

The Measurement of Language Ability and Impairment in Arabic-speaking Children

Areej Balilah & Lisa Archibald | Western University



Introduction

- Only a few studies have focused on the measurement of language ability and impairment in Arabic-speaking children.
- The available Arabic measures have largely been based on English measures, and in some cases, directly translated.

Study purpose

- The purpose of this study was to assess the sensitivity to developmental change of a battery of linguistic measures in a large unselected sample of Arabic-speaking children from Saudi Arabia.
- The study also examined sex differences in language development.

Methods

Participants

- The study invited all Arabic speakers, from 6 to 9 years of age in 10 schools in Saudi Arabia.
- Almost 400 children completed a battery of Arabic language tests available in published or unpublished form.

Age	M (n)	F (n)	Total (N)
6 yrs	41	65	106
7 yrs	39	65	104
8 yrs	40	66	106
9 yrs	38	67	105
Total	158	263	421

Procedure

Assessment battery

- Arabic Receptive-Expressive Vocabulary Test (AREVT ; El-Halees and Wiig, 1999).
 - Arabic Receptive Vocabulary Test
 - Arabic Expressive Vocabulary Test
- Arabic Language Screening Test (ALST; El-Halees and Wiig, 1999)
 - Arabic Language Screening Test (verbal abilities)
 - Arabic Language Screening Test (non-verbal abilities)
- Arabic Language Test (ALT; Shaalan, 2010)
 - Sentence Comprehension (A & B)
 - Expressive Language (A & B)
 - Sentence Repetition (A & B)
 - Arabic Picture Vocabulary Test (APVT; Shaalan, 2010)
- Arabic Nonword Repetition Task (ANWR; Shaalan, 2010)
- Arabic Sight Word Reading Task (ASWR; Oweini and Hazoury, 2010)

Results

Figure 1: Arabic Receptive- Expressive Vocabulary Test

- Significant performance growth with each increase in age band for both subtests
- Significantly higher scores for males than females were observed for the receptive subtest

