

BELEA « *Batterie d'Evaluation du Langage Ecrit en Arabe* » Assessment battery for Arabic written language skills

Applications

An assessment battery for Arabic literacy skills that takes into account language-specific features as well as several cognitive factors involved in reading and writing in Arabic is developed. Assessing language skills in bilingual contexts must consider all the languages spoken by a child and should be culturally relevant. Therefore, Arabic remains an important language to tackle in speech and language assessments, not only because it is the country's official language, but also because it is a compulsory learning language used in private and public schools across the country. Having standardized tests and adequate norms will allow speech and language therapists to identify possible disorders and therefore recommend a tailored treatment plan that addresses the child's difficulties and answers his/her needs. The process of norming and standardization was carried between Grade 1 to Grade 5 students.

Problem addressed

Lebanon is multilingual country where Arabic is a diglossic language and where education in more than one language is compulsory. These context-specific characteristics as well as the lack of relevant tests make the diagnosis of written language disorders challenging. Studies have shown that undetected disorders can lead to academic failure and can affect the child's psychological and social wellbeing (illiteracy, unemployment, difficulties integrating into society, etc.). However, administering the right assessment tools will enable clinicians to understand the child's reading and writing strategies as well as the underlying processes involved in reading and spelling. A comprehensive assessment would therefore make it possible to identify early learning difficulties, which in turn leads to appropriate and effective support. This project has been established to fill in this gap and provide Lebanese speech therapists with a battery that quantifies specific reading and writing skills. This project will also make it possible to advance knowledge on the development of Arabic literacy skills in Lebanese children. In addition, it will allow interlinguistic comparisons between different learning languages (i.e. French and English) that can be tested through formal assessment tools that are, as well, under the process of adaptation, standardization and norming.

Methodology

- Data collection and management strategies: Tests used to collect data among children, scores and testing results entered manually in Excel, descriptive and inferential statistical analysis conducted using SPSS.
- Inclusion criteria for the norming sample:
 - Lebanese children aged between 7 and 12 years old (Grade 2 to 5)
 - Lebanese children with learning difficulties, aged between 7 and 12 years old (Grade 2 to 5)

- Children with no neurological, sensory or cognitive disorders
- Sampling and stratification strategy: random selection of children from private and public schools based on school grade (80 to 100 child from each grade), gender as well as the school's geographic location (South, North and Beirut).
- Procedure and ethical considerations: In line with the Saint-Joseph University policy, ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Consent forms are acquired from all participants and anonymity is guaranteed during data collection. Children with learning difficulties will be recruited through speech therapists working in private settings or in healthcare centers.

Advantages

- Advance knowledge on the development of written language skills in Arabic, and its association with different cognitive functions.
- Provide speech and language therapists with a standardized battery that identifies written language disorders and support the development of tailored treatment plans.
- Provide researchers with a complete battery that will allow in-depth analysis in further domains (reading comprehension, rehabilitation protocol, etc.).
- Use this battery to assess written language skills in all Arabic-speaking children, whether in Lebanon, in an Arab country or in another country, where a bilingual child uses Arabic and another language as a spoken or a learning language.

Inventors

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