

Alternative Assessment of Language and Literacy in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations

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Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students are often misdiagnosed with language and literacy problems. The authors discuss how traditional approaches to language and literacy assessment can be systematically inaccurate for CLD students and they present alternatives which may reduce this bias.

Limitations to Traditional Assessment for CLD Students

Norm- and criterion-referenced assessments compare students' performance to an age-matched sample (norm) or a predetermined level of performance (criterion). They may misdiagnose CLD students due to:

Content bias: When CLD students with the same ability level as other students score lower due to differences in background knowledge or unfamiliarity with test procedures.

Linguistic Bias: When a student's language or dialect does not match the language or dialect of the tester or assessment.

The Potential of Alternative Approaches to Assessment for CLD Students

Dynamic and processing-dependent assessments can reduce content and linguistic bias when used in place of or in addition to traditional assessments.

However, future research and the development of assessments specifically for CLD students are necessary next steps.

Dynamic assessments use a test-teach-retest method to evaluate both a student's current performance and their ability to learn with responsive instruction. The focus on learning something new reduces content bias while the responsive teaching and testing reduces linguistic bias.

Processing-dependent assessments employ tasks which involve memorization or perceptual discrimination and are minimally dependent on prior knowledge or experience. The emphasis on processing reduces the risk of content bias for CLD students.