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Research on textbook use in the United States of America

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to review published research literature about procedures used to select textbooks in the USA. The contents of books, collected works, reports and journal articles were analysed, and summaries of the contents were then organised chronologically to present a commentary on this topic. The results showed that procedures for selecting textbooks arose in the states in the late nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, a balance between the numbers of states using state-level or local-level adoption procedures had been established, and a geographic pattern of north-eastern and mid-western states using local-level adoption and south-eastern, southern and western states using state-level adoption had emerged. Although early studies researching this phenomenon were limited to tabulating various provisions in selection policies, more recent studies have identified important differences between groups operating within these two types. Research examining the intent of state-level adoption has identified that its practice is most closely associated with controlling the cost of textbooks. Other research suggests that large state-level adoption states influence the content of textbooks used across the USA. Research examining this phenomenon at the local level has identified complexity and diversity among selection procedures, but failed to find a typical pattern from these data. Research comparing the differences and effects between local-level selection procedures in state-level and local-level adoption states has identified that the only significant effect is related to the cost of textbooks.

Key-words: educational policy, textbook content, textbook selection, textbook standards, textbooks