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Perspectives of Stakeholders on Exit Exams in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Exit exams in higher education have been a topic of significant debate among stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, and employers. This systematic review aims to synthesize the perspectives of these stakeholders on the implementation, effectiveness, and impact of exit exams in higher education. A comprehensive search of literature was conducted following the PRISMA guidelines, resulting in the inclusion of 23 studies. The findings reveal diverse perspectives, with students often expressing concerns about stress and fairness, while faculty and administrators highlight the potential for improving academic standards. Employers, on the other hand, view exit exams as a means to ensure competency and readiness for the workforce. The review concludes that while exit exams can serve as a valuable tool for assessing student learning outcomes, their design and implementation must consider the diverse needs and concerns of all stakeholders. Further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of exit exams on student success and workforce readiness.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Exit exams have become a prominent feature in higher education systems worldwide, serving as a mechanism to assess student competency and readiness for the workforce. These exams are often seen as a way to ensure that graduates meet the academic standards required for their respective fields. However, the implementation of exit exams has sparked considerable debate among various stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, and employers. This systematic review aims to explore the perspectives of these stakeholders on the role, effectiveness, and impact of exit exams in higher education.

The concept of exit exams is not new. Historically, they have been used as a tool to measure student learning outcomes and ensure that graduates possess the necessary knowledge and skills for their chosen professions (Handayani, 2024). In recent years, the use of exit exams has expanded, particularly in fields such as medicine, pharmacy, and aviation, where competency is critical (El-Hassan *et al.*, 2024; García-Pérez *et al.*, 2021; Lee & Lee, 2022). Despite their widespread adoption, exit exams remain controversial, with critics arguing that they can create unnecessary stress for students and may not accurately reflect their abilities (Warren & Grodsky, 2009).

The perspectives of stakeholders on exit exams are varied and often conflicting. Students, for example, may view exit exams as a barrier to graduation, particularly if they perceive the exams to be unfair or overly difficult (Houchensen, 2023). Faculty and administrators, on the other hand, often see exit exams as a way to maintain academic standards and ensure that graduates are well-prepared for their careers (Moore *et al.*, 2021). Employers, meanwhile, may view exit exams as a valuable tool for assessing the competency of potential hires (Piopiunik *et al.*, 2013).

This review seeks to address the following research questions, formulated using the PICO framework:

- (i) Population: What are the perspectives of students, faculty, administrators, and employers on exit exams in higher education?
- (ii) Intervention: How do exit exams impact the academic and professional outcomes of students?
- (iii) Comparison: How do the perspectives of different stakeholders compare regarding the implementation and effectiveness of exit exams?
- (iv) Outcome: What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of exit exams in higher education?

By synthesizing the existing literature, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of stakeholders on exit exams and to identify areas for future research.

2. METHODS

This systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The search strategy included electronic databases such as PubMed, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, as well as manual searches of reference lists from relevant articles. The search terms used included "exit exams," "higher education," "stakeholder perspectives," and "student outcomes." The inclusion criteria were studies published in English, focusing on exit exams in higher education, and providing perspectives from at least one stakeholder group (students, faculty, administrators, or employers). Studies that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

The initial search yielded 150 articles, of which 50 were duplicates and were removed. The remaining 100 articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts, resulting in the exclusion of 70 articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The full texts of the remaining 30 articles were reviewed, and 7 were excluded due to insufficient data or relevance. A total of 23 articles were included in the final review.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented in a table format, summarizing the key findings from each study. The table includes the following columns: Author and Year, Objective of the Study, Methods Used, Country, Major Findings, Perspectives of Students, Perspectives of Faculty, Perspectives of Administrators, and Perspectives of Employers. **Table 1** explains Summary of Key Findings from Included Studies on Exit Exams in Higher Education: Perspectives of Students, Faculty, Administrators, and Employers.

Table 1. Summary of key findings from included studies on exit exams in higher education: perspectives of students, faculty, administrators, and employers.

| Author & Year | Objective | Methods | Country | Major Findings | Student Perspectives | Faculty Perspectives | Administrator Perspectives | Employer Perspectives |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|----------|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Perez <i>et al.</i> (2023) | Impact of exit exams | Case study | Germany | Exit exams improve standards | Mixed feelings | Positive | Positive | N/A |
| Aristeidou <i>et al.</i> (2024) | Online exams acceptance | Survey | UK | Students prefer online exams | Positive | Positive | Positive | N/A |
| Hung (2021) | Washback effects | Case study | Thailand | Exit exams influence teaching | Negative | Positive | Positive | N/A |
| Felix (2021) | Racial equity in higher education | Modeling | USA | Exit exams may disadvantage minorities | Negative | Mixed | Mixed | N/A |
| Benner (2013) | Peer climate and exit exams | Survey | USA | Peer climate affects exam outcomes | Negative | Positive | Positive | N/A |
| Handayani (2024) | Educational efficiency | Review | USA | Exit exams improve efficiency | Positive | Positive | Positive | N/A |
| Linden and Gonzalez (2021) | Mandatory exit exams | Review | USA | Exit exams discourage graduation | Negative | Mixed | Mixed | N/A |
| Carol and Brown (1994) | Exit exam development | Case study | USA | Exit exams ensure competency | N/A | Positive | Positive | N/A |

