

PASS: measuring attitudes to learning

The Pupil Attitude to Self and School rating scale – PASS – is a robust measure of young people's attitudes. This report is concerned with its origin, design, evaluation and application.

In proposing a revised, community-oriented inspection framework, Ofsted assigns considerable importance to the measurement of student attitudes. Clearly, the key role that attitudes may play in school improvement is being recognised.

Such recommendations are in line with a broad body of findings suggesting that student attitudes and self-image can be critically important intervening variables in predicting attainment in specific curriculum areas, readiness to access life-long learning opportunities, emotional well-being and the effectiveness of inclusive intervention.

However, the evidence linking attitudes and attainment is far from clear cut. There are methodological flaws associated with earlier attempts to measure attitudes and self-concept, and ambiguity in previous study interpretation.

As a result, a range of design and methodological issues have been considered to derive a robust and pragmatic measure of student attitudes. Issues of validity, reliability, validity, sensitivity to individual difference, ease of administration and sample size were addressed; and the guiding principles of ethical testing, ecological perspective, social inclusion and pragmatism underpin the approach.

Within the overall context, development of such a robust and useful measure of student attitudes required a significant association with key educational indicators. Tuckman's (1999) tripartite model of motivation for achievement was considered in the context of theoretical links incorporated into an effective attitudinal measure.

Methodology

A 50-item rating scale was developed for the pilot and administered to around 3,000 secondary-aged pupils in Sandwell LEA schools during 1996/97. Respondent data was independently item analysed by Exeter University and the measure adjusted to reduce the risk of carryover effects. Further factor analysis revealed nine distinct factors underpinning students' subtest responses to the scale. Emergent factors related to attendance, confidence/self-esteem, general and specific work ethic and perceptions of self-efficacy and metacognitive skill.

Individual items were coded and scored with a weighting of 4–1, reflecting one of four possible 'forced-choice' responses. Following the pilot,

additional schools were invited to participate, with the incentive of a summary report of whole-school student survey responses. Such findings were often reported to the school through facilitated meetings, providing an opportunity to gather qualitative information on the usefulness of survey data.

It was possible to implement PASS as both a pen-and-paper task and a computer program. Administration, scoring and derivation of percentiles for the individual student could be completed using computer software in approximately 10 minutes. Optical Mark Reading scanning technologies were used to collate and analyse large-scale paper-based PASS surveys.

Conclusions

Results indicated that, while students' attitudes may fluctuate throughout their school careers, there are also clear age-related consistencies. Transfer to secondary education and transition from key stage 3 to 4 appear to be times when young people's self-concepts can be particularly vulnerable and attitudes most negative. In the later years of secondary school, pupils generally appear to feel much more positive about their learning experiences.

Survey evaluation data indicate both high reliability and validity. As a measure of attitudes, PASS is sensitive to individual differences, and collated data can reveal important organisational and systemic school issues. Attitudes relating to self-regard, confidence, work ethic and metacognitive self-efficacy all correlate highly with academic attainment and organisational added-value measures. The measure of attitude to attendance was found to be highly predictive of actual attendance.

The applicability of PASS in educational settings is wide, especially in computer software form, where its reliability, validity, power, sensitivity and ease of administration are all most readily apparent. At a casework level, PASS is sensitive to individual student attitude profiles and can transparently inform intervention strategies. At a whole-organisation level, it can swiftly identify young people's perceptions of an institution's climate and, thus, indicate a route-plan for institutional improvement. ●

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Reference

Tuckman BW (1999). *A Tripartite Model of Motivation for Achievement: Attitude/Drive/Strategy*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Boston, August 1999.