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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Development of the Special Needs Education Assessment Tool (SNEAT) to Evaluate the Educational Outcome of Special Needs Education: Centering on the Content Validity Verification

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ABSTRACT

It is currently difficult to find the tools to assess educational outcome in the field of special needs education. Therefore, this study aimed to develop the tool to evaluate the educational outcome of special needs education, called as the Special Needs Education Assessment Tool(hereafter, the SNEAT), that will enable teachers to evaluate their classes according to the changes of children with disabilities; for the development of the SNEAT, its content validity was verified with the draft of the SNEAT. For the content validity verification of the SNEAT, the surveys via interview and questionnaire were conducted for the researchers for special needs education, teachers who are affiliated with educational research institutes run by Prefectural governments and in-service teachers. In results, over 90 percent of the respondents answered that it is valid, which showed that the content validity was verified. The scientific methods to verify the SNEAT in the field of Education, however, need to be explored in the future, because the content validity verification method is done based on the subjective opinions of respondents.

< Key-words >

Special Needs Education, Education Assessment, Special Needs Education Assessment Tool, Development of Scale, Content Validity Verification

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I . Background

Even though the evaluation of academic ability has been considered as the major way to evaluate the educational outcome, the difficulty lies to apply it in the setting of special support schools; thus, whether the goals of the class on independent activities have been achieved or not has been used as an indicator to evaluate the educational outcomes in the setting of special needs schools(Kohara & Han, 2014). The new Courses of Study pointed out that "for the evaluation of the class on independent activities, the validity of plans as well as the effects and evaluation of education should be sufficiently reviewed, because the goals and contents of guidance are individually set up"; both the learning of students and the practices of teachers during the class need to be evaluated. Suzuki (1995) emphasized the importance of evaluation by suggesting that the evaluation of students should be used to reflect the classes, to understand the changes of students and to determine the appropriacy of classes.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to find the tools that are built based on those aforementioned considerations and, moreover, it is hard to find the tools that have been scientifically verified and structured assessment tools. Nozaki, Kawasumi (2012) found that over 60 percent of in-service teachers have difficulty in the learning and practice evaluations by conducting the survey for school teachers on the learning evaluation and practice evaluation of special needs education, which presented the necessity of the development of education assessment tools for special support education. In this context, this study aimed to develop the Special Needs Education Assessment Tool(hereafter, the SNEAT) to enable to evaluate lesson evaluation according to the changes of students. This is a meaningful attempt, for it has not been tried in Japan by now.

Shimizu (2005) suggested that the tools should be developed by considering whom or how they would affect, because they are utilized in the educational environment and more broadly in our society and by sharing the information and the feedback that have been collected via expanded information network in the theoretical and practical aspects. That is to say, the SNEAT should be provided to the field of education after sufficiently discussing them with researchers and in-service teachers and verifying them theoretically and scientifically, because they are the first attempt to evaluate the educational outcome of special needs education in Japan

To develop the Special Needs Education Assessment Tool, this study planed the process as follows:

1. The determination of the composing concepts and the preparation of the question items
2. The implementation of the survey for experts including the teachers of educational institutes of prefectural governments(Content validity verification I)
3. The implementation of the survey for in-service teachers (Content validity verification II)

Finally the tool that was developed through the aforementioned process was named as Special Needs Education Assessment Tool(SNEAT).

II . Questionnaire Construction (The Determination of Composing Concepts and the Preparation of Question Items)

There are three methods to make tools such as theoretical method, factor analysis and criterion-related method(Murakami, 2008). However, because the development of SNEAT is the first try to evaluate educational outcome based on the changes of children with disabilities, it is difficult to construct questionnaire via factor analysis or criterion-related methods; therefore, the theoretical method was employed. Murakami (2008) defined the theoretical method as the process in which the subjects are logically reviewed, the items to ask are collected, question items are made and question items are analyzed and arranged statistically.

Kohara , Han et al.(2014) verified the utilization of health-related QOL(hereafter, HRQOL) to evaluate educational outcome¹ 1) to improve the quality of life(hereafter, QOL) of children with disabilities who are the subjects of special needs education and 2) to meet the necessity of the tools to evaluate educational outcome according to the QOL of children with disabilities. In results, it was confirmed that independent activities are related with HRQOL.