Table 1 (continue). Summary of key findings from included studies on exit exams in higher education: perspectives of students, faculty, administrators, and employers.

| Author & Year | Objective | Methods | Country | Major Findings | Student Perspectives | Faculty Perspectives | Administrator Perspectives | Employer Perspectives |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|---------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| El-Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2024) | Medical exit exams | Review | India | Exit exams ensure quality | Mixed | Positive | Positive | Positive |
| Lee and Lee (2022) | Aviation exit exams | Survey | USA | Exit exams certify competency | Mixed | Positive | Positive | Positive |
| French (2021) | Affirmative action | Review | Brazil | Exit exams may reinforce inequality | Negative | Mixed | Mixed | N/A |
| Houchen (2023) | Culturally relevant exams | Case study | USA | Exit exams disadvantage minorities | Negative | Mixed | Mixed | N/A |
| Warin and Moore (2021) | University-industry partnerships | Review | USA | Exit exams align with industry needs | N/A | Positive | Positive | Positive |
| García-Pérez <i>et al.</i> (2021) | Pharmacy exit exams | Review | India | Exit exams uplift pharmacy practice | Mixed | Positive | Positive | Positive |
| Nelson and Johnson (2021) | Exit slips in classrooms | Review | USA | Exit exams improve reflection | Positive | Positive | Positive | N/A |
| Teshome (2025) | Self-regulated learning | Survey | Germany | Exit exams improve self-regulation | Mixed | Positive | Positive | N/A |
| Moore <i>et al.</i> (2021) | Predictors of success | Survey | USA | Exit exams predict success | Mixed | Positive | Positive | N/A |

Table 1 (continue). Summary of key findings from included studies on exit exams in higher education: perspectives of students, faculty, administrators, and employers.

| Author & Year | Objective | Methods | Country | Major Findings | Student Perspectives | Faculty Perspectives | Administrator Perspectives | Employer Perspectives |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|----------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Piopiunik et al. (2013) | Labor-market outcomes | Survey | Germany | Exit exams improve job prospects | N/A | Positive | Positive | Positive |
| Ibrahimi et al. (2023) | Pharmacy exit exams | Review | India | Exit exams advance pharmacy practice | Mixed | Positive | Positive | Positive |
| Brauer (2021) | Systematic review on exit exams | Review | Ethiopia | Exit exams improve standards | Mixed | Positive | Positive | N/A |
| Maldo nado and De Witte (2022) | Central exit exams | Review | Germany | Exit exams improve outcomes | N/A | Positive | Positive | Positive |
| Warren and Grodsky (2009) | Harm of exit exams | Review | USA | Exit exams harm failing students | Negative | Mixed | Mixed | N/A |
| Weir (2010) | Pretest/posttest assessment | Survey | USA | Exit exams improve assessment | Mixed | Positive | Positive | N/A |

3.1. Narrative Analysis

The narrative analysis synthesizes the findings from the 20 included studies, focusing on the perspectives of students, faculty, administrators, and employers regarding exit exams in higher education. The analysis reveals a complex interplay of benefits and challenges associated with exit exams, as well as divergent views among stakeholders.

3.2. Student Perspectives

Students' perspectives on exit exams are often mixed, with many expressing concerns about the stress and fairness of these assessments. For instance, Warren and Grodsky (2009) found that exit exams can harm students who fail them, leading to increased dropout rates and diminished self-esteem. Similarly, Houchensen (2023) highlighted that culturally diverse students, particularly African American students, often struggle with exit exams due to a lack of culturally relevant content, which exacerbates feelings of inequity. Also noted that exit exams may disproportionately disadvantage minority students, reinforcing existing racial inequities in higher education (Felix, 2021).

However, not all student perspectives are negative. Found that students generally accept and even prefer online exit exams, citing convenience and flexibility as key benefits (Aristeidou *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, Nelson and Charteris (2025) argued that exit exams, when designed as reflective tools (e.g., exit slips), can enhance students' critical thinking and self-assessment skills, leading to a more positive perception of these assessments.

3.3. Faculty Perspectives

Faculty members generally view exit exams as a valuable tool for maintaining academic standards and ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for their careers. Argued that exit exams improve educational efficiency by providing a standardized measure of student learning outcomes (Handayani, 2024). Similarly, Moore *et al.* (2021) found that faculty in nursing programs view exit exams as a reliable predictor of student success, particularly in high-stakes fields like healthcare.

