

Review Article

Exit Exams in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review

Samson Worku Teshome* 

Institute of Educational Research—Center for Higher Education Research and Training, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Abstract

This systematic literature review aimed to synthesize the literature on exit exams in higher education. To this end, an attempt was made to look into the purpose of exit exams in higher education, the design and preparation of exit exams in higher education, the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of exit exams in higher education, and the effects of exit exams on students, instructors, programs, and higher education institutions. In the literature search, the researcher used different electronic databases. The databases used were ERIC, JSTOR, Wiley, Google Scholar, and Tylor and Francis. Search terms were formulated and applied to the online databases. A total of 77 study articles were identified, and 11 studies were included in the study after applying inclusion, exclusion, and quality assessment criteria. The review process was guided by research questions. PICO (Problem Intervention Comparison Outcome) was used to formulate the research questions. The paper was prepared using the planning, protocol, extraction, analysis, and reporting stages. This systematic review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) criteria. Zotero was used for reference management. The study revealed that exit exams are requirements for graduation in higher education. The principal purpose of the exit exams is to assess students' educational achievement. Exit exams positively affect students, instructors, and intuitions in the higher education context. Exit exams in higher education are used to measure the attitude, knowledge, and skill of graduates in terms of competencies. Exit exams cover the fundamentals of the relevant fields of study. A variety of measurement instruments are used in exit exams. Exit exams are also criticized on different issues. For effective and efficient utilization of exit exams in higher education it requires a higher education system pre-exit, during, and post-exit exam test administration activities. Concerning the future of exit exams in higher education alternative methods of assessment are proposed by scholars.

Keywords

Design, Effects, Exit Exams, Higher Education, Implementation, Purpose

1. Introduction

Examination is a multifaceted process. It involves evaluating and estimating academic abilities and performance, measuring knowledge, feelings, intelligence, or apt of individuals or groups skills [10]. Various examination devices

and methods have been developed to facilitate this process [17].

According to [3], an exit exam is an exam that is given at the end of the course completion may be before or after

*Corresponding author: bedlusamson@yahoo.com (Samson Worku Teshome)

Received: 30 June 2024; **Accepted:** 23 July 2024; **Published:** 6 August 2024



Copyright: © The Author(s), 2024. Published by Science Publishing Group. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

graduation. There are two types of exit exam strategies namely internal and external to the institutions and given to the student either online or through paper and pencil methods.

Exit exams in higher education are used in various countries, including Japan, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany [16]. Exit exams in higher education are designed to assess student learning and academic performance [2]. However, the validity and reliability of these exams are crucial as they can inform curricular and program improvements [14].

The content of these exams, particularly the written components, must be carefully evaluated to ensure they effectively measure high cognitive skills [11]. There is a need for continuous review and improvement of exit exam questions to ensure they align with program goals and do not overly rely on memorization [2].

Many school systems provide educational outcome information. However, the exit exam provides outcome information to be comparable across schools on an external standard. Exit exams have been argued to improve the signaling of educational achievement on the labor market and to increase labor-market productivity through increased human capital. The exit exam is intended to ensure all graduates from HEIs have developed adequate mastery of the core competencies articulated in the respective curricula thereby satisfying the requirements of the labor market and employability through the nationwide implementation of curriculum-based external exit examination [5].

Exit exams serve as valuable quality indicators for assessing academic programs and the teaching standards of educational institutions. Mandating exit exams will establish new benchmarks designed to enhance the overall learning experience for all students [15].

This systematic literature review is aimed to analyze and synthesize the literature on exit exams in higher education. To this effect, it attempted to look into the purpose of exit exams in higher education, the effects of exit exams in higher education, the criticisms of exit exams in higher education, areas of measurement in exit exams in higher education, the measurement tools used in exit exams in higher education, and the future of exit exams in higher education.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Procedures

A systematic literature review was conducted on studies on exit exams in higher education between December 23, 2023, and February 07, 2024. A systematic literature review is a review of the research literature using systematic and explicit accountability methods [7].