Based on those studies, the scale was constructed and question items were written. The composing concepts were determined to three scopes of physical functioning, mental health and social functioning that are common with the independent activities and the scopes of HRQOL and based on them, question items were collected. The question items were extracted from common contents and terms from independent activities and HRQOL; the ability of concentration was added, because it is considered as important for learning activities, even though it is included only in HRQOL, not in the contents of independent activities. The annotations of each item were written by referring to the contents or terms of the report on the practice of education that was used in the study of Kohara, Han et al.(2014).

The questionnaire was composed of three scopes such as physical functioning, mental health and social functioning and 11 question items. Finally the draft of the SNEAT has been made as aforementioned process.

¹ Kohara, Han et al.(2014) conducted their study by dividing the contents of special needs education into six kinds of independent activities and eight scopes of HRQOL(SF-36) based on the Report on the Practices of the Course of the Study of Special Needs Education in Okinawa Prefecture.

III. The Content Validity Verification

Content validity enables to confirm appropriacy and representativeness of contents to be measured according to the judgment of experts (Shimizu, 2005). Waltz et al. (1991) emphasized that content validity is an indispensable factor to measure the validity of composing concept and has to be most importantly considered when developing assessment tools. Shimizu (2005) described that it is critical to construct the tools of which the content validity is verified in the process of developing them and the inference from the scores that were gained by using the tools is affected by whether to secure the content validity or not; that is, it is necessary to accurately write the contents and language expression of questions. Generally the content validity verification is implemented for certain experts. However, considering that the SNEAT is a new scale in the field of special needs education and that the content validity may decrease because of the employment of the theoretical method to develop it, the content validity was verified by researchers, teachers who are affiliated with education research institutes run by prefectural government and in-service teachers to heighten the degree of the content validity.

1. The Content Validity Verification I (Survey for Experts)

1) Methods

The survey for experts including four researchers on special needs education and six teachers of Okinawa Prefectural Educational Center² was conducted in May, 2014. After the developers of the SNEAT explained the theoretical background and structure of the SNEAT to them, the discussion about the structure of questionnaire and the contents and terms of each item was held.

2) The Characteristics of Respondents

All the four researchers on special needs education were males and the average period of their research on special needs education was 17 ± 5.9 years. Among the six teachers of Okinawa Prefectural Educational Center, there were four males and two females and all of them possessed the teaching license for special needs education; there was a teacher who has more than 10-year teaching experience in the field of special needs education and a teacher who has the experience of administrative position; the average period of their teaching experience was 15.8 ± 2.9 years and their average age was 43 ± 4.2 years.

² Okinawa Prefectural Educational Center is a Okinawa Prefecture Education Committee-affiliated organization and has implemented the research on education and the training of education-related staff.

3) The Results from the Discussion about the Scopes of the SNEAT and the Terms and Contents of Its Question Items

<Table 1> The Results from the Survey on the Draft of the Contents and Terms of the SNEAT for Experts

Experts' Opinions	Before Changing	After Changing
Generally the concept of the students with disabilities who are the subjects of the class is not clear. Disabilities are divided into diverse types such as intellectual disability, physical disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment, etc. Therefore, it is not reasonable to try to measure the educational outcome without the consideration of the characteristics of those various types of disabilities.	No mentions about this in the SNEAT	The remarks was added to the SNEAT as follows: “The SNEAT can be used in the classes for the students with disabilities regardless of the types of their disabilities. 1. The students who can express themselves in any way. 2. The students with the possibility that their posture, motor ability and motions may be improved, even temporarily.
The concept of “understanding” is not clear, whether it is teachers' or children's.	“Q3. Could you become to understand the life management of the student via the class?” “Q4. Could you become to understand the condition of student's disabilities(diseases) more deeply via the class? “	“Q3. Has been the ability of student to independently manage daily living improved?” “Q4. Has been the degree of student's understanding his/her condition of diseases(disabilities) improved?”
The meaning of the term of “positive feeling” is not clear. And the improvement of the will to learn may be different according to the guidance of teachers, the will to learn of students and the degrees of disabilities.	“2) Please evaluate all the items between Q1 and Q 11”	The explanation was added to the section of annotation and, because respondents may not read the annotation, also added to the SNEAT as follows: “2) Please evaluate all the items of No. 11 and read the annotation.”

