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The Relationship between Observed and Published Multiple-Choice
Question Difficulty may Depend on What Means “Related”

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ABSTRACT

The difficulty of a multiple-choice question is its most fundamental property, serving numerous purposes. A commonly available guide to managing item difficulty is in the form of published banks of multiple-choice questions that accompany most introductory texts. The questions are usually classified into three levels of difficulty: Easy, Medium, and Hard. The present study applies and compares two definitions of the extent to which observed difficulty and published difficulty are related. The study finds for the question banks examined that the effectiveness of their classifications does depend on what is defined as “related.”

KEYWORDS: Item analysis, item difficulty, multiple-choice questions, *TaxI*, published multiple-choice question taxonomies

Full paper and references available upon request.