Letter to Editor

Edgar Dale's Pyramid of Learning: Further expansion of the myth; Is it a mythical pyramid?

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To Editor,

As final-year doctoral students of medical education, we have been studying numerous articles citing Edgar Dale's learning pyramid; therefore, Masters' perspective on this topic is fascinating to us.[1]

According to Masters, increased citations of the Learning Pyramid are likely caused by poor referencing practices such as failing to study primary sources, misreading articles, or citing rebuttals of the Pyramid. However, Masters believes that the increased citations of the Pyramid are primarily due to the authors' politically conservative styles. Thus, treating the Pyramid as worthless does not seem appropriate in academic works.

In his study, Masters aimed to investigate the trend of citations to Edgar Dale's Learning Pyramid in medical education literature over the last five years and to determine the sources of these citations.[1] In his previous article on this phenomenon, the author questioned the citations of Pyramid and essentially prohibited other authors from citing the Pyramid.[2]

Masters was surprised to discover an increase in Pyramid citations and resources five years after publishing his first article. He provided several reasons for the increase in citations, including an increased number of articles in medical education, lack of referencing sources, failure to read the cited articles in their entirety, the increasing appeal of neat numerical brackets for Pyramid activities, placing a stronger emphasis on active learning than passive learning, and conservative disapproval of the Pyramid by opposing authors. Ultimately, Masters rejected the Pyramid and its citations as worthless.

Although the results of the Masters' study can be viewed from different aspects (e.g., correct and accurate referencing in articles), several factors should be considered regarding this article. Insufficient coverage of relevant articles may be attributable to limitations in search resources (four databases) and the search of resources by merely one individual (the author admits this). This limitation should be addressed by conducting a systematic review that includes all studies rejecting or approving the Pyramid.

Additionally, in response to the author's discussion of the lack of empirical evidence for the Pyramid, it can be argued that the Pyramid is supported by a substantial body of theoretical evidence, including the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning,[3] and relevant empirical studies[4] that constitute its foundation. The development of multimedia e-courses supports existing evidence,[5] although Masters discussed the challenges of different learning styles in his article. However, as acknowledged by Masters, neat numerical referencing to each level of the Pyramid, despite its appeal, tends not to be very reliable due to contextual differences.

In conclusion, despite the limitations and ambiguities associated with Edgar Dale's Learning Pyramid, it cannot be dismissed as a legendary phenomenon. Therefore, further research on its limitations is recommended.

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