2. The Content Validity Verification II (Survey for In-service Teachers)

1) Methods

The survey for in-service teachers including 23 teachers in charge of both general affairs and teaching of special need schools in Okinawa Prefecture and 66 teachers who participated in the training course of Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education for obtaining teaching license by Teachers' License Law³ was conducted between June and July, 2014. After the developers of the SNEAT explained the theoretical background and structure of the SNEAT to them, the survey on the structure of questionnaire and the contents and terms of each item was held.

³ The training course for obtaining teaching license by Teachers' License Law is prepared for the in-service teachers who are possessing the teaching license, but want to obtain higher classes of the teaching license or others. In this study, this refers two kinds of training courses for obtaining the teaching license to teach the students with special needs.

2) Questionnaires

The basic characteristics of respondents were asked; age, sex, the period of teaching experience, the period of experience to teach students with special needs and whether to have a teaching license or not.

The questionnaire about the content validity of the SNEAT was consisted of 18 questions (Table2); question No.1 to 3 were about the content validity to determine scopes; question No.5 to 8 were about the content validity to determine the items of physical functioning; question No.10 to 13 were about the content validity to determine the items of mental health; and question No.15 to 17 were about the content validity to determine items of social functioning. The answers were given based on five-point scale; very valid, valid, limitedly valid, in-valid and very in-valid. The question No. 4, 9, 14 and 18 were made open-ended style to enable respondents to write their opinions about the each scope and items of the SNEAT.

<Table 2> The questionnaire about the content validity of the SNEAT

No.	Questions	Evaluation Methods
Question No. 1	Do you think that it is valid to include the scope of "physical functioning" in the SNEAT, when evaluating the educational outcome of special needs education?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 2	Do you think that it is valid to include the scope of "mental health" in the SNEAT, when evaluating the educational outcome of special needs education?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 3	Do you think that it is valid to include the scope of "social functioning" in the SNEAT, when evaluating the educational outcome of special needs education?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 4	Please feel free to write down any opinions about the contents and terms of each scope of the SNEAT.	Open-ended
Question No. 5	Do you think that it is valid to include Q1(Were the activities during the class appropriate for the physical conditions of students?) in the composing items of "physical functioning"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 6	Do you think that it is valid to include Q2(Have been the posture, motor ability and motions of student improved?) in the composing items of "physical functioning"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 7	Do you think that it is valid to include Q3(Could you become to understand the life management of the student via the class?) in the composing items of "physical functioning"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 8	Do you think that it is valid to include Q4(Could you become to understand the condition of student's disabilities(diseases) more deeply via the class?) in the composing items of "physical functioning"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 9	Please, feel free to write down your opinions about the contents and terms of each question from Q1 to Q4 of the SNEAT.	Open-ended
Question No. 10	Do you think that it is valid to include Q5(Has the feelings of student changed positively when comparing it before the class with after the class?) in the composing items of "mental health".	Five-point Scale
Question No. 11	Do you think that it is valid to include Q6(Did the student participate in class(learning/activities) in concentration?) in the composing items of "mental health"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 12	Do you think that it is valid to include Q7(Has been the will of student to learn improved via the class?) in the composing items of "mental health"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 13	Do you think that it is valid to include Q8(Could the student respond to the changes of place and situation (the changes of environment) during class?) in the composing items of "mental health"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 14	Please, feel free to write down your opinions about the contents and terms of each question from Q5 to Q8 of the SNEAT.	Open-ended
Question No. 15	Do you think that it is valid to include Q9(Could the student form a relationship with others during the class(interactions)?) in the composing items of "social functioning"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 16	Do you think that it is valid to include Q10(Could the student express his/herself by choosing appropriate communication ways?) in the composing items of "social functioning"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 17	Do you think that it is valid to include Q11(Did the student participate in the class activities with understanding class rules and controlling his/her behaviors?) in the composing items of "social functioning"?	Five-point Scale
Question No. 18	Please, feel free to write down your opinions about the contents and terms of each question from Q9 to Q11 of the SNEAT.	Open-ended

3) Ethical Considerations

The written explanation for the purpose and methods of study and the ethical consideration was given to respondents. In the written explanation was the contact information on the research to ensure the right to ask questions. The questionnaire was collected anonymously to guarantee the anonymity of respondents.

