

Summary

The Risk Factors Caused by Exams Used for Student Selection and Placement into Higher Education on the Academic Performance

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Results obtained from the tests that are used for the purposes of monitoring and placement might also be used as an information source for determining student success, and while making decisions concerning students' success in school (Aslanoglu, 2007; Berberoglu & Kalender, 2005). While test results are sometimes used in accordance with their purpose, at times they are misused and comparing schools and students to each other leads to competition (Looney, 2009). Because of such misuse, tests that can be used to monitor student success and to make decisions about the development of students cause test anxiety, test pressure, and a deterioration in communicative skills, instead of contributing to education in schools. The professional literature tests of this kind are defined as "high-stakes tests".

It is often emphasized in Turkey that tests conducted during the process of student selection and placement have negative effects on students. It is remarked that students preparing for these tests fail to acquire the critical behavior that should be acquired in school, and the students graduate with an understanding of education that is based only on test success, that these tests attenuate student learning regarding school lessons (Kelecioğlu, 2002), that students have to spend large amount of money and time to prepare for the tests, and that they demonstrate an inclination towards behavior to learn the test in order to succeed (Beidel, Turner, & Taylor-Ferreira, 1999; Etsey, 1997; Hess, 2002; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1999; Johnson, 2007; TED, 2010), which causes pressure on the students (Gundogdu, Kiziltas & Cimen, 2010; MEB, 2010; McDonald, 2001; TED, 2008). Moreover the literature and in research studies indicate that students preparing for tests that have a large impact, such as higher education entrance tests, take less time off for social activities (Aslan & Cansever, 2009; Arslantas, 1989; Colak, 2006; Karakoy, 1995), and that they have communication problems with their friends and with their close environ-

ment. This negatively affects the students' success on the test (Arseven, 1986).

From this perspective, there is the apprehension that higher education entrance exams cause a risk for students continuing their secondary education. This apprehension, however, has not been clearly and concretely proposed through research studies. It is necessary that the risks related to the educational success of secondary school students caused by the indicated tests are examined with a model that will be constructed in line with the aforementioned research studies; furthermore, the relationship between the variable of test success with other variables and with the variable of school success should be revealed - a subject on which little research has been conducted.

This study was conducted to propose the relationship between the school success of students enrolled in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades of secondary school institutions and the risk factors thought to be posed by the tests conducted for student selection and placement into institutions of higher education (Examination for Entrance to License Studies and Examination for Placement into License Studies); the study also aimed to examine the factors that lie behind this relationship.

Method

In this study, a combined research method was employed, in which qualitative and quantitative research methods were used together. In studies where a combined research method is employed, instead of a single method, qualitative and quantitative methods that support each other are used in conjunction. In this respect, the combined method enables more extended analyses regarding the issue that is studied (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). There are different designs that can be used in the combined method. This study employed the "exploratory design" method.

Sample and Population

The population of this study consisted of the Anatolian High Schools in the districts of Çankaya, Mamak, and Yenimahalle districts in Ankara. The study was conducted on a sample selected from this population. Maximum diversity sampling, a non-random purposive sampling method, was used for the quantitative side of the study. For the collection of qualitative data, maximum diversity sampling and deviant case sampling methods from amongst purposive sampling methods were used.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

In the study, the Test Anxiety Inventory, Communicative Skills Inventory, Test Pressure Inventory, the validity and reliability of all of which have been proved, and the Student Information Survey and Student Interview Form, which were developed by the researcher were used. In the analysis of the data obtained on the quantitative side of the research, path analysis, one of the structural equality models, was employed. The data obtained from the interviews conducted for the qualitative side of the research were analyzed with the content analysis method.

Findings and Interpretation

Scrutinizing the findings from the quantitative side of the research demonstrated that the theoretical model that the researcher developed was verified by the data obtained from students enrolled in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades of institutions of secondary education, although

the adaptation scores obtained from the 10th graders were not seen not to be satisfactory. When the models that were developed are examined, it is seen that as grade levels increase, the increase that occurs in the time spent studying for the test, the amount of money that is spent for preparation for the test, test pressure, and test anxiety have negative effects on test success. Communicative skills on the other hand, predicted success only on the basis of the cognitive aspect. Moreover, while communicative skills negatively predicted test success for 11th graders, they contributed positively to test success for 10th and 12th graders. When the data obtained from the qualitative side of the research were analyzed, it was seen that as grade levels increased, students took less time off for social activities and their interest in school lessons diminished. Furthermore, the analysis of the data indicated that regarding the communication of students with their families and friends, the discussions they had did not change according to grade level, but that students with high levels of success stated that their communication with family and friends decreased as they progressed to higher grade levels and spent more time studying for the test. In addition to these findings, the data showed that as grade levels increased, students placed more pressure on themselves and felt more responsibility towards their parents because of test preparation expenses. Most of the students stated that classes such as physical education, music or art are not effectively implemented, and that these classes do not guide them towards discovering their talents. On the same subject, students mentioned the fact that very few hours are allocated in the schedule for these classes.