

ABSTRACT

The poster aims to present the current discussion about the mandatory use of tests in basic skills courses for adult learners in The Basic Competence in Working Life Programme (BCWL). The main concern is that the use of tests might lower the motivation for participation and learning in weak learners and immigrants with low language skills. We therefore asked test supervisors in a survey about the use and usability of three tests for diagnostic and summative purposes made available to them by Vox, Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning. Their answers differ for the three tests, but in general, they show that the tests are less suitable for weakest learners and immigrants with a language level below B1. The conclusion is that test supervisors should be free to choose what kind of assessment is suitable for their students. The findings also suggest that these three tests are better for diagnostic purposes than for summative purposes.

About Vox and The Basic Competence in Working Life Programme (BCWL)

Vox, Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning is owned by the Ministry of Education and Research in Norway. We work to improve basic skills in the adult population in the areas of reading, writing, functional numeracy and digital competencies.

The BCWL Programme is a funding programme aimed at developing basic skills in working life. Public and private companies together with course providers can apply for funding. Vox has the administrative responsibility and also develops various materials to support the provision.

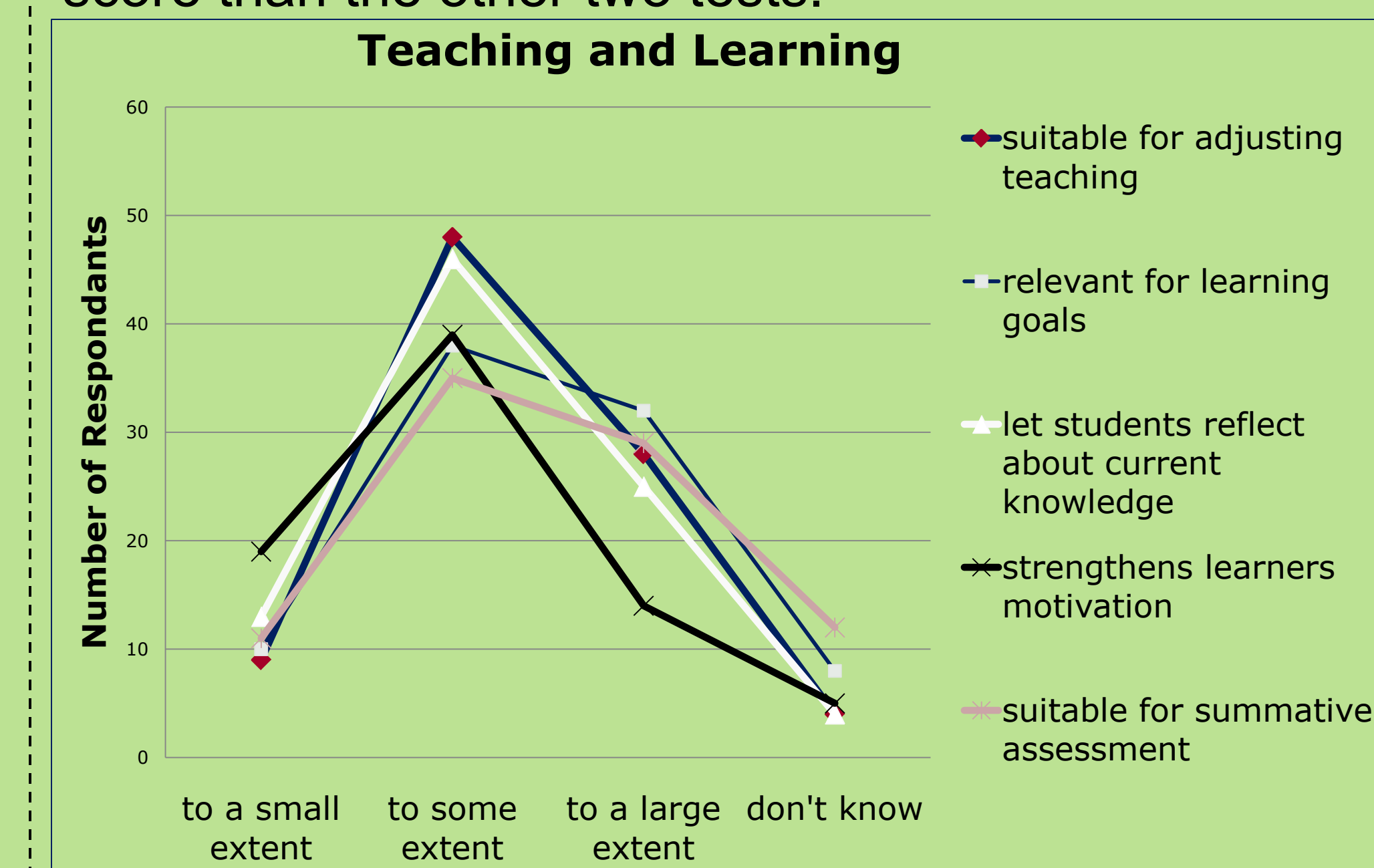
Introduction of tests for diagnostic and summative purposes
In 2009, Vox introduced a testing regime for diagnostic and summative purposes and also to help tailor the teaching and the courses to the learners' needs. In practice Vox has bought the license for a test in numeracy that was translated and adapted from the Netherlands (Cito), and another license for a reading test from ETS based on ALL and IALS. The test for digital competence was developed in cooperation with a small Norwegian company (Norsk Test).