4) Results

i. Characteristics of Respondent

<Table 3> Characteristics of Respondent

1. Age	40.1±8.3 years
2. Sex	30 males(33.7%)
	57 females(64.1%)
	2 no-responds (2.2%)
3. The average period of teaching experience	14.4±8.4 years
4. The average period of teaching experience in special needs schools	7.2±9 years
5. The teaching license for teaching the students with special needs	23 respondents(25.8%) possess the teaching license 64 respondents(72.0%) didn't possess 2 respondents(2.2%) didn't provide answer

ii. Results of Content Validity

The answers about the content validity were given based on five-point scale; very valid, valid, limitedly valid, in-valid and very in-valid. The 'very valid' and 'limitedly valid' were translated to be valid and the 'in-valid' and 'very in-valid' were translated to be in-valid.

In results of analysis, 90% of all items were valid(Table4). As to the content validity of Question 1 to Question 3, all the respondents except no-responds answered that they are valid; therefore, the validity of the structure of the SNEAT and its each scope was verified.

As to the validity of each item of physical functioning(Question 5 to 8), there were the answers of 'in-valid'; as to the Question 5, it was 1.1%; Question 6, 2.2%; Question 7, 3.4%; and Question 8, 4.5%. Respondents answered about the reason to have given 'in-valid', because there were two questions about the same class, which may cause the confusion, one was asking the state of the student during class and another was asking the state of the student after the class(the outcome of the class). In addition, there was a suggestion that the expression of 'Have ___ been improved?' might become better, if it changed to 'Could ___ be improved?'

As to the validity of each item of mental health (Question 10 to 13), while all the respondents agreed that Question 10 was valid except the no-response, 2.2% and 3.4% of respondents for Question 11 and 13 respectively answered that they were not valid. They presented the reason that they answered with 'in-valid', because they doubted that participating in the class in concentration may be included in the scope of mental health.

As to the validity of each item of mental health (Question 15 to 17), while all the respondents agreed that Question 16 was valid except the no-response, 1.1% and 2.2% of respondents for Question 15 and 17 respectively answered that they were not valid. They presented the reason that they answered with 'in-valid', because the meaning of 'appropriate communication' is vague. In addition, there was a suggestion that 'choosing and expressing the ways of communication' may become better, if separating to two sentences.

<Table 4> The Results of the Survey on the Validity of Each Scope and Question Item

Questions	Valid N(%)			In-valid N(%)		No-response N(%)
	Very valid	Valid	Limitedly Valid	In-valid	Very In-valid	
	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	
Q1	87(97.8)			0(0.0)		2(2.2)
	39(43.8)	37(41.6)	7(7.9)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	
Q2	87(97.8)			0(0.0)		2(2.2)
	39(43.8)	43(48.3)	5(5.6)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	
Q3	86(96.6)			0(0.0)		3(3.4)
	48(53.9)	32(36.0)	6(6.7)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	
Q5	86(96.7)			1(1.1)		2(2.2)
	42(36.0)	42(47.2)	12(13.5)	1(1.1)	0(0.0)	
Q6	85(95.6)			2(2.2)		2(2.2)
	29(32.6)	41(46.1)	15(16.9)	2(2.2)	0(0.0)	
Q7	83(93.2)			3(3.4)		3(3.4)
	24(27.0)	31(34.8)	28(31.5)	3(3.4)	0(0.0)	
Q8	84(94.4)			4(4.5)		1(1.1)
	22(24.7)	35(39.3)	27(30.3)	4(4.5)	0(0.0)	
Q10	87(97.8)			0(0.0)		2(2.2)
	33(37.1)	38(42.7)	16(18.0)	0(0.0)		
Q11	86(96.7)			2(2.2)		1(1.1)
	31(34.8)	38(42.7)	17(19.1)	2(2.2)	0(0.0)	
Q12	86(96.7)			2(2.2)		1(1.1)
	31(34.8)	41(46.1)	14(15.7)	2(2.2)	0(0.0)	
Q13	83(93.2)			3(3.4)		3(3.4)
	22(24.7)	33(37.1)	28(31.5)	3(3.4)	0(0.0)	
Q15	82(92.2)			1(1.1)		6(6.7)
	30(33.7)	44(49.4)	8(9.0)	1(1.1)	0(0.0)	
Q16	83(93.3)			0(0.0)		6(6.7)
	31(34.8)	38(42.7)	14(15.7)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	
Q17	81(91.1)			2(2.2)		6(6.7)
	26(29.2)	43(48.3)	12(13.5)	1(1.1)	1(1.1)	

