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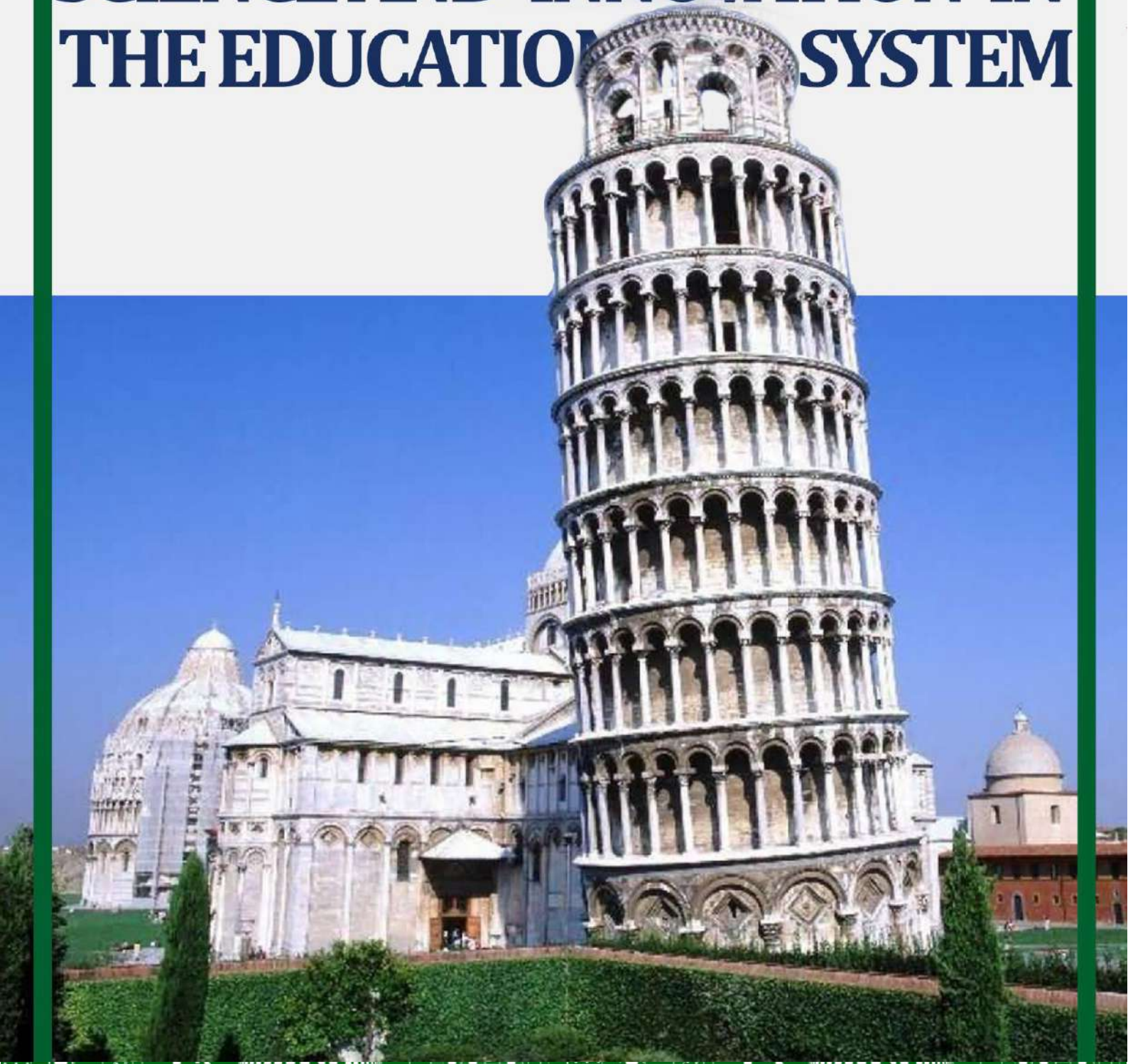

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ASSESSING YOUNG LEARNERS COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
This text discusses the importance of assessment in evaluating children's language skills, focusing on the distinction between assessment and evaluation, validity, reliability, and the challenges of language development. The research problem addresses the need for accurate and fair assessments to identify language difficulties in children. The aim is to highlight the significance of valid and reliable assessments in understanding children's language trajectories. The methodology involves a review of literature on language assessment, including indirect and direct screening methods, sensitivity, specificity, and formative versus summative assessment. The results emphasize the importance of fair assessment practices and the impact on children's language attitudes and motivation. The implications suggest that assessments should be tailored to individual learning needs to support language acquisition effectively.
Keywords: assessment, evaluation, language development, validity, reliability, sensitivity, specificity, formative assessment, summative assessment, criterion-referenced assessment, norm-referenced assessment, equity principles.