Systematic reviews are literature reviews that adhere closely to a set of scientific methods that explicitly aim to limit systematic error (bias), mainly by attempting to identify, appraise, and synthesize all relevant studies (of whatever

design) in order to answer a particular question (or set of questions) [12].

PICO (Problem Intervention Comparison Outcome) was used to formulate the research questions and the review process was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the purposes of exit exams in higher education?
2. What are the effects of exit exams in higher education?
3. What are the criticisms of exit exams in higher education?
4. What do exit exams attempt to measure?
5. Which measurement tools are used in exit exams in higher education?
6. What should be done to improve exit exams in higher education?
7. What is the future of exit exams in higher education?

The review encompassed 11 papers that were gathered from different databases—ERIC, JSTOR, Wiley, Google Scholar, PubMed, and Tylor Francis.

The researcher checked the Prospero database (<http://www.library.ucsf.edu/>) to determine if there are any published or ongoing projects related to the topic—exit exams in higher education—to avoid any duplication. The finding showed that there are no ongoing or published articles in the area of this topic.

The paper was prepared in the following steps: planning, protocol, extraction, analysis, and reporting stages. This systematic review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) criteria).

The researcher used Zotero for reference management, and a check was made as to the correctness of the referencing by Zotero.

2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The paper focused on exit exams in higher education and was published between 1994 and 2023. The paper is excluded if it is written in a language other than English, a paper published in a conference, a paper published as a book chapter, a paper published in predator journals, or a gray paper.

2.3. Quality Assessment

The following factors were considered as eligibility criteria in selecting articles of the study: Are the research goals clearly stated? Are the papers peer-reviewed? Are the papers full-text? Are the contents accessible?

2.4. Search Strategy and Source of Information

Search terms were formulated and applied to the online databases. Key terms were developed using various Boolean operators, such as "AND" and "OR."

The following search terms were used: "Exit Exam", OR "Exit Exam*" OR "Exit Tests", OR "Exit Assessment" AND "Higher Education", OR "Universities", OR "Colleges" OR

“Tertiary Education”.

A search of only peer reviewed full-text available journal articles' written on exit exams in higher education were used in the systematic review. To this effect.

- 1) A search on ERIC database on December 23, 2023 gave a result of 7 articles.
- 2) A search in JSTOR on December 28, 2023, resulted in 9 journal articles.
- 3) A search of journal articles in Wiley on January 6, 2024, resulted in 7 journals.
- 4) A search in Google Scholar on January 15, 2024, resulted in 35 journals.
- 5) A search in the PubMed database on January 18, 2024, resulted in 13 Journals.
- 6) A search in Tylor Francis on January 23, resulted in 6 Journals.

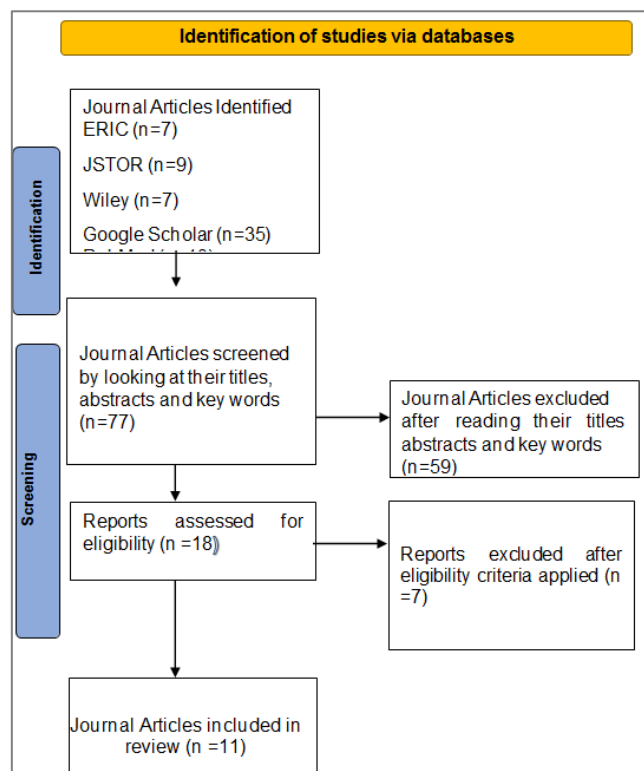


Figure 1. Search Procedures.

