

Review Article

The Constructive Aspects of Higher Education Exit Exams in Undesirable Situations: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Higher education exit exams serve as a means to evaluate students' ability in their respective programs before graduation. They are intended to ensure that graduates meet certain academic and professional standards. These assessments aim to measure students' critical thinking skills and mastery of the subject, acting as a comprehensive review of their acquired knowledge during their studies. This systematic literature review aimed to synthesize the constructive aspects of exit exams and their undesirable situations in higher education. In the literature search, the researcher used different electronic databases. Search terms were formulated and applied to the online databases. The databases used were ERIC, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, and Wiley. A total of 115 study articles were identified, and 24 studies were included in the study after applying inclusion, exclusion, and quality assessment criteria. The review process was guided by the research questions—what are the constructive aspects of exit exams in higher education? And, what are the undesirable situations of higher education exit exams? PICO was used to formulate the research question. The paper was prepared using the planning, protocol, extraction, analysis, and reporting stages. This systematic review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) criteria. Zotero was for reference management. The systematic literature review revealed that exit exams have constructive aspects in undesirable situations. To this effect, an attempt must be made to capitalize on the constructive aspects and curtail the undesirable situations of exit exams in higher education institutions.

Keywords

Constructive Aspects, Exit Exams, Higher Education, Undesirable Situations

1. Introduction

Exit exam refers to assessment implemented at the end of a specific program, course, study, or practice. It can act as a “gatekeeping” tool or as a basis for awarding a degree, individual awards, or other title [34]. Exit exams in higher education enhance students' achievement, improve graduates' performance, ensure common standards, boost public trust, and quality assurance through benchmarking potential issues

and ongoing assessment [7]. Hence, exit exams in higher education are assessments administered to graduating students to evaluate their knowledge and skills acquired during their program. They serve as a direct measure of learning outcomes and help identify curriculum strengths and weaknesses [37]. Exit exams have both positive and negative effects on the students, instructors, administrators, curriculum,

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and the higher education institutions [33].

Scholars in the area of exit exams provided various purposes of exit exams in higher education. Exit exams are required to graduate from universities and colleges in many countries. The primary purpose of the exit exams is to assess students' educational achievement in the courses in their major area of program study. Aniley states, exit exams can be internal or external, administered online or through paper and pencil methods [4]. The exam is supposed to measure the learning outputs of the program as a whole not the individual courses [3].

The design of exit exams in higher education involved institution-specific exams, lacking external verification, leading to corruption, tutoring, and eventual implementation [22]. Exit exams in higher education assess cognitive demands like knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. They vary in duration, curriculum breadth, and practical components across countries [15]. Central exit exams in higher education are externally developed, cover specific course content, signal various achievement levels, and assess a significant portion of expected knowledge, enhancing comparability, and accountability [35].

The goal of implementing exit exams is to encourage students to put effort into their learning. Exit exams can be a good quality indicator for academic program reviews and for educational institutes teaching standards. The compulsion of the exit exam will set into place new standards intended to increase the learning of all students. Such exams result in constructive aspects effects on student achievement. The implementation of exit exams is aimed at fostering a culture of diligence and dedication among students [31]. Exit exams in higher education are designed to assess program learning outcomes, motivate students, identify weaknesses, and aid in program enhancement through standardized testing [3].

El-Hussan discusses, designs of appropriate assessment tools to measure student achievement of program learning outcomes (PLOs) represent a challenge to higher education [16]. The effectiveness of exit exams depends not only on their design but also on their implementation processes. Moreover, exit exams influence student learning, teaching approaches, program improvement, and institutional outcomes.

A variety of measurement instruments are used in exit exams in higher education depending on the field of studies. Multiple choice questions [2]. Exit exams incorporate a mixture of assessment techniques [19]. This examination consisted of an objective structure clinical examination (OSCE), a multiple choice question (MCQ) paper, and a modified essay question (MEQ) paper. The MEQ paper failed to achieve its primary purpose of assessing higher cognitive skills [26]. Higher education exit exams use a variety of instruments, with specific examples used in different fields. Both theoretical and clinical instruments are used in nursing, indicating the need for thorough assessment [29]. No such tests [Exit Exams] presently are available in criminal justice [12].

Factors to consider in designing higher education exit exam include student perceptions, alignment with program learning outcomes, question difficulty, student preparation methods, and potential improvements for validity and student engagement [16], focusing on general basic questions, avoiding complex formulas, ensuring question clarity, and aligning with the program [3], and building assessment competencies, familiarizing students with exam technologies early, and addressing challenges like disabilities and technology access [5]. Exit exams in higher education should be carefully designed to ensure alignment with learning outcomes, manage dropout rates, and facilitate credit utilization, enhancing learning experiences, and inclusion opportunities [13].

