

An Integrated Sociological Approach to University Admissions in Iran: The Effect of the Combination of National Examination (Konkur¹) and High School Background on Scientific Literacy

Fatemeh Ghalkhanbaz

University of Tehran, Iran

Abstract

This study, situated within Robert K. Merton's sociological framework of science and his conceptualization of the scientific ethos, investigates the impact of a dual admission criterion, comprising national entrance examination (Konkur) scores and secondary-school academic records, on the scientific literacy of commencing university students in Iran. Employing a qualitative methodological approach informed by the sociology of science, we conducted in-depth interviews with university faculty members, secondary-school educators, and researchers specializing in higher-education assessment and Konkur preparation.

Our multi-faceted analysis indicates that, theoretically, the integration of Konkur results with academic transcripts holds the potential to provide a comprehensive evaluation of student aptitudes and predict the caliber of entrants to higher education. However, in practice, systemic disparities within the secondary education system, the lack of standardized grading protocols across schools, and the heightened stress levels associated with Konkur preparation collectively compromise the model's efficacy in ensuring both robust scientific literacy and equitable educational opportunities. Specifically, this hybrid admission system, by prioritizing rote memorization and theoretical knowledge acquisition, appears to attenuate applicants' analytical and practical proficiencies. Furthermore, it contributes to the proliferation of informal tutoring markets, intensifies psychological pressures on students, and exacerbates existing educational inequalities.

Keywords: National entrance examination (Konkur); Secondary-school academic records; Scientific literacy; Sociology of science; Student admission.

¹ The term "Konkur", whether derived from the English word "concourse" meaning a place of large gathering or "concur" meaning to act in harmony and simultaneously, is a term that has been used for national university entrance exams in Iran since ۱۹۶۹.