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Recommended Citation

Salinas, J. & Guajardo, C. (2022). A review of Standardized Testing and its relevance to public education. In E. Langran (Ed.), *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference* (pp. 1083-1088). San Diego, CA, United States: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). Retrieved May 4, 2022 from <https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/220871/>.

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A review of Standardized Testing and its relevance to public education.

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Abstract

In this paper, we seek to understand the complexity of standardized testing while promoting the inclusion of cultural representation within the current curriculum and effects. In the past decades South Texas schools have been forced to use standardized testing as a form of teacher and student classroom assessment. Good measurement and classroom management for the improvement of teachers and students' achievement levels need to be supported with other styles forms of testing. Our methodology is based on the analysis of literature and current strategies. The significance of this study is to implement possible enhancements to the current curriculum and testing. Our research aims to provide better accommodations for culturally diverse students who are lacking within the school system. By conducting this critical analysis of noted publications, we also aim to explain the patterns that have evolved through the educational system. By evaluating current practices, we promote a well-rounded education system.

Keywords: Standardized Testing, Culturally Diverse Populations, Diversity and Inclusions, Social Issues, Teacher and Student Achievements, Review of Publications

A review of Standardized Testing and its relevance to public education.

Introduction

The introduction of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, required schools to administer standardized examinations in an attempt to reduce the educational gap seen between many school districts. As our educational system evolved more restrictions were added to the school systems culminating in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which furthered school's usage and acceptance of obtaining results through the use of these examinations. As stated by Klein, et al. (2006) each state was accountable for the implementation of standardized testing required by the NCLB and previous legislation. Our paper aims to provide a relevant analysis of literature that aims to show that standardized testing is not the best way to prove a student's success rate or achievement levels in the educational system.

In the last few decades standardized testing has become the primary teaching method in the State of Texas in forms such as the TAKS, TEKS and STARR. One major flaw in their implementation often acknowledged is that they have no consideration for cultural relevance and lack the equitable distribution of resources. This has led us to believe that the difficulties exhibited by students may be due to fundamental issues and can be found within all the categorical subjects that are targeted by this form of examination. The main focus of the current examination is not the enhancement of student understanding of the material. This study focuses on reviewing whether or not current research overlooks the importance of culturally appropriate information and whether the use of standardized has an adverse impact on culturally diverse student bodies.

Literature Review

The use of standardized testing in the public school system over the years has been accepted in many areas. The goal is not only to get students situated at a basic level that is considered to be appropriate by the federal and state governments, but to also promote uniformity within the educational field. While many administrators continue to push the use of these exams, we must question can these tests truly determine student achievement throughout an academic career? Secondly, are these tests a distraction aimed to keep economically disadvantaged students from gaining the resources they need to be successful in life? This study focuses on this issue through the evaluation of three different aspects that we believe to be the focal points of the overall issue.

Government Influence

As a result of federal educational legislation, states and districts have mandated policies and procedures that narrowly focus on curricula, based on academic standards, in order to ensure students are learning, and teachers are teaching what is necessary to perform highly on standardized tests (Ramlackhan, 2020). As implied in current research, arguably the use of these forms of exams and standards has a tendency to counteract the actual intentions of the educational system. For the past two decades, standardized academic achievement tests have played a central role in the U.S. education system (Sugarman & Villegas, 2020). While placed within this central role, it has become apparent that there are affects that most would not have anticipated. "Over the last decade all but one state, to varying degrees, have established standards and standardized testing requirements, including requiring students to pass examinations to be promoted to the next grade or from secondary school" (Hursh, 2005). These standards have become an all determining requirement in some areas. These tests have become a mechanism by which public officials can impose their will on schools, and they are doing so with a vengeance (Kohn, 2000).

Culture

Drawing from cultural understandings from Thaman (1993) current research provides an understanding of culture and its place within the educational curriculum. However, studies are now showing just how complex the structure change is and where its affects are often found. Under the intention to create a universally standardized educational system, we now find that those in charge of policy may have overlooked the importance of culturally relevant details for students in the minority categories. Cultural references and the setting of prose passages might be inappropriate or unfamiliar to students (Sugarman & Villegas, 2020). The diversity within our educational system creates difficulties for students and educators alike. It was noted by McNeil (2000) that the costs of these changes are leading to the decline in the quality of what is taught and the creation of a new form of discrimination in the education of the poor and minority students. This led us to question whether there is a need for a new system of

reform or a course correction of the old one to determine what is lacking in our educational system. Bernstein (2004) questions this situation and suggests the use of one's position within the education field to not only challenge systemic inequalities but to advocate for change as well. Advocacy for students has been suggested in different forms especially when considering how classrooms are forced to adjust to the use of standardized examinations.