3. Results

It is important to note that researches made on exit exams in higher education have drawn researchers from different countries and continents.

The graph below shows the distribution of the articles by country. Four (4) of the studies were from USA, One (1) each from the UK and Thai, Three (3) of them were from India, and one (1) each from Ethiopia and Australia.

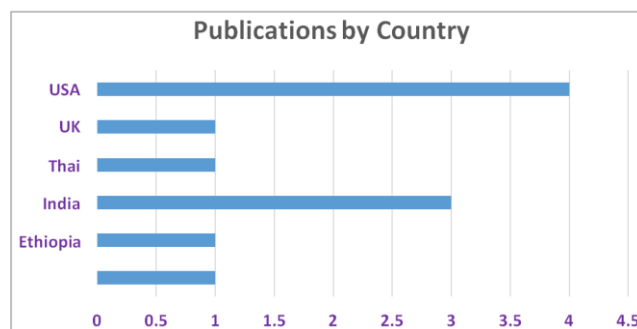


Figure 2. Publications by Country.

The line graph below shows publications year-wise. Three (3) of the articles in the systematic literature review were published in 2023, two (2) articles in year 2022, one (1) article each in the years 1994, 2010, 2014, 2015, 2017, and 2020 respectively.

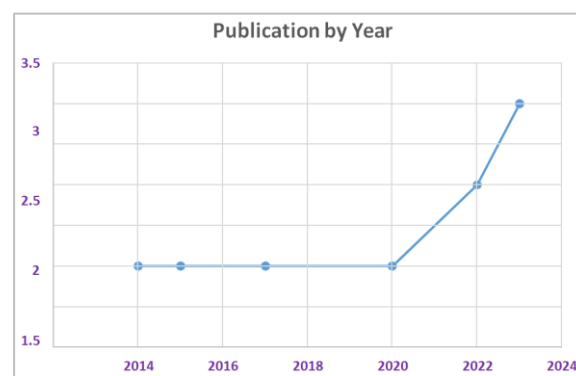


Figure 3. Publications by Year.

The pie chart next pages shows the research methods used in the literatures used for the systematic literature review.

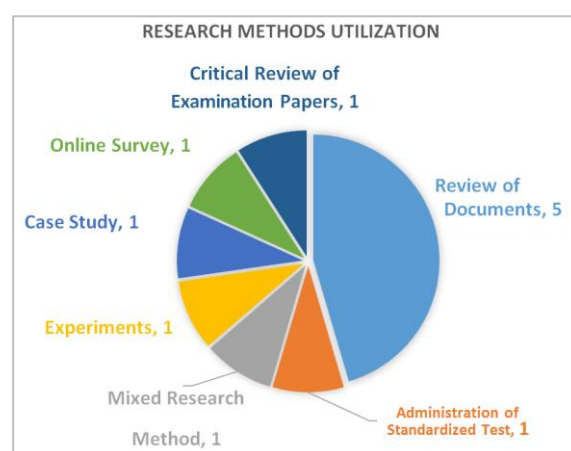


Figure 4. Research Methods Utilization.

In this section of the paper the researcher reports the find-

ings of the systematic literature review in the form of answers to the research questions.

