



What is the Difference Between Direct and Indirect Measures?

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

Direct measures of student learning provide evidence of student learning by examining the demonstration of student's skill or competency. Faculty members using a rubric to evaluate aspects of a student's writing is a direct measure. So too are judges rating a student's speech. Direct measures are usually most useful for course level assessment of student learning outcomes.

Indirect measures of student learning imply that learning occurred and include perceptions or attitudes related to a student abilities. They assess opinions or thoughts about student knowledge or skills. A student's self-report on a questionnaire or a transcript showing the number of math courses taken are examples of indirect measures. Indirect measures are usually most useful for program, department, or college level assessment.

Since all measures have a subjective element, direct vs. indirect is less a dichotomy than a continuum.

Examples of Direct Measures of Student Learning

- Locally designed exams/quizzes/tests
- Score and pass rates on standardized tests
- Research papers and reports
- Projects
- Course modules
- Classroom role-plays
- Presentations
- Portfolio artifacts
- Musical or theatrical performance
- Internships, clinical experiences, practica, student teaching
- Online course discussions analyzed by instructors
- Graduates' skills in the workplace rated by employers

Examples of Indirect Measures of Student Learning

- End-of-Course evaluation survey
- Alumni satisfaction survey
- Transcripts
- Self-reported perceptions of ability
- Employment or placement rates
- Reputation of graduate programs accepting students
- Interviews and focus groups
- Honors, awards, scholarships



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