

**Abstract**

This dissertation represents a pioneering study in the Arab world, in which scientific data on children's language is still lacking, and this holds especially true for the development of narrative competence in early childhood. Our review of the situation in the Israeli school system found a lack of suitable normative identification and classification measurement and evaluation tools which would make for a methodical, informed examination of early childhood development both on the individual and the system levels. This gap is particularly severe concerning tools for the Arab sector. Our thorough examination of the literature in the field of narrative competence acquisition found that no appropriate assessment tools were available for Arabic-speakers in early childhood, nor any intervention of the concept type used in our research. The urgency of filling this gap for the Arab sector has been highlighted by reports of pupils' low achievement levels in national and international tests.

The goal of the present research was to measure the development of Arab children's narrative competence and to investigate whether its acquisition can be speeded up through the implementation of an intervention programme based on the principles of the interactive approach, which relies on socio-dramatic play-acting of genuine day-to-day experiences, whereby children's social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic and imaginative resources are integrated. The intervention was adjusted to the Arabic children's developmental age; in addition, the children were asked to construct and develop their ideas and those of their playmates. We assumed that the narrative competence of all children in all three global dimensions would increase with age, and further that improvements would take place in the research group due to the intervention programme administered to them, and finally, that a correlation would be found between the three global dimensions.

## ABSTRACT

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The research took the form of an experiment, in which the experimental group was exposed to the intervention while this was not the case for the control group. Measurements of narrative competence were taken in both groups before and after the intervention.

The research sample consisted of 124 children of the two age groups 3-4 and 5-6 years. The sample was divided randomly into 60 children in the research and 64 in the control group. The children were chosen from 4 kindergartens attended by younger and older children. All children were native speakers of Arabic, with no developmental problems.

We used the DO-BINE program which assesses narrative competence, and adapted it for speakers of Arabic. Below we present a description of "the improved concept" intervention which was done by building a "fruit and vegetable market DO-FINE".

The results show that the 5-6 year olds achieved higher scores than the 3-4 year olds in all three narrative competence measures, with the increase in the dimension of coherence being the highest. A comparison between boys and girls shows that the impact of the intervention was similar for both sexes.

The adaptation of the instrument to the Arabic language will make it possible to map the level of spoken discourse and linguistic competence before school age.

The findings of this study can help administrators and education-policy makers with the treatment of children in the development of spoken language skills and their emerging literacy in kindergarten. Moreover, the research will contribute to the discovery of new ways to develop materials and assessment instruments for the spoken language, and to design intervention materials for the fostering of language in kindergarten. The study may also serve for professionals in kindergarten as the basis for a selection system, i.e. the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of young children, including those with special needs.