Assessment occurs on a regular basis. The gathering of data for a specific purpose is called assessment. When you go to a book store and choose a book to read, you decide whether the book will educate you or entertain you. You probably have no idea that assessment is a part of the process because it is so automatic. When choosing which course to take or which university to apply to, for example, assessment is more deliberate.

Evaluation is different from assessment. Examining the distinctions between the two can be helpful. Evaluation is used to collect and interpret information for decisions about an education program's effectiveness, whereas assessment is used to collect information and make judgments about a learner's knowledge.

If an effective teacher taught a young learner's class, you would probably observe the teacher automatically assessing learners. You would observe that the instructor paid close attention to her students. She would frequently observe, unintentionally, which students found the material to be too easy or too difficult. She would alter her teaching as a result of her observations. She might ask a

question in a different way or give a student more time to answer. When we think of assessment, we typically envision teachers using it to gauge a child's or group of children's progress. It is essential for you as a teacher to have precise instructional objectives so that you can determine whether or not they have been met. You won't be able to tell if your teaching goals and objectives have been met if you don't know them. The assessment should take into account specific program goals that are representative of the program's overall objectives.

When discussing assessment, two ideas are crucial. Validity and reliability are the two. If an assessment measures the skill it is meant to measure with a specific group of students, it is considered valid. You need to look at what the activity is and what it is supposed to measure when determining whether or not an assessment activity is valid.

The validity of the assessment for the students who will be taking the test must also be considered when evaluating test validity. For instance, test items that are appropriate for young students living in big cities may not be appropriate for children living in rural areas. Another illustration of this would be the situation in which a test that is appropriate for young learners aged 12 and 13 may not be appropriate for children aged 7 or 8.

You should look at an assessment tool's reliability after determining its validity. If the results of an assessment tool are consistent over time, it is reliable. This indicates that for a test to be reliable, the results must be consistent when administered by various teachers and scored by various teachers. Even if the tests are given on different days, they should all be the same. For instance, we can say that a test is reliable if it is given on two distinct dates and the results are very similar. Naturally, the outcomes won't be the same for everyone because students are human and don't always behave in the same way on different days or at different times.

Language development is challenging for many children. These difficulties arise for some children because they haven't had as many opportunities to learn languages, for others because they have trouble hearing or seeing, and a significant number of children also have difficulties for no apparent physical or mental reason.

Why should children's language skills be tested?

Young learners' language abilities are frequently evaluated, either as part of the curriculum to track progress or through screening. Teachers and coordinators of Special Education Needs carry out a lot of these tests.

Assessments are also used as pre- and post-intervention measures to evaluate the impact of oral language interventions in light of the current push to improve early language skills. Standardized scores should be interpreted with caution in these circumstances, even though repeated standardised testing can be a useful method for tracking progress over time.

According to Dockrell & Law (2007), regression to the mean can occur when a score is extreme on its first measurement but tends to be closer to the average on its second measurement. This "improvement" may be due to chance or measurement error rather than any significant improvement in performance. It is most likely to occur when samples are chosen to have extremely low scores and when measures are less reliable. In the evaluation of language interventions, where a control group that does not receive the intervention is required for comparison, regression to the mean is a particular concern.

The processes of identification and evaluation are distinct. The distinction between children whose language skills are below expectations and those who are currently performing in the average range is the goal of identification, which is to confirm the existence of a problem.

In contrast, assessment aims to characterize the child's difficulties in terms of their various language skills. In theory, language problems in children under the age of five can be identified through indirect or direct screening. When a parent or other professional notices a problem with a child's language development that they believe calls for additional investigation, this is called indirect screening. Direct screening, on the other hand, uses a screening tool on a population to find children whose language skills are below average. Methodological difficulties arise from direct language delay screening. The characteristics of the screening test, which is the standard for language problems, and who takes the test, such as a parent, professional, or educator, are crucial.