Survey among certified test-supervisors

Method: In spring 2010, a survey was sent to 318 certified test supervisors. 185 of them have responded. Many of the respondents are certified for more than one test and have therefore answered for each test separately. The aim of the survey was to find out how the test supervisors perceive the use of the test for the weakest learners and immigrants with a language level below B1. In addition, we wanted to know whether the tests are relevant for diagnostic and summative assessment purposes, the teaching goals of the courses and other factors influencing the teaching and learning process itself as motivation and reflection. Test supervisors were asked to respond (on a scale) to which degree they agree or do not agree to certain statements.

The data show that there is different grade of agreement for the three areas that were described in the aim of the survey.

suitable for weak learners to a small extent, and to some extent suitable for immigrants on language level B1 or higher. Many chose to answer: don't know. The test in digital competence received a far more positive score than the other two tests.



The total result for statements concerning the teaching and learning process, including a statement about the suitability of the tests for summative assessment, shows that the tests were seen as suitable only to some extent. How can we interpret this? The possibility for open answers included in the survey gives us some hints. Test supervisors comment that the tests do not match to the specific content of the course related to the needs of a certain profession or industry, and that the participants are often too weak to do well on the tests. They also criticised the pedagogical quality of the tests which again is a special problem in relation to weak learners. Here again, the test in digital competence scores better when it comes to motivational issues and summative assessment.

DISCUSSION

Can the use of tests be made mandatory for teachers and providers of basic skill courses?