iii. The Results of the Responses of the Open-ended Style Questions about the Contents Validity Verification

The questionnaire included the open-ended style questions to enable respondents to feel free to express anything about the content and the terms of the SNEAT. The SNEAT ver. 1 (Table 6) was completed by discussing the responses of the open-ended style questions with the experts on special needs education and QOL and the teachers in the prefectural education center and by adding and changing the contents and wording based on them (Table 5).

<Table 5> The Results of the Survey on the Contents and Terms of the SNEAT

Suggestions	Before Changing	After Changing
It is vague whether the SNEAT is for evaluating the student or the class.	Non-applicable	The explanation was added as follows: This is the tool for special education teachers to evaluate educational outcome (teacher self-assessment). In case of the class just for one student, you can assess your educational outcome based on the changes of the child; in case of the for more than two students, you can assess your educational outcome based on the average changes of all students (for example, as to the class for five students, you can figure out the average of the changes of all five students).
The SNEAT is constructed based on the five point scale, so the criteria are needed in each point to determine the point.	Non-applicable	This suggestion is relevant with all eleven questions, so 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree and 1=strongly disagree were added; this scale was made based on the scale of WHOQOL26
It is better that the annotations are included in each question, not in a separated section.	The annotations was written in the separate section from the questions of the SNEAT.	The annotations were written together with each question.
There were two questions about the same class, which may cause the confusion, one was asking the state of the student during class and another was asking the state of the student after the class (the outcome of the class).	Q1, Q6 and Q10 were about the state of the student "during the class"; Q2, Q3, Q4 and Q7 were about the state of the student "via the class"; and Q5 was about the state of the student "when comparing it before the class with after the class".	The expressions that may cause the confusion were changed; in the Q1, the question was changed to include "The contents that was given during the class... "and in the Q2 to Q11, "The student...".

