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Studies in Applied Linguistics & TESOL at Teachers College, Columbia University, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 1–22
Evaluating Test Consequences Based on ESL Students' Perceptions: An Appraisal Analysis

Evaluating Test Consequences Based on ESL Students' Perceptions: An Appraisal Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring that test-score use brings about socially positive consequences for test-takers is an important aspect of test validation. While many studies use an inductive approach to evaluate test consequences, few studies have implemented Appraisal analysis. To that end, this case study investigated the test consequences of an English reading placement test that was administered at a large American university. In this study, English as a second language (ESL) students (n=8) who took the placement test and an ESL reading course were interviewed; an Appraisal analysis was conducted to identify the students' positive and/or negative perceptions toward the placement test and the ESL reading course. Using an argument-based approach to validity framework, the findings were treated as evidence to evaluate the test consequences of the placement test. The results showed that, while taking the ESL course helped students gain some valuable academic reading skills, students felt that test anxiety, fatigue, and verbally demanding questions hindered their test performances. Understanding what students experienced while taking the test can help test-developers devise solutions that will improve the test-taking situation for future test-takers. This study also illustrates how an Appraisal analysis of test-takers' discourses can provide a systematic and fine-grained approach to evaluating positive and/or negative test consequences.

Key words: appraisal, placement test, validity

INTRODUCTION

For second language (L2) learners in higher education, the ability to comprehend academic materials is critical to their academic success (Neumann et al., 2019). Previous studies show that advanced English as a second language (ESL) students are better able to comprehend academic materials than lower-level ESL students (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 1994). Despite variations in students' understanding, college-level ESL students of all levels generally dedicate greater amounts of time and effort to their academic reading than native speakers of English, as a result

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ABSTRACT This study examines potential bias with respect to perceived gender and ethnicity in preservice teachers' professional noticing of children's mathematical thinking. The goal of the study was to explore how, and to what extent bias emerges within pre-service teachers' professional noticing of children of differing perceived races and genders. Our findings suggest that bias tends to emerge in the interpreting phase of professional noticing; however, such emergence did not appear to vary in conjunction with the perceived ethnicity and gender of the student. Further, our findings suggest that the inclusion of visual imagery (i.e. photos) influence the manifestation of bias among preservice teachers to some degree when professionally noticing in the context of a written case.

KEYWORDS equity, professional noticing, teacher noticing, numeracy, preservice teachers

Equity concerns in mathematics have been pervasive for decades (Breslich, 1941; Diversity in Mathematics Education Center for Learning and Teaching [DiME], 2007; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM], 2014), but there has been renewed attention to how mathematics classroom environments can support students from diverse backgrounds. Research has shown that students experience school differently because such experiences are informed by their racial and gender identities (Boaler, 1997; Gutierrez & Dixon-Roman, 2011). This is especially evident in STEM disciplines such as mathematics where students from non-dominant groups may have received implicit and explicit messages from an early age that they are not capable or do not belong (Goffney et al., 2018; Museus et al., 2011). In some cases, students have inequitable experiences because their teachers have lower expectations for them or do not consider their culture in their practice (Savage et al., 2011; Zavala, 2014).

We view teaching mathematics for equity as providing opportunities for all students "to learn rigorous mathematics in culturally specific, meaningful ways that seek to improve the economic and social conditions of marginalized individuals and groups, and that work toward

reduc[ing] deficit-oriented beliefs about who is or is not 'good' at mathematics" (Leonard & Evans, 2012, p. 100). In order to make mathematically appropriate decisions in a classroom, the framework of *professional noticing of children's mathematical thinking* (hereafter, *professional noticing*) is used to guide teachers' understanding of children's knowledge (Jacobs et al., 2010). Teachers' beliefs about who is and is not "good" at mathematics represents an intersection of professional noticing and equity. The process of professional noticing describes teachers' *perceptions* of student thinking. There are, however, opportunities for manifestations of bias inherent in such a process. The purpose of this study was to explore how and to what extent bias emerges within pre-service teachers' professional noticing of children of differing perceived races and genders.

Professional Noticing of Children's Mathematical Thinking

The professional noticing framework used in this study incorporates three interrelated components: attending, interpreting, and deciding (Jacobs et al., 2010). The first component of professional noticing, *attending*, is to observe and identify children's words and actions when