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Constructs over time: the construct of language competence as captured in tests in England over the last 150 years

Conference Paper Abstract

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Abstract

Tests constitute a widely used assessment tool in education. Gaining an insight into the future of tests presupposes understanding their present and past. Seeking to inform the field of testing, this study investigated tests diachronically. It focused specifically on the notion of construct which lies at the heart of test development and test score interpretation. Construct is the attribute measured by tests, with test scores indicating the degree to which the test taker possesses the measured construct. The construct which provided the context for this investigation is that assessed by language tests, namely, language competence. Focusing on first language competence as conceptualised in the context of secondary education in England, this study analysed a sample of high-stakes English tests from 1867 to 2017. Its aim was to illuminate the nature of constructs by tracing the trajectory of the construct of English competence over time. The study identified various conceptualisations of English competence each prevailing at a different point in time, demonstrating the evolving and fluid character of constructs. This presentation will report the findings of the study and discuss their implications for educational assessment.

Full paper

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