Development of a test battery to diagnose specific learning disorder in reading in a multilingual education context

Linda Romanovska, Sonja Ugen, Ineke Pit-ten Cate
FHSE, LUCET, University of Luxembourg

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Providing timely and adequate support to children experiencing difficulties in reading and writing is key to minimize the impact on children's academic achievements, social and emotional well-being, particularly for children with specific learning disorders. However, the diagnostic process is especially challenging in Luxembourg's multilingual educational system with changing instruction languages (Luxembourgish, German, French) and multilingual population. The chosen language of the diagnostic tool is usually identical to the main language of instruction at school, which at time of diagnosis (typically grade 3) is German. This may especially affect the diagnosis of children who do not speak German or Luxembourgish at home as data from the Luxembourgish national school monitoring program reveals significant differences in German reading comprehension in grade 3 depending on the language spoken at home (Hoffmann et al., 2018; Martini et al., 2021). Furthermore, the diagnostic tools currently employed in Luxembourg are developed in countries with primarily one language of instruction, challenging the validity of the diagnostic process in a multilingual population (Ugen et al., 2021).

The aim of the current project is to develop a diagnostic tool adapted to the Luxembourgish educational curriculum, that takes children's potential proficiency differences in the test language into account in the instructions, tasks and resulting norms. This way, over-diagnosis of reading and writing disorders in children who do not speak the main language(s) of instruction at home and underdiagnosis of children who do, can be avoided. The developed test battery assesses children's performance in key domains relevant for reading and writing comprising phonological skills, (non)word and text reading (fluency and accuracy), reading comprehension, writing, and vocabulary. We will present the pre-test results of 9 sub-tests completed by 214 children, providing the first insights into the test development and validation process.

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