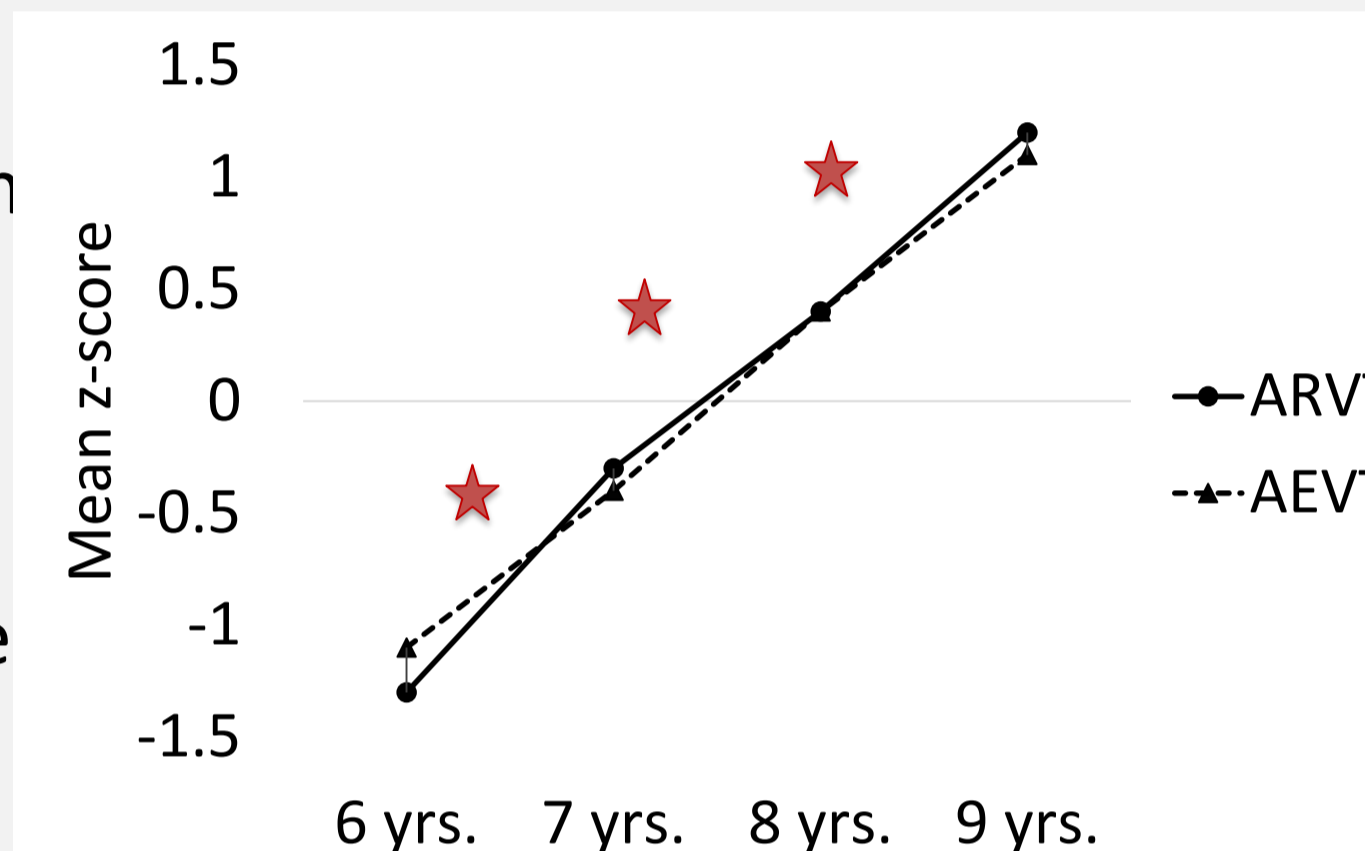


Figure 2: Arabic Language Screening Test

- Significant performance growth between 6 and 7 years old only
- On the nonverbal abilities subtest, males scored significantly higher than females

