

Iq tests are not
accurate



Psychologists have always wanted to quantify the complex notion of intelligence. Therefore, IQ tests have been used to measure human intelligence. However, whether these tests really measure complex notion of human intelligence or whether it is all about performing well on a standardized test is debatable. This paper aims to take a position that IQ tests are not accurate to measure a person's intelligence by exploring the concept of "intelligence" and analyzing IQ test in itself.

IQ tests were developed by Alfred Binet, the French Psychologist, to distinguish amongst children with high and low intellect, where the later could be provided with additional educational pursuits. Based on a study of education for special students, commissioned by the French government, Binet was quick to acknowledge that children with low intellect are likely to disrupt classes with frequent questionings and plea to repeat the lectures frustrating children with normal aptitudes. Binet, therefore, with a revolutionary approach in assessing the mental ability invented Binet test, which later went on to be called as the IQ test. It was on the basis of the data collected from the chosen sample, he generated a standardized test which is to be "the ratio of the 'mental age' to 'chronological age', with 100 being the average"(Binet 1903).

Since then, these standardized tests based on mathematical, logical and language skills have been considered valid to gauge a person's intelligence. But what is intelligence? Is mathematical, logical & language skills sufficient to quantify it? Do these standardized tests produce standardized results? Are these tests valid? For the interest of clarity, each question shall be dealt separately.

The notion of Intelligence

The proponents of IQ tests only take literacy and numeracy to be intelligence. Therefore, for them it is all about cognitive abilities. Hereby, we raise two questions. First, intelligence is an ambiguous word which is not defined then, paradoxically speaking, how can we say that IQ tests assess a person's intelligence when it is unclear as to what constitutes as intelligence? The 1920s journalist, Walter Lippmann said:

“ We cannot measure intelligence when we have not defined it (cited in N. J Block & G Dworkin).”

Second, even if we define intelligence, would it only encompass cognitive abilities? To this let us briefly look at the different ways it has been described. According to Webster's dictionary, “ Intelligence is a capacity to perceive and comprehend meaning, news and information.” In lay man's term it refers to skills necessary to face daily life challenges. This means intelligence is a broad term which is more than literal or numerical logic and reasoning. With such an understanding, creativity, personal attributes & characteristics, experiences, emotions, ability to adapt to the surroundings, style of socializations etc become an integral part of intelligence which remain untested. Answering a set of questions involving mathematical, logical and language understanding in an IQ test only measure the academic aspect of intelligence.

Dr Howard Gardner (1983) developed the theory of multiple intelligences. This theory identifies 8 different types of intelligences namely, linguistic intelligence, logical mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily

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kinesthetic intelligence, music intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence and naturalist intelligence (Gardner, 1983). If Gardner's theory is to be taken then the IQ test simply falls short to quantify this spectrum of intelligence. Therefore, IQ tests are limited in their scope as they can hardly measure traits which are integral to the classification as intelligence.

If we consider the purpose of the IQ test, the aim was solely to benefit low aptitude children with extra academic help. Hence, IQ scores are reliable in identifying children with good mental reasoning & language and not measuring intelligence. Alfred Binet (1903) himself said:

“ The scale, properly speaking, does not permit the measure of intelligence, because intellectual qualities are not superposable and therefore cannot be measured as linear surfaces are measured.”

Standardized test & Standardized result

IQ tests being standardized in nature assume that everyone undertaking the test will perform on equal basis irrelevant of their surroundings. But critics say that if is such is the case, then why don't they produce consistent results? This is because these tests don't take into account the environment where they are being undertaken. It ignores the comfort level such as sitting posture, lightening in the room etc. It also ignores the anxiety which overcome students when taking the test for they are unsure about the procedure of the test. It also does not record the biasing effect of the instructors towards the test takers. These factors are likely to affect

performance hence the IQ score, then how can these tests be an accurate measure of intelligence?

False Impression of Intelligence

Proponents of IQ tests put such weight on them believing it to be valid. But this validity is to be seriously questioned in two ways. First, how can it be valid when we don't agree upon the nature of the intelligence?

Second, even if we agree on the nature, are they reliable enough to prove validity? Unfortunately, the test lack evidence to prove its validity. Also, it fails to take into account the factor of training; the more you practice the test more the chances to score higher. Improved skills and better schooling bring about good IQ scores which are not taken into account by the test. These tests, therefore fail to take into account such factors giving a false impression about the accuracy of intelligence.

Other Factors

As the IQ is “ the ratio of the ‘ mental age’ to ‘ chronological age’ they are comparative academic estimate of intelligence of an individual with its peers. Therefore, the test is about the ability to perform well within a group. As well, IQ tests are time barred. It is all about the number of questions answered within a set time. Therefore, it determines mental attentiveness than intelligence, for latter is about thinking not speed of thinking.

Considering, IQ tests to be an accurate measure of absolute intelligence is seriously flawed. These tests are limited in scope as they do not measure all aspects of intelligence. Neither they are valid nor inclusive of the

environment. Strictly speaking, they test only cognitive abilities for predicting how one will perform academically. Therefore, if someone is not able to perform well in the test should not be taken as unintelligent.