

The Overlooked Clinical Need for Standardized Written Language Assessment in Persian-Speaking School-Aged Children: A Letter to the Editor

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Letter to Editor

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Introduction

Written language is one of the most complex manifestations of language and plays a fundamental role in children's academic success, learning, social participation, and quality of life. In recent years, in parallel with advances in cognitive and psycholinguistic models, the perspective on written language has shifted from merely assessing spelling and writing to a comprehensive analysis of lexical, morphosyntactic, discourse, and writing productivity components (1-3). Despite this development, there is still no standardized and comprehensive tool available to professionals in the Persian language that can systematically assess these components in accordance with the linguistic characteristics of Persian.

This gap is particularly important in the field of speech-language pathology. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) considers the assessment and intervention of written language to be among the primary responsibilities of speech-language pathologists (4). However, in practice, many speech-

language pathologists, due to the lack of valid and standardized tools, are compelled to use informal methods or assessments that have not been designed for the Persian language or that assess only some aspects of writing skills. On the other hand, the results of a large-scale national study conducted in the United States in 2011 on the knowledge and practices of school-based speech-language pathologists in the area of written language showed that approximately 68% of students who had reading and writing difficulties did not receive any written-language services from school-based speech-language pathologists (5). In other words, although the expertise of speech-language pathologists applies to both oral and written language, evidence still indicates that speech-language pathologists do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to assess and treat written-language difficulties (6). Consequently, written-language assessment in many clinical and educational settings is dependent on individual judgments and lacks consistency and comparability.

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On the other hand, most existing international assessments have been developed for English or other European languages and are based on the structural characteristics of those languages. Accordingly, the need to examine writing samples in non-English languages has been emphasized (7). Fundamental differences between Persian and these languages in morphological, syntactic, and lexical systems, as well as in the way writing is taught, mean that direct translation or adaptation of these tools cannot provide an accurate picture of the writing abilities of Persian-speaking children. Therefore, the use of non-native tools may not only result in inaccurate estimates of language performance but may also affect clinical and educational decision-making.

The importance of this issue is even greater in clinical populations. Children with language disorders, learning disorders, cleft lip and palate, hearing loss, or other communication disorders are at greater risk of experiencing written-language difficulties than their peers (8). In the absence of standardized and culturally and linguistically appropriate tools, accurately identifying these children's strengths and weaknesses, designing targeted intervention programs, and evaluating treatment effectiveness will be challenging.

In addition to clinical applications, the lack of a standardized tool has also limited research in the field of Persian written language. The use of different indices, heterogeneous scoring methods, and non-equivalent assessment tools has reduced the

possibility of comparing findings across different studies and conducting multicenter research, thereby hindering the development of coherent scientific evidence in this field.

Accordingly, the design and standardization of a Persian Written Language Assessment Profile based on the characteristics of the Persian language, contemporary theories of written language, and the clinical needs of speech-language pathologists could represent an important step toward developing diagnostic services, improving the quality of therapeutic interventions, and advancing research in this field. Such a tool, in addition to providing an integrated framework for assessment, would also enable the comparison of results, monitoring of therapeutic changes, and establishment of valid databases.

It is hoped that greater attention from researchers, universities, and policymaking institutions to the development and standardization of indigenous written-language assessment tools will provide the foundation for improving specialized services and enhancing the quality of care for Persian-speaking children.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this article.

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