

## Cultural Bias in the Academic Knowledge in Social Studies Subtest

### What was the goal of the study?

The researchers wanted to determine whether a commonly used assessment of social studies knowledge (the Woodcock Johnson Academic Knowledge Social Studies subtest) needed be revised to avoid cultural bias.

### Why was the study conducted?

The Woodcock Johnson (WJ) Academic Knowledge Social Studies subtest is a verbal social studies test originally designed for children and adults in the U.S. (ages 2-90 years). Later, the test was also administered to school aged youth in Canada (ages 6-19 years). A group of experts identified eight items that were specific to the U.S. context, potentially making these items culturally biased. For example, one item asks about a U.S. historical political figure. Out of these eight items, three were left unchanged and five were slightly changed to align them with the Canadian cultural context.

### What did the study find?

The five items modified were somewhat successfully adapted to the Canadian cultural context. Three of the five items modified did not show any difference in performance between the U.S. and Canadian test takers, and one item showed a small difference. However, the items that were not modified showed clear bias against Canadian participants, which suggests that those items should have been similarly adapted.

### Who participated in the study?

The participants in this study were 264 adult learners in the U.S. and 280 adult learners in Canada.

### How was the study conducted?

The researchers used differential item functioning (DIF) analysis, which is a common analysis used to determine whether assessments are fair and unbiased.

### How can people use the results?

The results of this study demonstrate a need for practitioners to exercise caution when administering a test developed for one country to another country that might have the same language but different social, cultural, and educational contexts.

### Reference

Woodcock, R. W., McGrew, K. S., & Mather, N. (2007). Woodcock-Johnson III Normative Update. Rolling Meadows, IL: Riverside Publishing.