infant 1 and 2. There are five more years of primary school, Standard 1 through 5. At the end of Standard 5, decisions are made on which students will proceed to secondary education, which students will follow vocational or craft training, and which students will end their formal educational training.

Those in the first group generally proceed to five years of comprehensive secondary education, Form 1 through 5. Some of these will proceed to Form 6 for an additional two years of secondary schooling. Some students, however, receive only three years of secondary education in the junior secondary schools.

Secondary schools, in particular, are noted by their level of prestige. Generally, the denominational schools are more prestigious than the government schools. Although the denominational schools are influenced by an independent governing board, all teachers in Trinidad and Tobago are paid by the government. Education is free in both the government and denominational schools. However, only those earning one of the limited number of openings may go on to secondary school.

The teachers of these students have generally begun their teaching at the primary level, before they received a university degree or any teacher training. After

teaching two or more years, many of these teachers are accommodated in a teacher training program. Those who have completed a university degree are usually assigned to secondary schools. At this level, formal teacher training usually does not commence until the teacher has at least five years of experience. In recent years, there has been an effort to enroll teachers in a training program after two years of teaching experience.

Student Achievement Testing

In Trinidad and Tobago, significant decisions are made on students' future educational and career plans on the basis of scores received at the end of Standard 5, at the end of Form 5, and, for those continuing their education, at the end of Form 6. Students assigned to the government junior secondary schools are tested at the completion of Form 3 for openings in the comprehensive upper level secondary schools.

Classroom Testing

Since significant decisions on a child's placement are based on comprehensive examinations administered at the end of primary and secondary school, classroom testing has a diminished emphasis. However, classroom tests are perceived as being indicative of how the child may hope to perform on the comprehensive tests at the end of primary and secondary school.

Most teachers have received no formal training in teaching and testing practices. Generally, the classroom tests are quite difficult, intending to clearly identify the most promising students.

Common Entrance Examination

After completing primary school, at the end of Standard 5, students in Trinidad and Tobago sit for the Common Entrance Examination (CEE). This exam is commonly referred to as the 11+ ("eleven plus") exam, since children sitting for the CEE generally have passed their eleventh birthday. As presented in Table 1, the CEE has one writing exercise with the remainder of the test being multiple choice items: 65 in mathematics (40 computational and 25 word problems), 25 in science, 25 in social studies (5 are "family life"), and 25 in English. A single composite score is derived from the student's performance in these five areas. On United States standards, the CEE is a very difficult test for children at this age and level.

When the students take the Common Entrance Examination, they rank their choices of secondary schools they would like to attend. On the basis of their CEE

composite score alone, students are assigned to secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Of the approximately 28,000 students taking the Common Entrance Examination each year, only about 20 percent gain admission to the 5-year and 7-year denominational or government comprehensive secondary schools. About 50 percent earn seats in government 3-year junior secondary schools. The remaining 30-35 percent continue primary education, apply to youth camps, or end their formal education altogether.

Table 1

Table of Specifications for the
Common Entrance Examination

<u>Test</u>	<u>Types of Items</u>	<u>Number of Items</u>
Mathematics		65
	Computational	25
	Word/Interpretation	40
Science		25
	Word/Interpretation	25
Language Arts		60
	Definitions (synonyms)	15
	Fill-in (correct meaning)	15
	Passage Interpretation	15
	Identify Error in Sentence	15
Social Studies		25
	Family Life/Manners	5
	Map/Graph Interpretation, General Social Studies, Reference Skills	20
TOTAL Number of Multiple Choice Items		175
Essay (2 options)		

Several decades ago, only 20 percent of the students completing primary school were afforded a secondary education. Today, about 80 percent of the population can pursue education past the primary level. Yet, about 20 percent of the students who sit for the 11+ exam fail in their effort to earn a spot in a secondary school (J. Stanley-Marcano, Testing Supervisor, Ministry of Education, personal communication, March 20, 1990).

From the beginning of their primary education, this system puts enormous pressures on the students and their parents. Although school grades are seen as being important, they are generally viewed as only predictive of student preparation for the CEE. The students are held solely accountable for their performance and achievement on the test. Teacher role is generally perceived as preparing the student to take the test. In the educational system of Trinidad and Tobago, this preparation takes the form of preparing and administering mock tests, representative of the CEE examination the student will take. Popular items which sell many Sunday papers in Trinidad and Tobago are "sample" and mock CEE examinations ("Answers to," 1990; "Common Entrance," 1990; "Junior Express," 1990). These editions are very popular with students, their parents and the populace which pays much attention to the testing done at the end of primary education.