3.1. Purposes of Exit Exams in Higher Education

Researchers in the study of exit exams provided various purposes of exit exam in higher education. Exit exams are required to graduate from universities and colleges in many countries. Exit exams are intended to be implemented at Ethiopian higher education public and private institution undergraduate programs to improve and ensure the quality of education, and then to increase employment and competency rates. Increase the competition between students. Assess the long-term memorization and holistic quality of students. Assess the effectiveness of the curriculum. Used to assess the effectiveness of teaching and assessment mechanisms. Assess the quality of education among different programs and institutes [1]. The primary purpose of the exit exams is to assess students' educational achievement in the courses in their major area of program study. The exam is supposed to measure the learning outputs of the program as a whole not the individual courses [2]. The goal of implementing exit exams for Diploma in Pharmacy (D. Pharm holder) is to encourage students to put effort into their learning. Exit exams can be a good quality indicator for academic program reviews and for educational institutes teaching standards. The compulsion of the exit exam will set into place new standards intended to increase the learning of all students. Such exams result in positive effects on student achievement. Exit exams will surely upgrade the pharmacy profession in India [9]. The implementation of exit exams for Diploma in Pharmacy (D. Pharm) holders is aimed at fostering a culture of diligence and dedication among students [15]. The literature above provide the aims of implementation of exit exams in undergraduate higher education programs. Hence, exit exams are planned to improve quality of education by applying standardized assessment at the end of educational programs. Exit exams also increase the employment rates by certifying graduates are will prepared for the job market. Besides, exit exams rise competition among students by encouraging students to attempt for higher achievement. Furthermore, exit exams are useful in assessing the long-term memorization going beyond testing immediate recall.

3.2. Effects of Exit Exams in Higher Education

Exit exams positively affect students, instructors and institutions in higher education context. Improve responsibility for Students, teachers, and institutions on student's outcome. Improve the progressive, integrated and continuous learning habits of students. Qualify students for their future organizational work [1]. The exam serves to provide the departments, colleges and universities with detailed up-to-date feedback, which helps to develop the program and its course. Results of

the exit exams could be used by universities in the evaluation of their instructors and faculty members during one batch. This evaluation may impact the academic promotion of faculty members. This action would force instructors to do their best to explain the content of the course well, which will impact significantly on the student's performance and proficiency [2]. The SWU-SET [Exit Exam in Thai] induced the teachers to put their effort into helping students achieve the course objectives and the test objectives [4]. The compulsion of the exit exam will set into place new standards intended to increase the learning of all students. Such exams result in positive effects on student achievement [9]. These exams have a demonstrably positive impact on student performance [15]. In discussing the effects of exit exams on students, teachers, and institutions, exit exams motivate students to prepare meticulously and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, teachers are forced to show a more dedicated approach to teaching and explaining course content effectively, the institutions get feedback as a result of exit exams that support in program and course development.

3.3. Criticisms of Exit Exams in Higher Education

The existing literature on exit exams in higher education also presents criticisms of exit exams. (1) Does not assess the skill-based performances of students (2) Increases stress on students learning (3) It may not be always a perfect measure of students' quality (4) It may not be always a measure of program competency (5) Administration and financial challenge [1]. The personal worries and anxieties that students may have at the end of the course are also factors that should be taken into consideration [2]. Exit exams are criticized for they do not assess skills, increase tension on student that may affect their health and behavior, and may not be a perfect measure of students' achievement and program effectiveness.

3.4. Areas Measured Through Exit Exams

Authors also provide the areas measured through exist exams in higher education. Exist exams are used to measure the attitude, knowledge and skill of graduates in terms of engineer competency [2]. Exit exams focus on clinical and communication skills. They assess both generic and subspecialty specific competencies and incorporate a mixture of assessment techniques [8]. Therefore, exit exams aim to measure the attitude, knowledge and skills of graduates in terms of competencies. In other words, exit exams assess students' understanding of theoretical concepts, their ability to apply those concepts in practical situations, and their attitude towards professional ethics and responsibilities.