<Table 6> SNEAT ver.1

Special Needs Education Assessment Tool (SNEAT)Ver.1						
1) This is the tool for special education teachers to evaluate educational outcome (teacher self-assessment). In case of the class just for one student, you can assess your educational outcome based on the changes of the child; in case of the for more than two students, you can assess your educational outcome based on the average changes of all students(for example, as to the class for five students, you can figure out the average of the changes of all five students.)						
2) Please, check(○)on the point you think most appropriate for each question.						
3) The SNEAT may be utilized for students with disabilities who are qualified with below conditions regardless of the types of disabilities.						
1. The students who can express themselves in any way.						
2. The students with the possibility that their posture, motor ability and motions may be improved, even temporarily.						
Total ①+②+③					/100	
① Physical Functioning						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q1	Were the activities during the class appropriate for the physical conditions of the student? 「Physical conditions」 include body temperature, physical strength, pain, etc	5	4	3	2	1
Q2	Have been the posture, motor ability and motions of student improved?	5	4	3	2	1
Q3	Has been the ability of student to independently manage daily living improved? 「Managing daily living」 includes rhythm of life, taking meals, defecating, taking medicine, changing clothes, taking a rest, etc.	5	4	3	2	1
Q4	Has been the degree of student's understanding his/her condition of diseases(disabilities) improved?	5	4	3	2	1
① Total Score of Physical Functioning					/35	
② Mental Health						
Q5	Has the feelings of student changed positively? 「The positive changes of feelings」 may be revealed by smiling face, happy mood, calm look, etc.	5	4	3	2	1
Q6	Did the student participate in class(learning/activities) in concentration?	5	4	3	2	1
Q7	Has been the will of student to learn improved? 「The will to learn」 may be expressed by student's presenting the pleasure to learn something new, the sense of accomplishment and the expectation like 「I want to do it again」	5	4	3	2	1
Q8	Could the student respond to the changes of place and situation (the changes of environment) during class? 「The changes of place and situation」 include the changes of class contents, the change of classroom, the absence of classmates, etc.	5	4	3	2	1
② Total Score of Mental Health					/35	
③ Social Functioning						
Q9	Could the student form a relationship with others during class(interactions)? 「Others」 include all the people like classmates, teachers, etc.	5	4	3	2	1
Q10	Could the student express his/herself by choosing appropriate communication ways? 「Appropriate communication ways」 include all the ways like verbal and non-verbal communication ways.	5	4	3	2	1
Q11	Did the student participate in the class activities with understanding class rules and controlling his/her behaviors? 「Controlling his/her behaviors」 include no-standing up, no-chatting, following teacher's direction during class.	5	4	3	2	1
③ Total Score of Social Functioning					/30	
Calculation	Please, do the sum of three sub-totals	Double the scores of all questions except the scores of Q1 and Q2, so the score of five become to be ten, four to eight, three to six, two to four and one to two except the scores of Q1 and Q2.				

IV. Discussion

Special needs education is the new area to be launched in earnest since 2008. Moreover, in recent, the interest in special needs education has been expanded to the development and growth, self-supporting life and social participation and the improvement of QOL of students as well as their academic achievement. In this situation, this study employed the theoretical method to figure out the appropriate contents and question items for the development of the Special Needs Education Assessment Tool(SNEAT) in the field of special needs education in Japan. The contents validity was verified by the teachers in special needs education research institutes of prefectural governments and in-service teachers as many as possible, because the SNEAT is the tool to measure the educational outcome and has to be utilized in the field of special needs education.

The percentage of the in-service teachers who possessed the teaching license was 25.8% among all the respondents. Among the teachers who are working at special education schools, 71.1% of teachers possess the teaching license for the students with special needs and 28.9% don't. Because these figures were only from the full time teachers, however, if temporary teachers had been included in, the rate of possessing the teaching license for the students with special needs would have been much lower; to develop the SNEAT that may also be used by the teachers who do not possess the teaching license for the students with special needs, they also were included in the content validity verification. In the results of the content validity verification of the SNEAT for in-service teachers, over 90% of respondents answered that it is valid. In particular, as to the validity of the scopes of the SNEAT(Q1 to Q3), all the respondents answered that it is valid, except no-responses. In results, it is reasonable to say that the content validity of the structure of the SNEAT was verified.

As to the survey on the contents and terms of the SNEAT, there were several suggestions about who can be the subjects of the SNEAT, the addition of the annotations, the criteria of the five-point scale, etc.

As to who can be the subjects of the SNEAT, there was the opinion that the types and the degree of disabilities are not clear. Even though special needs education includes the students in the wide range of developmental stages, considering the characteristics of the question items of the SNEAT, the subjects were determined to be the students who can express themselves in any way and those with the possibility that their posture, motor ability and motions may be improved, even temporarily. The annotations had been included in a separate section at first, but because there was the suggestion that they may be easily ignored or difficult in reading, they were located just below each question. The criteria of the scale were made based on the responses of WHOQOL26; 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree and 1=strongly disagree. As to the use of terms, the terms that were determined to be easily used were chosen via the discussion with the researchers and teachers.

This study surveyed on the content validity of the questions of the SNEAT for special needs education-related professionals as many as possible, considering that this is the first try to develop the tool to evaluate the educational outcome of special needs education in Japan. However, Murakami (2008) pointed out that content validity has the defect that it is irrelevant with the attitude and the response tendency of the subjects, because it is conducted only for the question items. Therefore, the scientific methods to verify the SNEAT in the field of Education need to be explored, because the content validity verification method is based on the subjective opinions of respondents.

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