

Creating better tests: Students' views on the accessibility of different exam question design features

Conference abstract

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Abstract

As part of continued efforts to ensure inclusivity in assessment, one of the UK's examination boards (OCR) developed a set of accessibility principles for question design in science examinations. The principles are intended to help ensure that all students can demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills to the best of their ability. The aim of this research was to consider the effectiveness of the accessibility principles by investigating students' perceptions of question features in terms of accessibility. Two versions of a short test were constructed using questions with and without the accessibility principles applied. Students aged 15 to 16 from four schools across England attempted the test and, of these, 57 were interviewed. Students were asked about question design features relating to the different accessibility principles and encouraged to talk about how accessible they felt the questions were and why. The results revealed that for most of the question features explored in this study, students' perceptions of accessibility tended to align with expected effects. For example, students preferred questions with simplified vocabulary or grammatical structure and appreciated the presentation of context in the form of bullet points. However, for three accessibility themes, the findings were neutral or mixed. For example, for the removal of a non-essential visual resource, there were varying effects on perceived accessibility. Whilst the accessibility principles in the current study have been evaluated in the context of secondary education, most also seem likely to be relevant to other assessment contexts.

An article about this research is published here:

<https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/our-research/all-published-resources/research-matters/issue-29-spring-2020/>