Measuring Students’ Attitudes Towards Peers With Disabilities Using a Portuguese Version of the CATCH Scale

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Contribution

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Attitudes of typically developing peers are described as a crucial variable in the inclusion process of students with disabilities within regular education classrooms (Vignes et al., 2008). Research findings show that positive peer attitudes can facilitate the social and academic development of children with disabilities included in regular schools (Cook & Semmel, 1999; Cutts & Sigafous, 2001). However, despite the efforts in the implementation of educational policies fostering inclusive practices, it seems that typically developing students still endorse negative attitudes towards their peers with disabilities (McDougall, DeWit, King, Miller, & Killip, 2004).

Attitudes are often defined as a multidimensional concept, including: the cognitive domain of ideas and beliefs; the affective domain of emotional feelings; and the behavioural domain of intended actions (Triandis, 1971). Attitudes are also described as “learned predispositions reflecting how favourable or unfavourable people are towards other people, objects or events” (Triandis, 1971, p. 266). According with this perspective, attitudes change can be targeted in intervention programs. However, the design of such programs requires a thorough understanding of how attitudes develop and a detailed knowledge of factors influencing their development. Consequently, a considerable body of research within the special education field has been addressing students’ attitudes towards their peers with disabilities (Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl, & Petry, 2011; Yu, Ostrosky, & Fowler, 2012).

In Portugal, evidence regarding how included children are accepted by their typically developing classmates is still scarce. The present study, part of a wider project, reports the development of a valid and reliable Portuguese version of the
Chedoke-McMaster Attitudes Towards Children with Handicaps scale (CATCH) Rosenbaum, Armstrong, & King, 1986. The Chedoke-McMaster Attitudes Towards Children with Handicaps scale is a self-report measure created to assess students’ attitudes towards their peers with disabilities. In a recent literature review of 19 wide used tools, the CATCH was appraised as being one of the most complete instruments since it includes all three attitude components - cognitive, affective, and behavioural – and presents good psychometric properties (Vignes et al., 2008). The CATCH has already been used in countries such as France (Vignes et al., 2008), Netherlands (de Boer, Pijl, Post, & Minnaert, 2012), Belgium (Bossaert et al., 2011) and Israel (Tirosh, Schanin, & Reiter, 1997) showing to be a reliable and valid assessment tool.

In our study, the main purposes were: (a) to establish the equivalence between the original English and the Portuguese version of the CATCH scale; (b) to determine its reliability; (c) to check the validity of the three attitude components construct in the Portuguese version of the scale; (d) to identify factors independently associated with more positive attitudes.

**Method**

The CATCH questionnaire was completed by 826 students without disabilities within the age range of 9-15 years old. Students were recruited through a parental informed consent form where parents indicated their willingness to allow their children to participate in the study. Students’ attitudes towards their peers with disabilities were measured using the CATCH. The CATCH comprehends 36 items, embracing the three dimensions of attitudes, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree). An English-Portuguese translation of the CATCH was performed by three professional bilingual translators followed by a back translation into English.

Internal structure validity of CATCH was studied through the examination of the relationships between the sub-scales and the analysis of inter-item reliability. Internal consistency of the CATCH was determined by computing Cronbach’s Alpha. Test-retest reliability was studied in 476 participants that completed again the CATCH after 3 months of the first completion. In order to determine test-retest reliability, the Intra-class Correlation Coefficient (ICC) was computed. Construct validity of the scale was assessed using Confirmatory Factorial Analysis (CFA).

**Expected Outcomes**

At this point we are still analysing the data. The results will inform about the psychometric properties of the Portuguese version of the CATCH in terms of its reliability and construct validity. In addition, the expected outcome of this study will also be a comprehensive picture of attitudes endorsed by Portuguese students’ towards their peers with disabilities. Students’ attitudes will be explored with reference to demographic characteristics such as age and gender, and also in regard to school characteristics. The paper will conclude by highlighting the need for educational staff to develop inclusive cultures within schools through changing students’ attitudes and with recommendations for developing interventions in line with the multidimensional concept of attitudes reflected in attitudes of Portuguese students.

**References**


This proposal is part of a master or doctoral thesis.
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