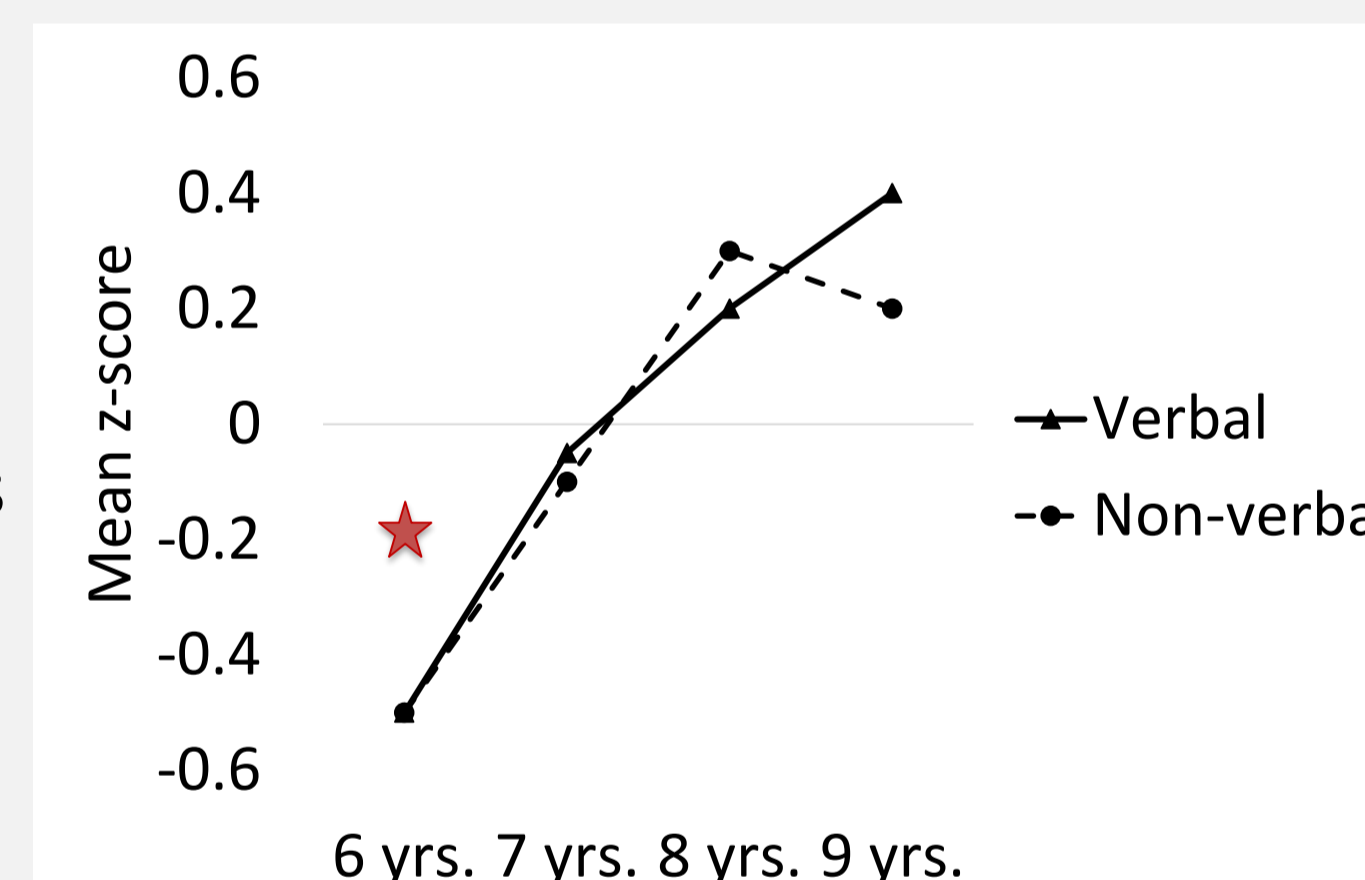
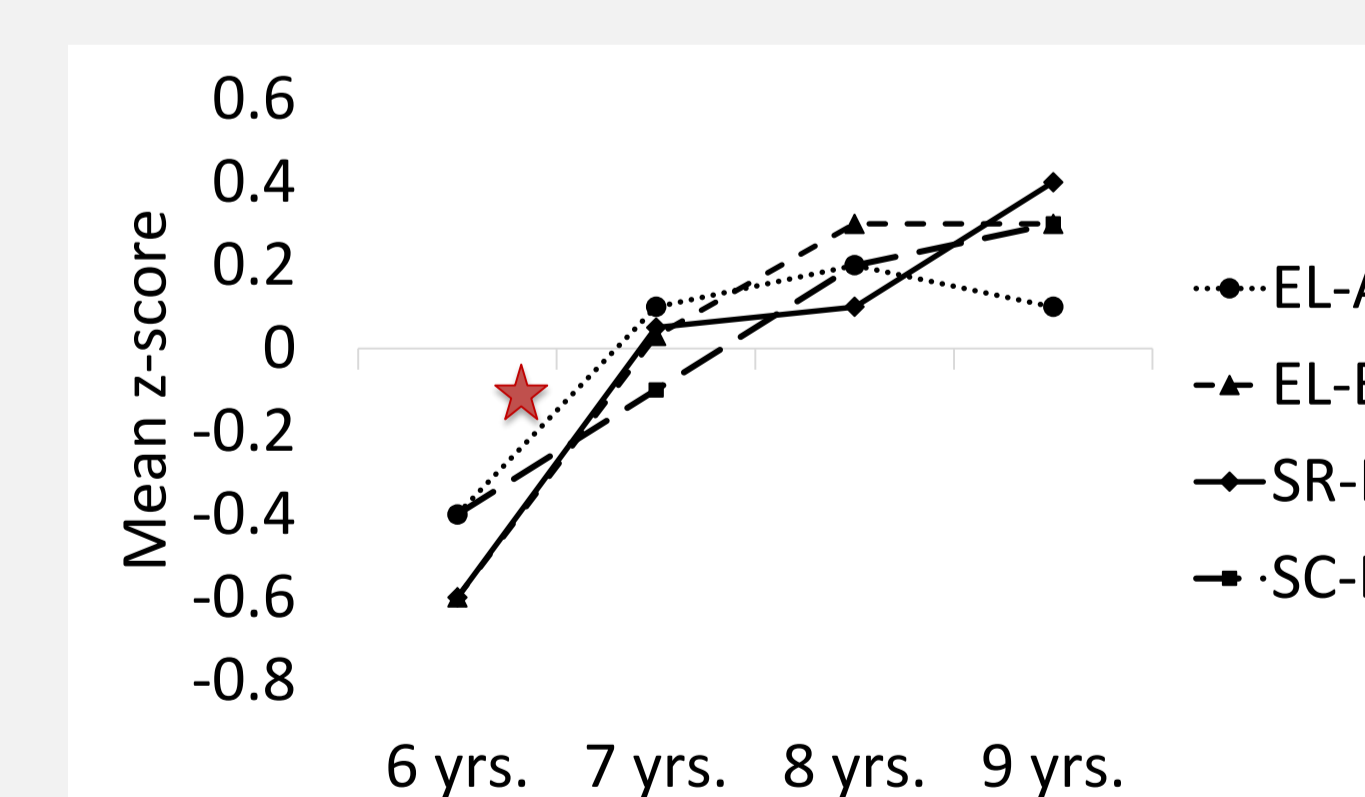