3.5. Measurement Tools Used in Exit Exams in Higher Education

A variety of measurement instruments are used in exit exams in higher education depending on the field of studies. Multiple choice questions [1]. Exit exams incorporate a mixture of assessment techniques [8]. This examination consisted of an objective structure clinical examination (OSCE), a multiple choice question (MCQ) paper, and a modified essay question (MEQ) paper. The MEQ paper failed to achieve its primary purpose of assessing higher cognitive skills [11]. Higher education exit exams use a variety of instruments, with specific examples used in different fields. Both theoretical and clinical instruments are used in nursing, indicating the need for thorough assessment [13]. No such tests [Exit Exams] presently are available in criminal justice [6]. Exit exams utilize a variety of measurement tools depending on the field of study. Multiple-choice questions (MCQ) are the most commonly used tool.

3.6. Recommendations to Improve the Exit Exams in Higher Education

In order to improve exit exams in higher education researchers forwarded suggestions as follows. To effectively and efficiently achieve the core objective of delivering exit exams to undergraduate students the following recommendations should be taken into account. (1) Build students' academic performance before giving exit exams (2) The exit exams are better to be delivered in an online system (3) Prepare clear guidelines for pre, and post-exit exam strategies (4) Exit exams should be included in the curriculum and should be graded (5) Exit exams should be certified to get a job or professional license or scholarship opportunity (6) Its effectiveness should be assessed by research (7) Online or book-based exam banks should be prepared (8) The standard professional questions should be prepared (9) Motivate top scorer students through scholarship (10) Create better and fair employment competition for qualified students (11) Improve the life standard and research-teaching capacity of teachers (12) Before an official exit exam will be given, for the purpose of demonstration implementation challenges and students preparation, mock exam should be given before 2 months (13) There must be a re-exam until the students will pass (14) It is better to make the Central exit exam or prepared in a cluster of universities (15) It is better to use both internal and external examiner (16) Attrition rate, tracer study, company feedback should be collected for those students who had taken exit exams (17) Exit exam for engineering programs should be skill based aimed at measuring experimental, analytical, software, programing, field work, code related skills [1]. The EE Department needs to draft the questions more carefully [2].

3.7. The Future of Exit Exams in Higher Education

Exit exams in higher education are a subject of continuous discussion and change. While some question the fairness and effectiveness of these tests, others contend that they offer a useful indicator of student learning and program effectiveness. Alternative methods of assessment, like capstone projects or performance-based evaluations, may become more popular because they more accurately represent the knowledge and abilities required in the workforce [2].

4. Discussion

Exit exams play a prominent role in improving and ensuring the quality of education in higher education institutions, assessing the educational achievement of students, evaluating the efficacy of educational programs, assessing the effectiveness of teaching approaches and methods, evaluating assessment mechanisms. Exit exams attempt to measure the knowledge, skill, and attitude of higher education students by using a mixture of instruments appropriate to the field of the study at hand that include multiple choice and a modified essay question papers.

The resulting favorable effects of implementation of exit exams in higher education system include: Improving student motivation and engagement thereby increasing students' performance, increasing employability of graduates, providing information on the state of educational programs (curriculum) and courses, to this effect, helping in improvement in this regard to, and exit exams also help in appraising instructors and support staff so that helping the teaching and the non-teaching staff to do their best to increase students' performance.

Exit exams are also criticized in some regards too. The first and most important is the inability of exit exams to measure skill outcomes. The other is the stress exit exams create on students and the resulting health problem that it creates on students. Last but not least, the huge administrative cost that the implementation of exit exams requires is worth mentioning. To improve the use of exit exams in higher education a lot of pre, during and post measures are forwarded in the literature of exit exams in higher education system.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review has created awareness on the purpose, effects, criticisms, measurement areas, measurement tools, and the future of exit exams in higher education. Therefore, taking this study as a spring board, further research can be undertaken on the design, implementation, alternative ways of assessment of students' performance, and after graduation achievements in the labor market and further education.

Abbreviations

PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
PICO	Problem Intervention Comparison Outcome

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Dr. Daniel Desta and Dr. Birhanu for their constructive comments which shaped the systematic literature review to its present status.

