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**Placement: M.Sc. (N) I Year**

**Subject: Nursing Education**

**Unit 5: Standardized and Non-Standardized Tests**

**STANDARDIZED TEST**

**Introduction:**

A standardized test is any form of test that (1) requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from common bank of questions, in the same way, and that (2) is scored in a “standard” or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students. While different types of tests and assessments may be “standardized” in this way, the term is primarily associated with large-scale tests administered to large populations of students, such as a multiple-choice test given to all the eighth-grade public-school students in a particular state, for example.

In addition to the familiar multiple-choice format, standardized tests can include true-false questions, short-answer questions, essay questions, or a mix of question types. While standardized tests were traditionally presented on paper and completed using pencils, and many still are, they are increasingly being administered on computers connected to online programs (for a related discussion, see computer-adaptive test). While standardized tests may come in a variety of forms, multiple-choice and true-false formats are widely used for large-scale testing situations because computers can score them quickly, consistently, and inexpensively. In contrast, open-ended essay questions need to be scored by humans using a common set of guidelines or rubrics to promote consistent evaluations from essay to essay—a less efficient and more time-intensive and costly option that is also considered to be more subjective. (Computerized systems designed to replace human scoring are currently being developed by a variety of companies; while these systems are still in their infancy, they are nevertheless becoming the object of growing national debate.)

While standardized tests are a major source of debate in the United States, many test experts and educators consider them to be a fair and objective method of assessing the academic achievement of students, mainly because the standardized format, coupled with computerized scoring, reduces the potential for favouritism, bias, or subjective evaluations. On the other hand, subjective human judgment enters into the testing process at various stages—e.g., in the selection and presentation of questions, or in the subject matter and phrasing of both questions and answers. Subjectivity also enters into the process when test developers set passing scores—a decision that can affect how many students pass or fail or how many achieve a level of performance considered to be “proficient.” For more detailed discussions of these issues, see measurement error, test accommodations, test bias and score inflation.

**Achievement tests** are designed to measure the knowledge and skills students learned in school or to determine the academic progress they have made over a period of time. The tests may also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a schools and teachers, or identify the appropriate academic placement for a student—i.e., what courses or programs may be deemed most suitable, or what forms of academic support they may need. Achievement tests are “backward-looking” in that they measure how well students have learned what they were expected to learn.

**Aptitude tests** attempt to predict a student’s ability to succeed in an intellectual or physical endeavour by, for example, evaluating mathematical ability, language proficiency, abstract reasoning, motor coordination, or musical talent. Aptitude tests are “forward-looking” in that they typically attempt to forecast or predict how well students will do in a future educational or career setting. Aptitude tests are often a source of debate, since many question their predictive accuracy and value.

**College-admissions tests** are used in the process of deciding which students will be admitted to a collegiate program. While there is a great deal of debate about the accuracy and utility of college-admissions tests, and many institutions of higher education no longer require applicants to take them, the tests are used as indicators of intellectual and academic potential, and some may consider them predictive of how well an applicant will do in postsecondary program.

**International-comparison tests** are administered periodically to representative samples of students in a number of countries, including the United States, for the purposes of monitoring achievement trends in individual countries and comparing educational performance across countries. A few widely used examples of international-comparison tests include the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

**Psychological tests**, including IQ tests, are used to measure a person’s cognitive abilities and mental, emotional, developmental, and social characteristics. Trained professionals, such as school psychologists, typically administer the tests, which may require students to perform a series of tasks or solve a set of problems. Psychological tests are often used to identify students with learning disabilities or other special needs that would qualify them for specialized services.

**METHODS OF STANDARDIZED TESTS**

**•**Formative and Summative Assessment

•Standardized and High-Stakes Tests

•Norm-Referenced and Criterion-Referenced Tests

•Reliability, Validity, and Fairness

Different formats of tests

•Multiple-Choice Tests

•Open-Ended Tests

•Performance

Other large-scale standardized tests

•National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP)

•International Tests: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)

•College Admissions: SAT, ACT

•Advanced Placement (AP)

•International Baccalaureate (IB)

**STANDARDIZED TESTS: ADVANTAGES**

There are many advantages of standardized testing:

1. Standardized tests are practical, they're easy to administer and they consume less time to administer versus other assessments.

2. Standardized testing results are quantifiable. By quantifying students' achievements, educators can identify proficiency levels and more easily identify students in need of remediation or advancement.

3. Standardized tests are scored via computer, which frees up time for the educator.

4. Since scoring is completed by computer, it is objective and not subject to educator bias or emotions.

5. Standardized testing allows educators to compare scores to students within the same school and across schools. This information provides data on not only the individual student's abilities but also on the school as a whole. Areas of school-wide weaknesses and strengths are more easily identifiable.

6. Standardized testing provides a longitudinal report of student progress. Over time, educators are able to see a trend of growth or decline and rapidly respond to the student's educational needs.

**DISADVANTAGES OF STANDARDIZED TESTING**

Although standardized testing is beneficial in some situations, its use has been criticized, specifically because such measures fail to inform instruction adequately. Standardized administrations may not be possible for some students with disabilities. Some disabled students can take some test in the established standardized way with some accommodations. Some accommodations, however, can become modifications to the trait or concept attempting to be measured. Some other common criticisms or disadvantages of standardized tests are as follows:

(1) Standardized test items frequently are unrelated to those tasks and behaviors required in the classroom setting,

(2) Standardized test results reflect behavior or ability that has been measured during a single point in time and, as such, are greatly influenced by noncognitive factors (e.g., fatigue, attention, and so forth);

(3) Standardized test results do not provide the type of information required for making curricular modifications or instructional change, and

(4) Standardized administration procedures often prevent the examiner from obtaining useful information regarding the conditions under which the examinee may be able to improve performance

**QUALITY OF STANDARDIZED TESTING INSTRUMENTS**

The quality, or adequacy, of any standardized testing instrument, whether norm-referenced or criterion-referenced, is directly empirically supported by both reliability and validity studies. Professional testing associations or organizations often publish standards that practitioners can refer to when evaluating the quality of a testing instrument. For instance, in the field of psychometrics, there is a set of standards titled, “Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing” which psychologists and other related practitioners can refer to when interested in the standards of test development or construction, fairness in testing, and testing applications.