Figure 3: Arabic Language Test

- Significant performance growth between 6 and 7 years old only
- Significantly higher scores on sentence repetition-B were observed for males compared to females



Results

Figure 4: The Arabic Vocabulary Test (APVT)

- Significant increases between the 6 and the 7 year olds only
- Significantly higher scores were observed for males than females

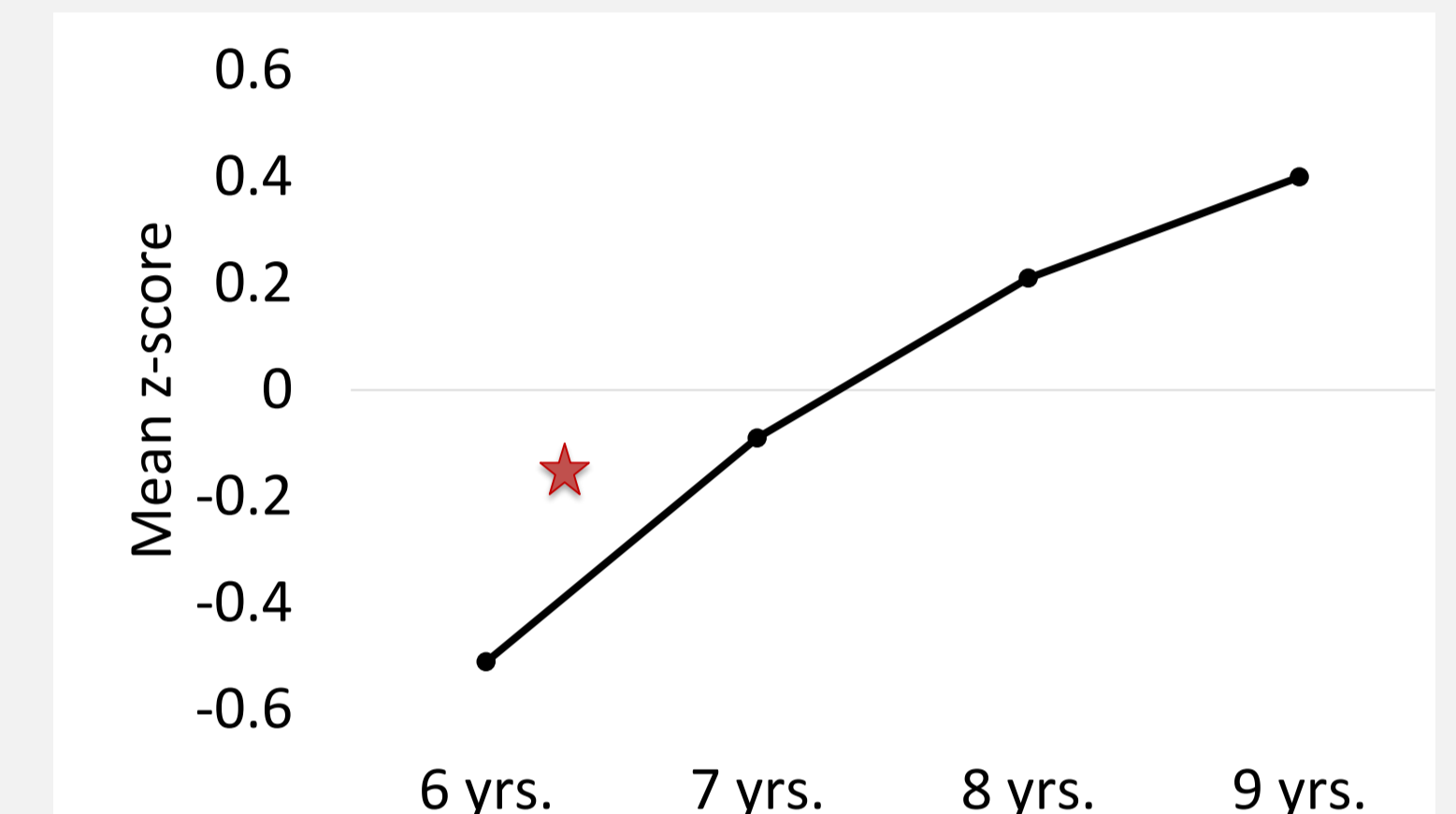


Figure 5: Arabic Nonword Repetition Task

- No significant effects of age
- Significantly higher scores for females than males