Classroom effects

While standardized testing may be useful in some sense to provide insight on weakness in student's overall academic capacity (Causey-Bush, 2005). As explained by Kohn (2000) these tests are geared to a different, less sophisticated kind of knowledge. Student's face being provided irrelevant information placed in difficult formats, which neither provide a structured learning basis nor promote useful information. As observed by McClaskey (2001) standardized tests offer a means of excluding information and does not offer a sole purpose and meaning for engaging in learning. It brings to question whether the use of these exams actually promote a lesser form of learning for the student and whether there is an obviously needed course of correction. "Teachers cope with being deskilled by dumbing education down; they give students minimal information but not a richer understanding of the topic" (McNeil, 2000). Critics of U.S. schools' heavy emphasis on testing charge that high stakes assessments inflict anxiety on students and teachers, turning classrooms into test-preparation factories instead of laboratories of genuine, meaningful learning (Paul, 2015). For example, test anxiety has grown into a subfield of educational psychology, and its prevalence means that the tests producing this reaction are not giving us a good picture of what many students really know or can do (Kohn, 2000).

Research Methods

Using a qualitative investigative review of literature, we approach this study by breaking down the way policies are used, and the effects seen within the classroom setting. Information was obtained through a search of relevant articles that focus on the use or implementation of standardized exams. Articles were evaluated for their usefulness of content. They followed a wide variety of aspects within standardized testing and either accept or reject their use within the classroom setting. All articles had a clear view on whether students should be subjected to standardized testing.

Using this method of article analysis, the variables were students, teachers, and those who mandate the execution of these exam sessions. The articles that were used follow the implementation of standardized testing within the educational system and some data within those articles belongs to those students. There were no active participants within our study making the sampling strategy to be one of convenience. After gathering all the published data as in any study, we evaluated the usefulness of standardized exams. Our evaluations follow whether there should be any adjustments made within our current curriculum for creation of a better knowledgeable classroom format.

Findings and Analysis

Upon processing this material, it was found that the use of standardized testing is one aspect that has caused a great deal of conflict and controversy within the educational system. While one form or another is used throughout the United States, there are significant notes detailing how these examinations fail groups as they attempt to produce some type of conformity. There are many groups that maintain an acceptance of standardized testing. However, there is a lack of correlating data as to whether it's true learning or achievement. The most conclusive determination is that the use of standardized testing creates a form of education that can easily be manipulated and pursued by those looking for funds from state and federal budgets.

We found through our search that the use of standardized exams comes with hardships and frustrations that are not often addressed. These issues affect both the students and the educators who are forced into compliance with the exam format. Students are compelled to learn fundamental test taking skills in order to fill in the proper bubbles within these exams. Our educators are also required to adjust their classroom formats so that they can promote irrelevant materials that just focus on memorization. As examined by Pinar et. al. (2014) the instructional repertoire produced by the "scientific" community, from standardized examinations, bureaucratically imposed instructional models to teacher-proof curricula, "all help to hinder the teacher's ability to utilize or implement a more orchestral perspective on teaching and learning." Through a review of previous studies, it can be seen that students that do come from a largely minority-based communities will face complex issues. The state of the current education system promotes a singular form of knowledge focusing on test taking. Which in theory could be useful idea, but within the

construct of our communities is more complex. These communities consist a mixture of cultures and people that a singular form of reference is difficult to come by. As shown in previous studies the difficulties arise often and are overlooked by those within the state and federal level administration.

Discussion

As supporters of educational reform and enhancement, the use of standardized testing can be seen as an overcorrection. The issues teachers face within the classroom setting are calculated by those who have little or no experience in providing teaching. The original focus of standardized testing initially was to provide educators with a guideline to follow. These guidelines were for classroom sessions that outlined material to be considered relevant to student success. In the current format the test is overly intrusive as they now provide teachers with details and required techniques. Throughout this study, there is still one question that remains to be unanswered. If these examinations are the main cause of difficulties for the students and they do not provide any form of educational aid, then why is the system continuing on with implementing this form of testing. In our current social construct these exams promote an overbearing form of control that only promotes the needs of the government and its political members.

Limitations

The limitations faced by this research study are based on the amount of previously published materials and the form in which the research took place. In order to come to a full understanding of the true nature of these exams and the affects it has on students categorized as minorities, we have to consider the student's geographic surroundings. This study actively uses a critical analysis and inquiry-based approach questioning the amount of time and population size it would require for a definitive answer. Using previously published studies we also face having to look at the subject in the eyes of the original researchers. While these studies are intended to be completed without bias, there are always going to be aspects that should be placed under an opinion category which can complicate things. We are left evaluating the chosen studies based on our own views still attempting to reduce any form of bias that may come forth. Each study also has its own set of limitations that we must consider.

Future Scope

We acknowledge that it has had some success in the past as an educational supplement. However, standardized testing in today's curriculum is no longer a supplementary item but a conceptual basis for how all teaching is handled. It has been noted that, "teachers are already beginning to tire of the pressure, the skewed priorities, and the disrespectful treatment they are forced to implement a curriculum largely determined by test manufactures or state legislatures" (Kohn, 2000). The intent of this study is not only to evaluate the current use of this test, but to provide a detailed view of how the current format effects students in areas of high cultural diversity. The idea of the education system is to promote the best form of knowledge to all students. If the basis of this exam only relies on unknown content than those who fall outside of the majority base will face harsher consequences. By doing a deep review on the curricular format, suggestions can be made for future curricular models.

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