A Comparison Between Career and Technical Education and Other Students on a High Stakes Test

A Critique By:

Robert M. Torres
New Mexico State University

The authors raise the issue of fair comparison between groups on a state standardized test. While standardized testing as a practice is will continue to be a point of debate, the issue in this study centers on the nature of group comparison. The paper provides an over-view on nature and practice of assessment. While the over-view of assessment provides some basis for understanding the problem address, the study would have had a stronger foundation for which to address the problem if related-literature had been presented as a basis for group comparisons practices by administrators, policy makers, and stakeholders.

The authors include in an exhaustive list of terms and definitions typically found in theses, but served little value to the paper. The theoretical framework for the study focused on standardized tests and the nature of knowledge, skills and applications in vocational and non-vocational curriculum.

A static-group comparison, a pre-experimental design, was used to design the study. The authors are commented for addressing validity issues with the chosen design. However, the paper becomes puzzling when the authors identify “2000 graduates from urban, suburban, and rural districts…” as the independent variable of interest. As the name implies, a static-group comparison research design is used to compare groups; in this study the groups are CTE and non-CTE students. The independent variable of interest is type of curriculum (CTE versus non-CTE). The issue was further clouded when the author identify “subject selection” and “population and sampling procedures” as extraneous variables.

Two collection instruments were used to gather the data, however, no documentation as to their trustworthiness was provided. Other methodological and analyses questions remain. The summary, implications, and recommendations serve as a basis for discussion.

Questions:

1. Is it a fair assumption to state that students in Career Technical Education predominately possess certain attributes and characteristics with out providing appropriate evidence?
2. What findings lead authors to conclude that “Special Population areas” were associated with lower test scores?
3. What was the R Squared resulting from the regression analysis? Is it appropriate to base conclusions on significance testing where inference is in appropriate?
4. How did the authors control for the extraneous variables when determining group differences?

The authors are to be commented for raising a very important issue when comparing groups on high stakes tests such as standardized academic proficiency tests.