Author Contributions

Samson Worku Teshome is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

No funding is provided for this work from anybody. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Adal Mengesha Yimer and Kefale Kebie Bishaw (2023). A Review on Implementation Challenges and Measures of Exit Exam to Enhance and Assure the Quality of Engineering Education at Ethiopia HEIs. *Journal of Higher Education Research*, 8(5), 225-231. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.her.20230806.13>
- [2] Al Ahmed, M. and others (2014). Exit Exam as Academic Performance Indicator. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 15(3), 58-67. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICeLeTE.2013.6644378>
- [3] Aniley, A. A. (2023). Comprehensive Review on Exit Examination Strategies and Its Role for Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Employability Opportunity in Engineering and Technology Programs. *IETE Journal of Education*, 64(1), 41-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09747338.2022.2118874>
- [4] Athiworakun, C., & Adunyarittigun, D. (2022). Investigating Washback Effects on Teaching: A Case Study of An Exit Examination at the Higher Education Level. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 15(2), Article 2.
- [5] Ayenew, E., & Yohannes, A. G. (2022). Assessing Higher Education Exit Exam in Ethiopia: Practices, Challenges and Prospects. *Science Journal of Education*, 10(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.sjedu.20221002.15>
- [6] Carol A., V., & Brown, M. F. (1994). The development of an exit examination in criminal justice for graduating seniors: A case study. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 5(1), 49-57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511259400083081>
- [7] Gouch, D., Oliver, S. and Thomas, J. (2012). *An Introduction to Systematic Review*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- [8] Hughes, F. (2001). The Achilles Heel of University-Industry Partnerships. 2001 Annual Conference Proceedings, 6.980. 1-6. 980. 5. <https://doi.org/10.18260/1-2--8883>
- [9] Khan, H., Sebu, Gaur, P., Kumar, A., & Rahman, M. ur. (2023). Pharmacy Exit Exam for the Upliftment of Profession of Pharmacy Practice in India: A Review. *International Journal of Pharma Professional's Research (IJPPR)*, 14(4), Article 4.
- [10] Nishizawa et. al. (2015). Examination device and examination method. Retrieved January 18, 2024, from <https://typeset.io/papers/examination-device-and-examination-method-47sofmwoi3>
- [11] Palmer, E. J., Duggan, P., Devitt, P. G., & Russell, R. (2010). The modified essay question: Its exit from the exit examination? *Medical Teacher*, 32(7), e300-e307. <https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2010.488705>
- [12] Petticrew, M. and Roberts, H. (2006). *Systematic Review in Social Sciences: A Practical Guide*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- [13] Rosqvist, K., Koivisto, J.-M., Vierula, J., & Haavisto, E. (2022). Instruments used in graduating nursing students' exit exams: An integrative review. *Contemporary Nurse*, 58(5-6), 393- 413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10376178.2022.2085593>
- [14] Schlemer, L., & Waldorf, D. (2010). *Testing the Test: Validity and Reliability of Senior Exit Exam*.
- [15] Siddiqui, A. W., Singh, D., Samanta, R., Das, A. M., & Chhetri, P. (2023). Evaluating The Role Of Pharmacy Exit Exams In Advancing Pharmacy Practice In India: A Comprehensive Review. *Latin American Journal of Pharmacy: A Life Science Journal*, 42(10), Article 10.
- [16] Stevenson, H. W., & Lee, S. (1997). International Comparisons of Entrance and Exit Examinations: Japan, United Kingdom, France, and Germany. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED412289>
- [17] Tsai Ching Fu. (n.d.). Examination system and examination device Retrieved January 18, 2024, from <https://typeset.io/papers/examination-system-and-examination-device-4hkkrkm34m>

Biography



Samson Worku Teshome, Ph.D. Candidate, Addis Ababa University, Institute of Educational Research, Center for Higher Education Research and Training and also Head of Department of Management and Lecturer at a private college named JIGDAN College.