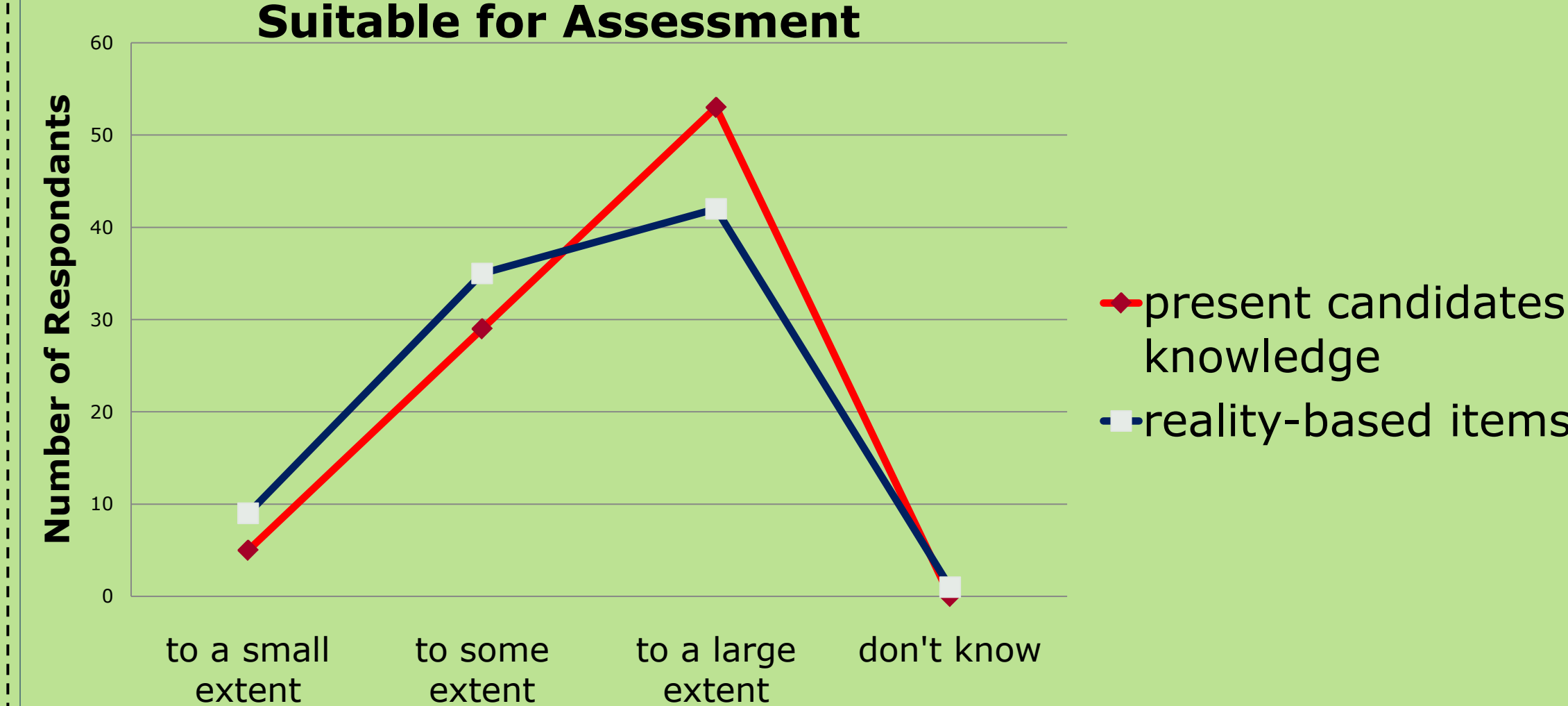
The reasons for using these tests in all courses are:

- tailoring courses according to the learners' level
- generating a complete database to help research and policy makers
- providing evidence of the effect of the BCWL programme
- motivating learners (For some learners tests show results that are far better than expected.)

Arguments against the mandatory use of tests are:

