Adolescent Social Communication

Social communication skills play a vital role in the success of adolescents with disabilities in both school and post-school settings (Ryzewski, 2016). Identifying and addressing deficits in social communication skills is important for transition planning, a process mandated by federal law (IDEA, 2004).

SLPs do not have a systematic way to select language assessments (Cunningham, Daub, Cardy, 2019). Inconsistencies can lead to bias in who qualifies for interventions and what goals are emphasized in intervention (McCleod & Baker, 2014).

Evidence-Based Assessment

To incorporate Evidence-based practice (EBP) into social communication assessment, SLPs need to identify and use tests with adequate measurement properties. This process is hampered by a lack of clarity on how to define adequate measurement properties.

The CoNsentus-based Standards for the selection of health Measurement Instruments (COSMIN) initiative aims to improve test selection in clinical practice. COSMIN provides guidelines to identify and rate measurement properties, such as validity and reliability (Mokkink, Prinsen, Bouter, de Vet, & Terwee, 2016).

Our goal in this project is to apply COSMIN standards to determine the level of psychometric properties for assessment tools suited for evaluating social communication ability for transition-aged youth.

Methods

(P) Age 14-21 at risk for social communication difficulties due to development disorders.

(I) Assessments of social communication or pragmatics.

(C) Compared to other available assessments.

(O) Better measurement properties.

(S) Empirical evaluation of measurement properties.

Search strategy based on PICOS question yielded 3274 articles across databases (PubMed, PsycINFO, and ERIC).

Results

Part 1: Partial List: Characteristics of Identified Social Communication Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment (Reference)</th>
<th>Target Age / Population</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Assessment Language(s)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matson Evaluation of Social Skills for Individuals with Severe Retardation (MESSER; Matson, 1995)</td>
<td>Adults with severe to profound ID.</td>
<td>Informant Report</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>More information from Disability Consultants, LLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yale in vivo Pragmatic Protocol (YPP; Simmons, Paul, &amp; Volkmar, 2014)</td>
<td>Children and adolescents (9-17 years); autism; typical development</td>
<td>Interview (Dynamic Assessment)</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Examiner follows script with 19 pragmatic probes; use hierarchy of cues for non-responders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Social Outcome Measure (GSOM; Stichter et al 2012)</td>
<td>Children and adolescents 10 – 16 years; Autism, speech-language impaired, other health impaired.</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Progress monitoring, intervention response measurement tool. Six unique test forms assess same constructs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Communication Disorders Checklist (SCDC; Skuse et al., 1997; Bolte et al., 2011)</td>
<td>Age 3-25 years; Turner’s Syndrome; Autism</td>
<td>Informant Report (Parent)</td>
<td>English, German, Spanish</td>
<td>12 question brief screener for autism and sub-clinical social difficulties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters II (MESSY II; Matson et al., 2012)</td>
<td>Age 2-16 years; Autism</td>
<td>Informant Report</td>
<td>English, Korean, Greek</td>
<td>Analysis of Hostile, Adaptive - Inappropriate, and Inappropriately Assertive behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales (SEARS; Merrell et al., 2011)</td>
<td>Age 5-17 years; typically developing children</td>
<td>Informant Report &amp; Self Report</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Measures positive social-emotional attributes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Assessment of Social Skills (CASS; Ratto et al., 2011)</td>
<td>Age 16-22 years; High-functioning Autism</td>
<td>Direct Observation</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Two role play conversations with different confederates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Moral Awareness Test (SMAT; Livesey et al., 2012)</td>
<td>Ages 19-71 years; mild-to-moderate learning disabilities</td>
<td>Informant Report</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Assesses social-moral rule understanding; content validity not yet assessed in other cultures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


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Discussion

- Measurement properties for social communication assessment are more clearly evaluated when social communication is sole focus of the test.
- Many other assessments include social communication as a component, but measurement properties then apply to a mix of constructs unless specified by scale.
- Test developers use inconsistent terms for measurement qualities, a barrier to assessing psychometrics.
- The COSMIN framework advances evidence-based assessment for social communication by proposing:
  - Consensus terminology
  - Common standards for adequacy for measurement properties.

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