CXC Examinations

After five years of secondary school at completion of Form 5, students sit for subject examinations administered by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). Students generally sit for 5 to 8 examinations over subjects they have taken throughout their secondary schooling. The results of these examinations are only reported numerically with a score of 1 through 5. Scores of 1 and 2 are accepted as passing. Although a score of 3 is technically a passing score, it is not accepted by the public as being successful in the exam. Criteria for continued schooling and for employment opportunities often include a minimum of 5 CXC passes, with two of the five being English and mathematics. The results for the 1989 CXC administrations are presented in Table 2. Note "passing" rates (earning scores of I and II) range from 17 to 72 percent, with an average of 43 percent of the exams passed. Thus, failure on the CXC comprehensive examinations is more likely than passing.

During Form 5, students take mock CXC examinations which have been constructed by their classroom teachers. If the student does not receive a score above 50 percent to pass the mock exam, the government does not pay for that student to take the respective CXC examination.

Table 2
Results for the 1989 CXC Examinations

SUBJECT	No. Ent.	No. Sat.	GRADES					% I,II
			I	II	III	IV	V	
Agricultural Science	1076	1029	9	295	453	246	26	30%
Art	804	662	89	194	104	196	79	43%
Biology	4915	4636	156	1639	1699	871	271	39%
Art and Craft	246	208	19	61	39	75	14	38%
Caribbean History	3916	3647	757	1293	943	527	127	56%
Chemistry	3546	3325	593	1280	796	602	54	56%
Clothing and Textiles	186	179	8	83	62	24	2	51%
Craft	33	27	4	13	3	7	0	63%
English A (Language)	16533	15082	1988	3888	4719	3711	776	39%
English B (Literature)	3964	3855	533	1721	1146	319	136	58%
Food and Nutrition	584	544	57	255	146	76	10	57%
French	729	717	294	224	116	78	5	72%
General Electricity	508	433	47	146	127	67	46	45%
Geography	4865	4635	648	2140	1122	671	54	60%
Home Management	303	276	7	77	118	68	6	30%
Integrated Science I	1102	943	51	269	341	226	56	34%
Integrated Science II	2	0						
Mathematics	14828	13099	1572	2366	3027	4788	1346	30%
Metals	288	242	41	114	59	23	5	64%
Office Procedures	1625	1483	55	275	777	358	18	22%
Physics	3023	2756	457	751	739	443	366	44%
Principles of Accounts	4282	3719	769	1190	1008	626	126	53%
Principles of Business	7541	6881	517	2816	2407	1077	64	48%
Shorthand	184	159	16	11	34	79	19	17%
Social Studies	7071	6317	459	2087	1876	1376	519	40%
Spanish	2193	2073	246	616	445	681	85	42%
Technical Drawing	1389	1213	211	422	381	151	48	52%
Typewriting	1906	1695	173	648	588	256	30	48%
Woods	356	297	12	127	77	30	51	47%
TOTALS	87908	80132	9788	25001	23352	17652	4339	43%

The CXC examinations are comparable to the British "O-level" or ordinary examinations. In the late 1970's, the Caribbean Examination Council began to create examinations more appropriate to the West Indies. Prior to the early to mid 1980's, the British O-levels were almost exclusively used to test student achievement at the completion of Form 5.

Students successful on five or more CXC or O-level examinations often matriculate to Form 6, a two-year program. Commonly referred to as Lower 6 in the first year and Upper 6 in the second year, students take only three courses along with general studies (written paper). In Form 6, students identify more specifically their major field of study. At the conclusion of Form 6, students sit for the British "A-level" examinations. As yet, comparable CXC examinations have not replaced the British A-level examinations in the West Indies.

In Trinidad and Tobago, success on the A-level examinations qualifies students for government scholarships to pursue advanced education either at the University of the West Indies (UWI, pronounced "u-wee") or abroad. The prestige of a secondary school is gained largely by the success of its students on the A-level examinations. National recognition is given to both students and the schools they attend. For the 50 highest scores: national scholarships are awarded; ceremonies are held; dignitaries have their pictures taken with the successful students at the successful schools; and newspapers run features for several months on the successful candidates and their schools.

Conclusions

Since (a) students are solely held responsible for their performance on examinations and (b) entrance to the subsequent educational level is solely based on these test scores, much more pressure is felt by students and their parents with the CEE and CXC examinations than is felt by students and their parents in the United States. In the United States, the stakes in student achievement testing are not as severe as they are in Trinidad and Tobago.

Recent editorials in Trinidad and Tobago have articulated the pain of failure for students and their parents caused by these practices ("Challenge of," 1990). Yet, CEE and CXC testing in Trinidad and Tobago is not discriminatory by race, gender, or socio-economic level. These tests are, however, discriminatory in favor of the students who perform well on comprehensive tests administered at the conclusion of primary and secondary education.

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