Sensitivity and specificity are fundamental concepts in screening. When a bench mark test is used, a test with high levels of sensitivity accurately identifies children as having language difficulties, whereas a test with high levels of specificity does not identify children who do not have language difficulties as cases. Regardless of the purpose of the screening, there will always be a trade-off between sensitivity and specificity that must be met by any measure. It has been argued that sensitivity should be held to a higher standard because inadequate sensitivity may have a more significant impact on the child and their academic progress in the future. Over-identification of children, on the other hand, can waste resources and cause unnecessary stress.

The first step in the language assessment process is to determine whether or not there is a problem. After the children have been identified, it is crucial to describe the nature and extent of their language skills differences.

To achieve this objective, a wide range of information- gathering activities are available. Teachers require a thorough understanding of language learning, as previously stated. Lynne Cameron made the analogy of the growth of a plant to language learning in her book Teaching languages to young children. The notion that language acquisition is an ongoing organic process is implied by this concept. The nutrients that the plant gets from its environment help it grow; At various stages of development, various types of growth take place. As a result, the assessment asks how well the "plant" language is developing. At this point, it is essential to emphasize that language learning progress, not achievements, should be evaluated and graded later! In recognition of the fact that learners of a second language construct a linguistic system that draws from both the learner's mother tongue and the target language, Larry Selinker came up with the term "interlanguage." By reorganizing the entire system and adding and removing rules, the students alter their interlanguage, creating an interlanguage continuum. Acquisition can be seen in this transition. Because learning a language is a process rather than a one-way street, it should be evaluated and graded.

Learning should not be hindered or prevented by assessment. Instead, assessment ought to improve language acquisition: A positive assessment result can support further learning, motivate the student, and provide feedback.

The teacher can use the results of the assessments to plan the subsequent lessons and may also use them to evaluate and improve courses. What children have been taught and how they have been instructed should be used to evaluate them. The activities for the assessment should be similar to those in the classroom (assessment of interaction as opposed to individual experience).

Formative and summative assessment Formative assessment can provide immediate feedback on specific treatment methods and inform ongoing instruction. The teacher plans the next lesson or lessons based on the student's results to improve the student's performance in the future. The concept of formative assessment is related to diagnostic assessment, which aims to determine a child's capabilities and limitations; so that more chances to learn can be given to people.

A type of assessment called summative assessment is given at the end of a unit or a year. As a result, rather than focusing on the processes that lead to the

accomplishments, this kind of assessment focuses on the learners' mid- or long-term achievements. (Assessment of ability)

Criterion-referenced and norm- referenced assessment

A comparison of various students, or, to be more specific, an examination of how a student's performance can be interpreted in relation to the accomplishments of other students, serves as the foundation for norm-referenced assessment.

In norm-referenced testing, a student's grade or mark is heavily influenced by the results of other test takers. Although this kind of evaluation might inspire some students to perform better than their peers, knowing how well you do in comparison to others does not provide an answer to the question of how you can improve yourself.

The child's performance is matched to an expected response in criterion-referenced assessment. Typically, a scale is used to place the student. Therefore, regardless of how other students fared, the primary question is whether or not the learner achieves a particular objective. A clear picture of the child's progress, a demonstration of success of knowledge are provided by this kind of assessment.

When designing and using assessments, fairness, or "equity," must be seriously considered. As part of the learning of a child's first language, assessment can have an impact on the child's attitude toward the language. If the assessment is not tailored to what they have been taught or is not fair-designed, they may lose interest and motivation. When conducting an assessment, six equity principles should be taken into account:

1. The children should have access to numerous opportunities to demonstrate their language proficiency.
2. Throughout the lessons, multiple assessment methods should be used.
3. The students should be familiar with the types of questions, tasks, and content of the assessment.
4. Before the assessment begins (silent period), the willingness to talk should be obvious if oral production is required.
5. Conversation with an adult ought to be conducted with confidence.
6. The evaluation of the children should not be influenced by behaviour, gender, or appearance. (Cameron, Lynne. (2001). Teaching Languages to young Learners. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.)

Children's language trajectories vary significantly due to the complexity of the language system and its many subcomponents. As a result, it is difficult to

create valid and reliable assessments, but they are crucial to understanding both typical and atypical development.

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