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TITLE: An Evaluation of California's Oral Licensing Examination

DATE: March 1973

AUTHOR(S): David M. Harrington

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FUNDING SOURCE: Departmental Budget

PROTECT OBJECTIVE:

To analyze the cost and effect of orally examining illiterate applicants.

SUMMARY:

An analysis was made of the Department's method of testing illiterate applicants.

These oral testing methods included a recording asking questions about signs and laws, the use of interpreters, and person-to-person tests involving gestures, sketches, and so forth. The aim of this testing procedure was to give illiterate applicants every opportunity to show that they possessed sufficient knowledge of the traffic laws to meet the legal requirements for licensing.

Due to the characteristics of the applicants and of the tests, the failure rate was very high-only 49% passed on their first attempt at the test, compared to a pass rate of 88% on the written knowledge examination. The amount of examiner time spent on this type of test made it quite expensive. In 1973, it cost approximately \$5.00 to test each oral applicant, compared to three cents for the regular written test. Testing its approximately 20,000 oral applicants per year cost the department approximately \$100,000.00 more than it would have cost to test a similar number of literate applicants.

The study found no significant difference between the accident rate of oral tests and that of other drivers.

Three approaches to improving the oral test were recommended for further study: (1) an entirely pictorial test, (2) an upgrading of the standard recorded oral test involving tape cassettes and picture books, and (3) the use of audio-visual testing machines.

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

This study led directly to the oral test study (cited below) that was contracted to the University of Southern California (Margaret Jones). That study investigated five alternate ways to test illiterate applicants that would be instructive but not require a high level of verbal ability to pass. Jones found no significant differences in fail rates among the five modes of audio-visual testing, and proposed that pictorial instructions and audio cassettes be used together to test both literate and illiterate applicants. The Department decided not to implement the consultant's recommendations.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

See Jones, M., (Page II-12), Oral Testing of Driver License Applicants .. Traffic Safety Center, Institute of Safety and Systems Management, University of Southern California.