

To What Extent Is Testing a Barometer for Educational Quality? Unveiling the Intended and Unintended Consequences of High-Stakes Testing on Student Learning

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ABSTRACT This conceptual paper explores a centrally important element in the teaching and learning process, namely, assessment. The paper argues that assessment is the mainstay of any quality learning process. The discourse specifically focuses on high-stakes testing as an assessment instrument that has gained wide currency the world over. The authors use a critical analysis to stimulate an intellectual conversation on the impact of high-stakes testing on student learning. The discourse unfolds with an exposition of conceptual terms that constitute the building blocks of the discussion and then highlights the major intended and unintended consequences associated with the use of high-stakes tests. The authors suggest that educational decisions that affect students learning in profound ways should not be based on the narrow results of high-stakes testing perse as these may not be representative enough. The use of eclectic assessment strategies that afford students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding is therefore recommended.