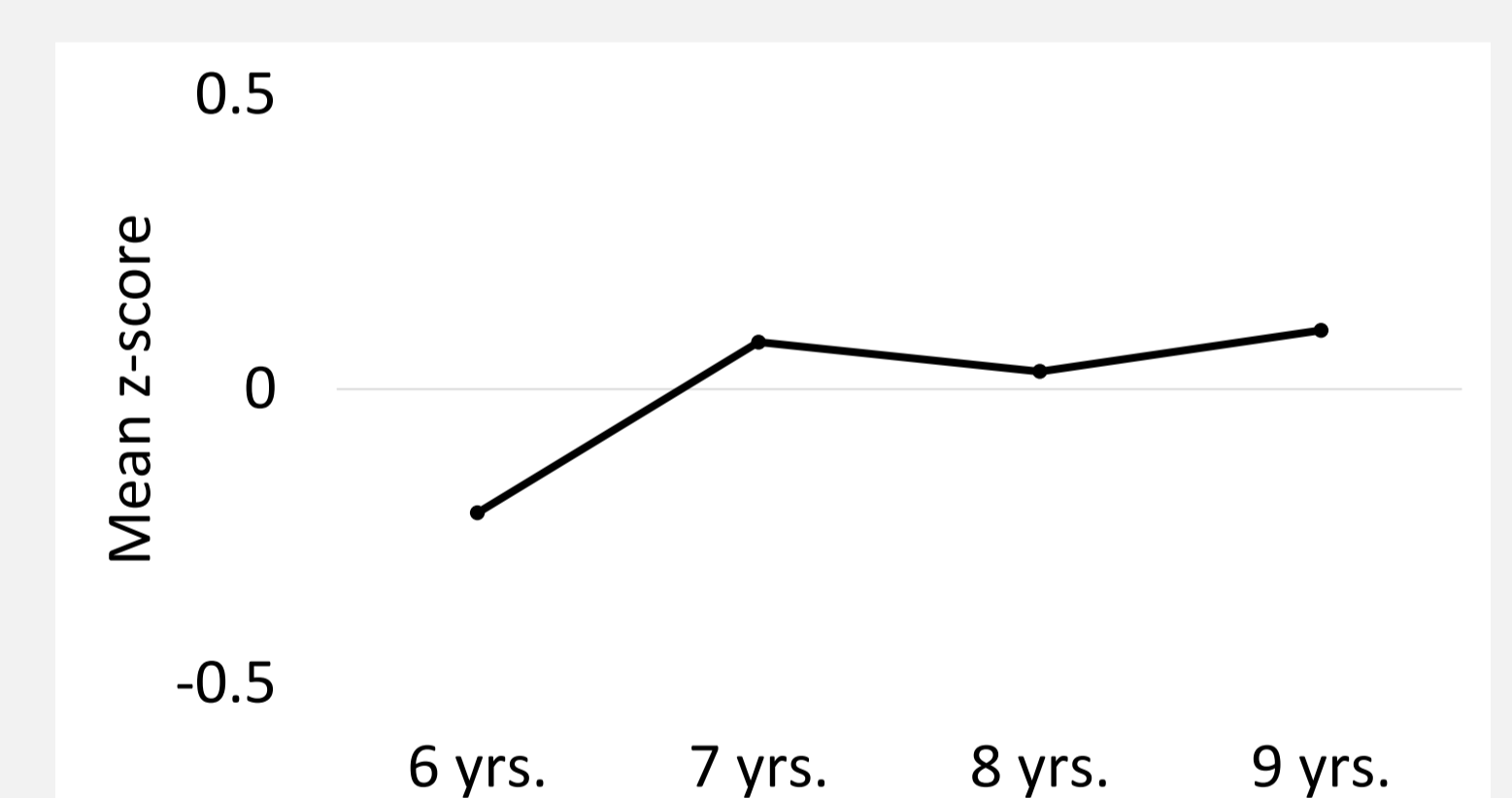
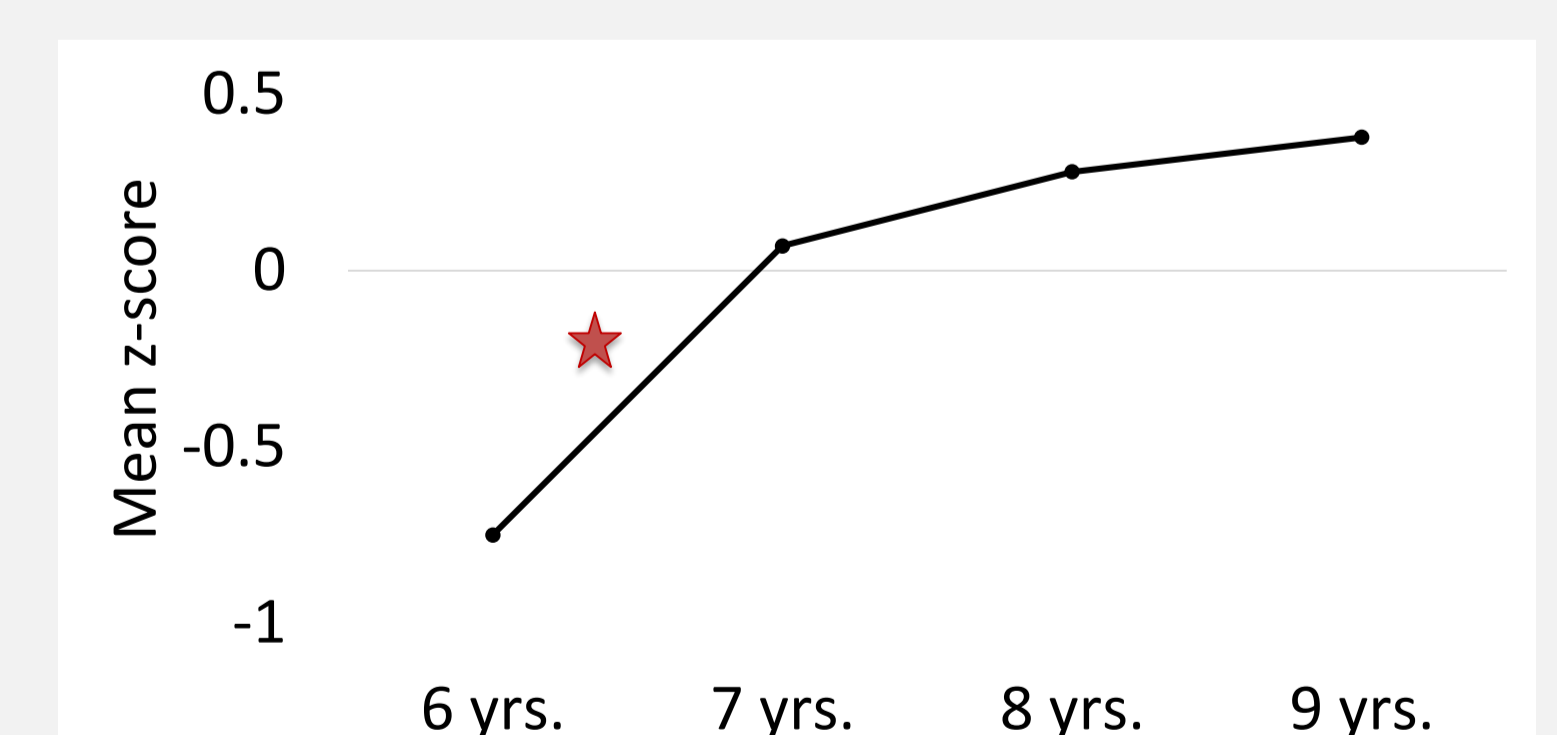