The authors in the area also provide the areas measured through exit exams in higher education. Exist exams are used to measure the attitude, knowledge, and skill of graduates in terms of engineer competency [3]. Exit exams focus on clinical and communication skills. They assess both generic and sub-specialty-specific competencies and incorporate a mixture of assessment techniques [19].

This systematic literature review aimed to analyze and synthesize the exiting literature on the constructive aspects and undesirable situations of exit exams in higher education.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Procedures

This systematic literature review was conducted on studies on the constructive aspects and undesirable situations of exit exams in higher education between May 5, 2024, and September 6, 2024. A systematic literature review is a review of the research literature using systematic and explicit accountable methods [18]. A more elaborated definition of systematic literature review is provided by Petticrew [27] as follows: "Systematic reviews are literature reviews that adhere closely to a set of scientific methods that explicitly aim to limit systematic error (bias), mainly by attempting to identify, appraise, and synthesize all relevant studies (of whatever design) to answer a particular question (or set of questions)." The review process was guided by the research questions what are the constructive aspects of exit exams in higher education? And, what are the undesirable situations of higher education exit exams? The systematic literature review contained 24 papers that were gathered from different databases—ERIC, Google Scholar, Sematic Scholar, and Wiley.

The author checked the Prospero database (<http://www.library.ucsf.edu/>) to determine if there are any published or ongoing projects related to the topic—The Constructive Aspects of Higher Education Exit Exams in Undesirable Situations—in order to avoid any duplication. The finding showed that there are no ongoing or published articles in the area of this topic.

The paper was prepared in the following steps: planning, protocol, extraction, analysis, and reporting stages. This sys-

tematic review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) criteria. The researcher used Zotero for reference management, and a check was made as to the correctness of the referencing by Zotero.

2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This systematic literature review focused on the constructive aspects and undesirable situations of exit exams in higher education. The paper is excluded if it is written in a language other than English, a paper published in a conference, a paper published as a book chapter, a paper published in predator journals, or a gray paper. In addition, studies focusing on high school exit exams and studies lacking empirical evidence are excluded.

2.3. Quality Assessment

The following factors were considered as eligibility criteria in selecting the papers: Are the research goals clearly stated, are the papers peer-reviewed, are the papers full-text, and are the contents accessible?

2.4. Search Strategy and Source of Information

Search terms were formulated and applied to the online databases. Key terms were developed using various Boolean operators, such as "AND" and "OR." The following search terms were used: "Constructive aspects of Exit Exams". OR "Undesirable situations of Exit Exams", AND "Higher Education", OR "Universities", OR "Colleges", OR "Tertiary Education".

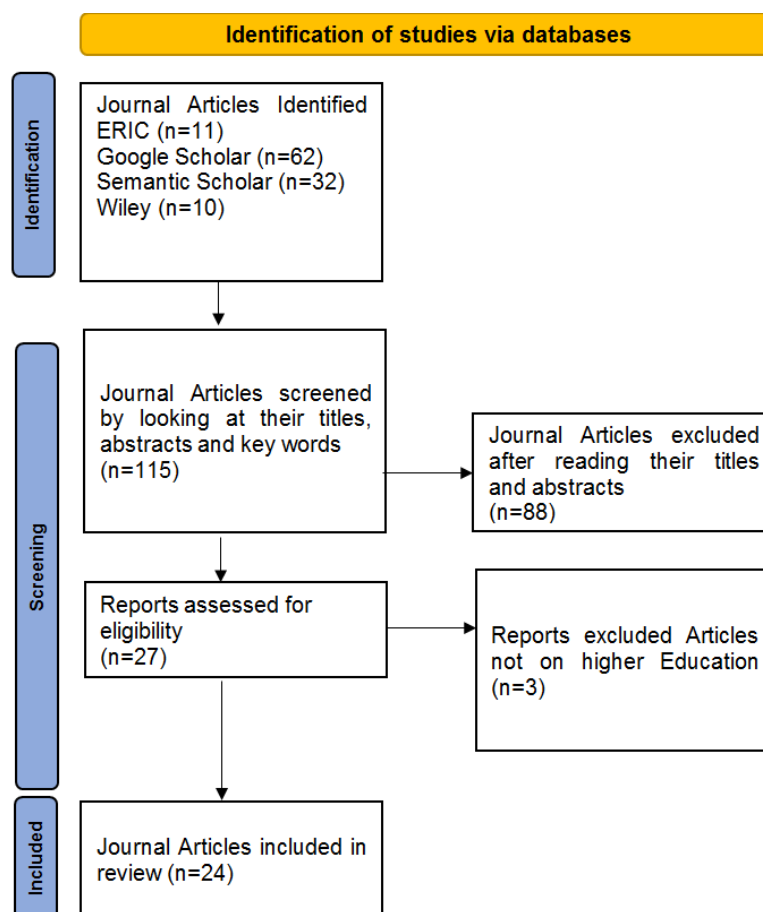


Figure 1. Search Strategy.

