



Title of Project

Effects of Cultural Familiarity on Canadian Elementary Students' Performance on a Standardized Reading Test

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TIRF Research Topic Investigated

Language Assessment

Project Summary

Considering significant roles that testing plays for high-stake purposes, ensuring valid score interpretations and fair score use is a matter of paramount importance for educational researchers. In Canada, one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse countries, this diversity in student populations and fast-changing learning environments challenge the construct invariance across context.

Differential item functioning (DIF) analysis has been instrumental in our understanding of various construct-irrelevant factors and test bias. While much existing DIF research in language and literacy assessment has focused on manifest variables such as ethnicity and linguistic backgrounds, cultural familiarity has received relatively less attention. Students with greater exposure to a given culture may perform better on standardized tests developed and used within that culture. The degree of cultural familiarity may also interact with the length of residence in the target culture where the language of instruction and test is, in this study context, English.

Designed as sequential explanatory mixed-methods research, this project aims to investigate the extent to which items in a provincial-level reading achievement test function differently across multiple linguistic subgroups with different levels of exposure to mainstream Canadian culture, based on the length of residence. After a series of quantitative analyses to identify DIF items, the construct relevance of these items will be examined qualitatively through students' think-aloud protocol and individual interviews. This research will advise significant implications for future development and practices of assessments targeted for test-takers with diverse cultural backgrounds.