

The LENA™ Developmental Snapshot

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ABSTRACT

As part of the development of the LENA System, a team of LENA Foundation speech language pathologists, linguists, statisticians and other researchers created the LENA Developmental Snapshot (LDS). This 52-item survey was designed to assess expressive and receptive language skills in children 2 months to 36 months and to estimate developmental age as a function of chronological age. Here we describe the development of the LDS. Initial respondents were drawn largely from the LENA normative study participant pool, and their LDS scores were validated based on correlations with pre-existing standardized language and cognitive assessments. Participants in a longitudinal study completed the LDS at approximately monthly intervals to evaluate LDS test-retest reliability.

Keywords

LENA Developmental Snapshot, item-by-item analysis, normative sample, test-retest reliability, validation.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A child's receptive and expressive language skills provide information about overall language and cognitive development. Receptive language skills refer to what a child understands; these skills represent the child's language comprehension. Expressive language skills refer to language output; these skills are a representation of the child's productive language ability. The LENA Developmental Snapshot (LDS) is a questionnaire that provides parents with an estimate of their child's developmental age with respect to receptive and expressive language skills. Results from parental responses on this validated survey may be visualized as a comparison of the child's developmental age to his or her actual chronological age.

2.0 CREATION OF THE LENA DEVELOPMENTAL SNAPSHOT

Question items on the LDS were selected based on experimenter expertise and review of other standard language and cognitive assessments, including: the Preschool Language Scale, 4th Ed (PLS-4) (Zimmerman, Lee, Steiner, & Pond, 2002); Receptive-Expressive Emergent Language Test, 3rd Ed (REEL-3) (Bzoch, League, & Brown, 2003); Mullen Scales of Early Learning (Mullen, 1995); Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development (Bayley, 2006); Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) (Bricker, Squires, & Mounts, 1995); MacArthur Communicative Development Inventories (MCDI) (Fenson, et.al., 2007); the Child Development Inventory (CDI) (Ireton and Thwing, 1992.); and the Rossetti Infant Toddler Language Scale (Rosetti, 1995). A professional linguist and a certified speech language pathologist formulated and preliminarily ordered the questions according to their age appropriateness.

The current LDS is a product of multiple developmental phases. Initially, a 54-item survey was developed to pilot test with 15 families. These families were recruited from the Boulder, Colorado, community and through Internet advertisements. Pilot participants were mailed the 54-item LDS survey (Version 1), an agreement to participate, a consent form and a postage-paid, self-addressed return envelope. In addition, the pilot participants were asked to complete either the MCDI or ASQ, as appropriate to their child's age. Detailed analyses of the pilot phase responses and feedback resulted in nine items being added to the LDS survey for a total of 63 items (Version 2). As described below, the final version (Version 3) contains 52 items.

3.0 NORMATIVE DATA COLLECTION

The collection of normative data for LDS development proceeded in two phases. Over 300 participants from Phase I of the LENA Natural Language Study (LNLS) were solicited for participation; of these, 308 agreed to participate. See technical report LTR-02-2 for further information on the LNLS. These participants completed the 63-item Version 2 of the LDS, a background information form, consent form, and select standard child language questionnaires for validation purposes (e.g., ASQ, MCDI, and/or CDI, depending on the child's age). The forms were organized in a single packet and mailed to participants along with a postage-paid, self-addressed return envelope. Participants received monetary reimbursement if responses were returned to the LENA Foundation within one week.

Normative data contributing to the LDS survey were collected several months after the last LNLS participant was enrolled, and at that time most of the children from the LNLS were older than 8 months. Thus, a second phase of LDS normative data collection added families with children between 2 months to 7 months who had not participated in the LNLS and had no previous experience with the LENA System. Thirty-nine new participants were recruited through Internet advertisements. Selection was based on child's age as well as mother's education level, with the goal of obtaining a demographic distribution similar to that of the U.S. population. As during the first phase, participants received monetary reimbursement if responses were returned to the LENA Foundation within one week. These new recruits were mailed the same package as described above for the LNLS participants; there was a 100 percent response rate.