However, some faculty members express concerns about the potential for exit exams to narrow the curriculum. Noted that exit exams can lead to "teaching to the test," where instructors focus primarily on exam content at the expense of broader educational goals (Tayeb & Al-Jaro., 2022). Despite these concerns, most faculty members agree that exit exams, when properly designed, can serve as a useful tool for assessing student competency.

3.4. Administrator Perspectives

Administrators tend to support exit exams as a means of ensuring institutional accountability and improving academic standards. Found that central exit exams are associated with improved student outcomes, which administrators view as a reflection of institutional quality (Piopiunik *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, the Maldonado and De Witte (2022) argued that exit exams can enhance the reputation of higher education institutions by demonstrating that graduates meet rigorous academic standards.

However, administrators also recognize the challenges associated with implementing exit exams, particularly in terms of cost and logistics. Highlighted the need for collaboration between universities and industry partners to ensure that exit exams align with workforce needs, which can be resource-intensive (Warin & Moore, 2021). Despite these challenges, administrators generally view exit exams as a necessary component of quality assurance in higher education.

3.5. Employer Perspectives

Employers generally view exit exams as a valuable tool for assessing the competency of potential hires. Found that medical exit exams in India are widely regarded as a guarantee of quality, ensuring that graduates possess the necessary skills for clinical practice (El-Hassan *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, García-Pérez *et al.* (2021) argued that pharmacy exit exams can uplift the profession by ensuring that graduates meet industry standards.

However, some employers express concerns about the ability of exit exams to fully capture the skills needed in the workplace. Noted that while aviation exit exams certify technical competency, they may not fully assess other critical skills, such as communication and teamwork (Lee & Lee, 2022). Despite these limitations, employers generally support the use of exit exams as a means of ensuring that graduates are ready for the workforce.

3.6. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review highlight the diverse perspectives of stakeholders on exit exams in higher education. While exit exams are generally viewed as a valuable tool for maintaining academic standards and ensuring workforce readiness, they also pose significant challenges, particularly for students.

3.7. Balancing Academic Standards and Student Well-being

One of the key tensions identified in this review is the need to balance academic standards with student well-being. On the one hand, exit exams are seen as a necessary mechanism for ensuring that graduates meet rigorous academic standards. On the other hand, these exams can create significant stress for students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. [Warren and Grodsky \(2009\)](#) and [Houchensen \(2023\)](#) both highlighted the negative impact of exit exams on students who fail them, including increased dropout rates and diminished self-esteem. These findings suggest that while exit exams can serve as a useful tool for assessing student learning outcomes, their design and implementation must take into account the diverse needs and experiences of students.

3.8. The Role of Exit Exams in Promoting Equity

Another important issue raised in this review is the role of exit exams in promoting or hindering equity in higher education. [Felix \(2021\)](#) and [French \(2021\)](#) both noted that exit exams may disproportionately disadvantage minority students, reinforcing existing racial and socioeconomic inequities. These findings underscore the need for culturally relevant and inclusive assessment practices that take into account the diverse backgrounds of students. Suggested that online exit exams may offer a more flexible and inclusive alternative, particularly for non-traditional students ([Aristeidou et al., 2024](#)).

3.9. Aligning Exit Exams with Workforce Needs

The perspectives of employers highlight the importance of aligning exit exams with workforce needs. [El-Hassan et al. \(2024\)](#) and [García-Pérez et al. \(2021\)](#) both found that exit exams are widely regarded as a guarantee of quality in fields like medicine and pharmacy. However, [Lee and Lee \(2022\)](#) noted that exit exams may not fully capture the range of skills needed in the workplace, such as communication and teamwork. These findings suggest that while exit exams can serve as a useful tool for assessing technical competency, they should be complemented by other forms of assessment that capture a broader range of skills.

3.10. Future Directions for Research and Practice

This review identifies several areas for future research, including the long-term impacts of exit exams on student success and workforce readiness. Additionally, there is a need for further research on the design and implementation of culturally relevant and inclusive exit exams that take into account the diverse needs of students. Finally, future research should explore the potential for alternative assessment practices, such as online exams and reflective tools, to address some of the challenges associated with traditional exit exams.

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic review provides a comprehensive synthesis of the perspectives of students, faculty, administrators, and employers on exit exams in higher education. The findings reveal that while exit exams are generally viewed as a valuable tool for maintaining academic standards and ensuring workforce readiness, they also pose significant challenges, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The review highlights the need for a balanced approach to the design and implementation of exit exams, one that takes into account the diverse needs and experiences of all stakeholders. This includes developing culturally relevant and inclusive assessment practices, aligning exit exams with workforce needs, and exploring alternative assessment methods that address some of the limitations of traditional exit exams.

Ultimately, exit exams can serve as a useful tool for assessing student learning outcomes and ensuring that graduates are ready for the workforce. However, their design and implementation must be carefully considered to ensure that they promote equity, support student well-being, and align with the broader goals of higher education. Future research should continue to explore these issues to develop assessment practices that are both rigorous and inclusive.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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