Figure 6: Arabic Sight Word Reading Task

- Significant increases between the 6 and the 7 year olds only ($p < .05$)
- No significant effects of sex



Conclusion

- The available Arabic language measures are sensitive to developmental change in younger children only between the ages of 6 and 7.
- Only the *Arabic Receptive-Expressive Vocabulary Test* revealed significant performance growth with each increase in age band.
- Need to develop language assessment measures that tap a broad range of language abilities and more complex language skills for Arabic-speaking children, and are based on psycholinguistic of Arabic language
- Further investigation of sex differences warranted: It is possible that the low performance on several language measures by females compared to their male peers may reflect sociocultural differences especially in relation to language practices between males and females in Saudi Arabia.

References

1. Shaalan, S. (2010) Investigating Grammatical Complexity in Gulf Arabic Speaking Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI). University College London.
- 2) Abdalla, F. (2000). Verbal inflection in Arabic-speaking children with specific language impairment. Unpublished manuscript, McGill University, Montreal.
- 3) Abdalla, F. (2002). Specific language impairment in Arabic-speaking children: deficits in morphosyntax. Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University.
- 4) Wiig, E. H., & El-Halees, Y. (2000). Developing a language screening test for Arabic-speaking children. *Folia Phoniatrica et Logopaedica : Official Organ of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics (IALP)*, 52(6), 260–274.