3. Results

This part of the systematic literature review presents studies containing the constructive aspects and undesirable situations of exit exams in higher education to be followed by the discussion section.

3.1. Constructive Aspects Higher Education Exit Exams

Academics on the study of exit exams in higher education provided several constructive aspects of exit exams in higher education. Exit exams enhance quality assurance by aligning

educational outcomes with industry standards, as seen in engineering programs where they help achieve program learning outcomes [4, 16]. They promote standardization across different academic programs, reducing discrepancies in grading and expectations, which is particularly beneficial in diverse educational settings like UAE University [3]. Implementing exit exams has been linked to improved student performance. For instance, a study showed that strategic interventions in exit exams led to a significant increase in average scores from 47% to 78 % [16]. Exit exams constructively affect students, instructors, and intuitions in higher education context. Improve responsibility for Students, teachers, and institutions on student outcomes. Improve the progressive, integrated, and continuous learning habits of students. Qualify students for their future organizational work [2]. The exam serves to provide the departments, colleges, and universities with detailed up-to-date feedback, which helps to develop the program and its course. Results of the exit exams could be used by universities in the evaluation of their instructors and faculty members during one batch. This evaluation may impact the academic promotion of faculty members. This action would force instructors to do their best to explain the content of the course well, which will impact significantly on the student's performance and proficiency [3]. The SWU-SET [Exit Exam in Thai] induced the teachers to put their effort into helping students achieve the course objectives and the test objectives [6]. The compulsion of the exit exam will set into place new standards intended to increase the learning of all students. Such exams result in constructive aspects on student achievement [21]. These exams demonstrably constructively impact student performance [31]. The constructive aspects of exit exams in higher education include enhancing reflective thinking, aiding in articulating beliefs about teaching and learning, and improving curriculum practices for students and teachers [23]. Exit exams in medical education aim to enhance quality, create a national network of doctors, and combat corruption, fostering standards in the medical profession [14]. Exit exams constructively affect labor-market outcomes, enhancing higher education's relevance to job market needs, and potentially leading to improved employment prospects and skill alignment [28]. Exit exams in higher education determine access to further studies or job opportunities impacting students' future career and life chances by providing certification of achievement [15]. Panjoy states, exit exams can certify competency, enhance program quality, and ensure industry standards are met, benefiting both students and the industry [25]. Exit exams constructively affect students, instructors, and institutions in the higher education context [36]. Exit exams positively affect students, instructors, and institutions in the higher education context [32]. Finally, exit exams in higher education enhance student achievement, standardize grading, and improve curriculum development, benefiting students, instructors, and overall educational quality [3].

3.2. Undesirable Situations of Higher Education Exit Exams

Scholars on the study of exit exams in higher education also provided numerous undesirable situations of exit exams in higher education. The undesirable situations of exit exams in higher education include increased stress, anxiety, and fatigue among students, potentially due to pressure from teachers, impacting students' motivational and emotional experiences [3]. Exit exams disproportionately affect students with disabilities or those from under-resourced backgrounds, exacerbating existing educational inequities [36]. Exit exams can reinforce social discrimination, limit curriculum flexibility, exacerbate inequalities in access to higher education, and weaken connections between universities and local communities [30]. Exit exams in higher education harm students who fail by reducing graduation rates without benefiting those who pass [36]. Exit exams result in a focus on rote memorization, limited cognitive engagement, and potential narrowing of teaching to exam content [10]. Exit exams in higher education can lead to narrowed teaching practices due to their impact on assessment and planning affecting teacher behavior [34]. Statewide exit exams in Germany lead to teachers feeling de-professionalized, increased pressure on students and teachers, narrowed curriculum, and reduced responsiveness to student interest [1]. The implementation of exit exams can lead to increased uncertainty about passing exam and impacts on students' self-regulated learning [24]. Exit exams in higher education can reduce graduation rates and increase incarceration rates, particularly, when the exams are more challenging and standard—based [8]. Exit exams in higher education may discourage graduation with evidence showing a decrease in graduation rate [11]. Exit exams have developmental outcomes, decreased GPA, school engagement, and belonging, rather than constructive aspects effects in higher education [9]. French shows, exit exams in higher education can lead to drawbacks such as academic misconduct, stress, anxiety, and lack of empirical evidence supporting their pedagogical benefits [17]. Moreover, Tontus provides exit exams in higher education impact teacher practices, lending to narrowed planning and assessment [34]. Finally, Houchensen shows that exit exams can lead to emotional distress, perceived failure, and limited academic choices, impacting students' self-esteem and learning environment [20].