4.0 FINAL VERSION OF THE LENA DEVELOPMENTAL SNAPSHOT

To determine the final version of the LDS, responses from the normative data collection phase were subjected to an item characteristic analysis. Here, we determined how to optimize the survey validity through appropriate ordering of questions. Survey items were ordered empirically based on chronological age. In addition to reordering items, we eliminated 11 questions that did not provide consistent information about developmental age. The final version of the LDS (Version 3) contains 52 age-ordered items.

5.0 VALIDATED SAMPLES

Developmental age estimates and LDS total scores from the two phases of LDS normative data collection were validated against other contemporaneous measures including those completed in the initial packet, along with results from standardized assessments administered by a certified speech language pathologist during the LNLS (but within six weeks of completion of the LDS). Thus, LDS validation relied on both parental self-report and professional clinical examination using standardized language development assessments including the PLS-4, REEL-3, CDI, the Cognitive Adaptive Test (CAT), and the Clinical Linguistic and Auditory Milestone Scale (CLAMS) (Accardo & Caput, 2005). Table 1 demonstrates the convergent validity of the LDS; standardized language and cognitive assessment developmental age estimates were highly correlated with the LDS developmental age estimates.

Table 1: Correlation of LDS Data with Standardized Language Assessments.

| Assessment | N | Correlation |
|-------------------------|-----|-------------|
| PLS-4 Receptive | 51 | .93 |
| PLS-4 Expressive | 51 | .92 |
| REEL-3 Receptive | 75 | .96 |
| REEL-3 Expressive | 75 | .96 |
| CDI Receptive Language | 143 | .84 |
| CDI Expressive Language | 142 | .81 |
| CLAMS | 52 | .97 |
| CAT | 52 | .95 |
| Overall Average | | .93 |

All correlations were significant at the $p < 0.01$ level (two-tailed)

In addition to correlating highly, LDS developmental age estimates agreed well with estimates from standardized assessments. For example, LDS age estimates did not differ significantly from PLS-4 or REEL-3 age equivalency estimates for either receptive or expressive language. LDS developmental age estimates also correlated well with chronological age, $r(306) = 0.92$, $p < .01$, and on average did not differ from chronological age, indicating that parental responses were consistently age specific.

6.0 RELIABILITY

Three months after completing the LDS, a subset of LNLS longitudinal-phase participants completed it again; these participants have continued to do so on a monthly basis, permitting an evaluation of test-retest reliability.¹ Developmental age estimates from the first to the second completion (3-month interval) increased an average of 3.2 points (SD = 2.8); the average month-to-month increase for subsequent completions was 0.8 points (SD = 2.3). Test-retest reliability for the LDS Developmental Age, as indicated in Table 2, was excellent.

Table 2: Test-retest Reliability of the LDS Developmental Age.

| Completion Month | N | Correlation with Previous LDS Estimate |
|------------------|-----|--|
| 10/06 | 308 | - |
| 1/07 | 70 | .97 |
| 2/07 | 73 | .98 |
| 3/07 | 71 | .96 |
| 4/07 | 71 | .97 |
| 5/07 | 66 | .97 |
| 6/07 | 61 | .96 |
| 7/07 | 56 | .96 |
| 8/07 | 58 | .95 |
| 9/07 | 59 | .97 |
| 10/07 | 56 | .96 |
| 11/07 | 56 | .93 |
| 12/07 | 57 | .95 |

¹ Participants are no longer asked to complete the LDS once they attain the maximum total score (i.e., answer 'Yes' to all 52 items) for two months in a row.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The Lena Developmental Snapshot (LDS) was developed to provide parents an estimate of their child's developmental age with respect to expressive and receptive language skills. LDS total scores and age estimates are highly correlated with standardized observation-based and parent report language and cognitive assessments, an indication of instrument validity. Repeated monthly administrations show that the LDS has excellent test-retest reliability.

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