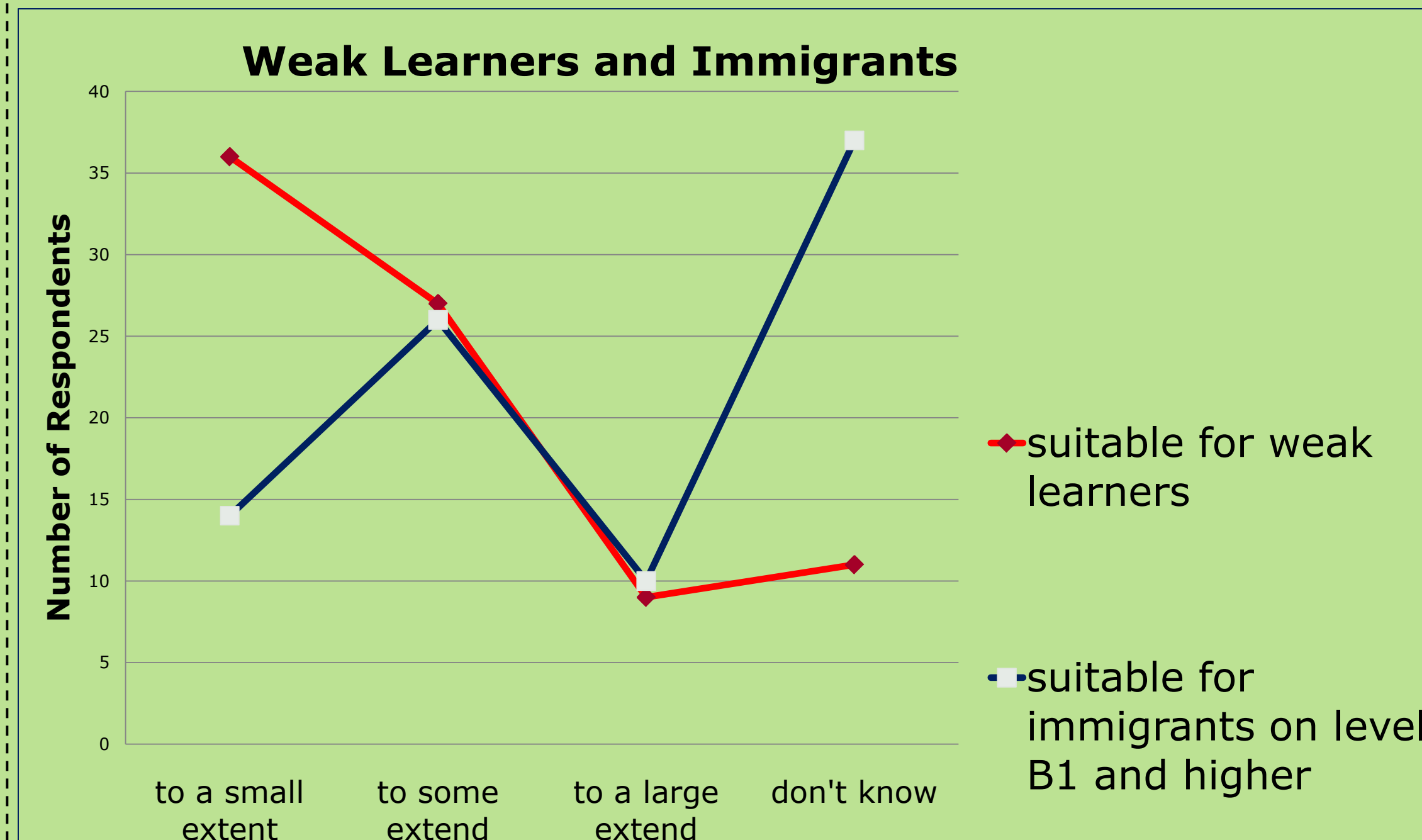
- learners might experience test anxiety and drop out of courses
- the tests are too difficult for the lowest levels
- teachers should be free to decide the form of assessment
- the courses are too short (40 hours) for test results to show significant progress

Suitable for Assessment



When the respondents were asked whether the tests are suitable for diagnostic purposes, and have sufficient reality-based items, the test supervisors agreed to a large extent.

Weak Learners and Immigrants



In terms of the suitability of the tests for weak learners and immigrants, there was some disagreement and uncertainty among test supervisors. They think that the tests are

CONCLUSIONS

There seems to be a lot of arguments against making the tests mandatory for The Basic Competence in Working Life Programme (BCWL). Given the diversity in adult learners' groups and the relatively low level, teachers should be free to decide which form of assessment is most suitable for diagnostic purposes at the beginning of the courses, and whether a test, if any, should be used for summative purposes.

REFERENCES

1. Council of Europe: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment.
2. Linda Berg; Hanne Størset (2010): PDK-, Digital- og Regnetesten. Testveiledernes vurdering av hvordan de fungerer i bruk. Vox: Internal report. Oslo



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