4. Discussion

Exit exams in higher education offer several constructive aspects, including assessment of learning outcomes, accountability, curriculum evaluation, and graduate readiness, and standardization, motivation for the students, feedback mechanisms, and data for stakeholders. Hence, exit exams provide a standardized measure of students' knowledge and skills, helping institutions assess whether graduates meet the expected learning outcomes of their programs. Secondly, exit exams can hold both students and institutions accountable for

educational quality. They can help ensure that programs are effectively preparing students for their careers. Thirdly, results from exit exams can highlight strengths and weaknesses in curricula, guiding improvements and ensuring alignment with industry standards. Exit exams also help verify that graduates possess the necessary competencies and critical thinking skills required in their fields, which can enhance employability. By offering a common evaluation method, exit exams can also help standardize assessments across different programs and institutions, making it easier to compare graduate outcomes. Awareness of a comprehensive evaluation at the end of their studies can motivate students to engage more deeply with their coursework and prepare more thoroughly. Exit exams provide valuable feedback to students about their strengths and areas for improvement, informing their future educational or professional endeavors. Finally, the results from exit exams can serve as important data for stakeholders, including employers, accrediting bodies, and policymakers, highlighting the effectiveness of higher education programs.

Though these are the constructive aspects of exit exams in higher education, it's also important to note the potential undesirable situations. The undesirable situations of exit exams include stress and anxiety, teaching to the test, equity concerns, limited assessment scope, cost and resources, false sense of security, feedback limitations, resistance from faculty and students, and the potential for cheating. The pressure of a high-stakes exam can lead to significant stress and anxiety for students, potentially impacting their performance and overall well-being. Faculty may feel compelled to align their teaching closely with exam content, which can limit the breadth of the curriculum and stifle creativity in instruction. Standardized exit exams may disadvantage students from diverse backgrounds or those with varying levels of preparation, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities. Exit exams often focus on specific knowledge or skills, which may not fully capture a student's overall abilities or the practical skills needed in their field. Implementing exit exams can be costly and resource-intensive, requiring funding for development, administration, and evaluation. Success on an exit exam may give a misleading impression of a student's readiness for the workforce, as real-world applications often involve more complex, interdisciplinary problem-solving. While exit exams provide some feedback, they may not offer detailed insights into individual student strengths and weaknesses, limiting opportunities for targeted improvement. Faculty may resist the implementation of exit exams due to concerns about their impact on teaching, while students may feel that such exams do not reflect their true capabilities. Exit exams can encourage dishonest behavior, leading to questions about the integrity of the assessment process.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

In conclusion, exit exams in higher education can play a valuable role in assessing student knowledge and ensuring

accountability within academic programs. They provide a standardized measure that can enhance the overall quality of education, align curricula with industry standards, and motivate students to engage more deeply in their studies. However, the potential drawbacks—such as heightened stress levels, issues of equity, and the risk of narrowing educational focus—underscore the need for a careful approach to their implementation. To maximize the benefits of exit exams while mitigating their undesirable situations, institutions should prioritize a comprehensive evaluation framework that incorporates multiple assessment methods. This might include portfolio reviews, practical assessments, and peer evaluations alongside exit exams. Furthermore, providing support systems for students, such as test preparation resources and mental health services, can help alleviate the pressure associated with exit exams. Balancing the constructive aspects with these undesirable situations is essential to ensure that exit exams serve their intended purpose without undermining the educational experience. Hence, balancing the constructive aspects and undesirable situations of is crucial for effective implementation of higher education exit exams. By thoughtfully integrating exit exams into a broader educational strategy, higher education institutions can better prepare graduates for the challenges of their future careers while promoting a culture of learning that prioritizes individual growth and achievement.

Abbreviations

ERIC	Education Resources Information Center
PICO	Problem Intervention Comparison Outcome
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

Author Contributions

Samson Worku Teshome is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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