Adaptive Behavior Inventory

The Adaptive Behavior Inventory (L. Brown & Leigh, 1986a) is a norm-referenced scale appropriate for use with students who range in age from 6–0 to 18–11. The ABI is intended to be used to provide information about adaptive behavior during the diagnosis of mental retardation, to compare various components of adaptive behavior exhibited by one individual, and to evaluate instructional programs designed to affect a student's adaptation. Like other adaptive-behavior measures, it is administered by having a respondent answer questions about the subject being assessed. The preferred respondent for the ABI is "the classroom teacher or other professional who has relevant contact with the student being assessed" (L. Brown & Leigh, 1986b, p. 4). It is particularly praiseworthy that ABI users are urged to postpone administration of the device if a rater cannot be found who has had sufficient contact with the student to provide complete and reliable information.

Subtests

The ABI consists of five subtests that can be given independently in about five minutes each.

Self-Care Skills  This subtest contains 30 items that range from asking about how students get from one school area to another to questions about grooming and about students' awareness of social-service agencies.
**Communication Skills**  This subtest contains 30 items that range from asking about how students orally communicate their needs to questions about how students describe abstract ideas in writing.

**Social Skills**  This subtest contains 32 items that ask about behaviors ranging from referring to others by name through sharing things with others to organizing and leading groups.

**Academic Skills**  This subtest contains 30 items that range from asking whether students can identify alphabet letters and their own names to questions about whether they take adequate notes to wondering whether they can perform advanced mathematical tasks.

**Occupational Skills**  This subtest contains 28 items that ask about behaviors ranging from being punctual to supervising the work of others.

A short form of the ABI is also available. It contains selected items from each subtest.
Scores

Individual items are scored using a 4-point scale, with which the respondent indicates that the subject does not perform the behavior (0 points), is beginning to perform the behavior (1 point), performs the behavior most of the time (2 points), or has mastered the behavior (3 points). Raw scores on each subtest can be converted into percentiles and standard scores (mean = 100; standard deviation = 15). If four or five subtests are administered, a weighted composite deviation score can also be obtained.

Norms

Two sets of norms are available. One set, the normal intelligence sample, is intended to be representative of students in the general U.S. population; the other set is intended to be representative of pupils with mental retardation in special education programs and residential facilities. Sampling plans are not provided for either normative sample, and the samples are poorly described.

The normal-intelligence sample was composed of about 1,300 individuals who ranged in age from 5–0 to 18–11 and resided in 24 states. This sample, as a whole, corresponds to the U.S. population at the time of the 1980 census in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, geographic area, and socioeconomic status. However, the correspondence of each age group with these characteristics is not described.

The mentally retardation sample was composed of about 1,100 individuals from the same age range drawn from the same 24 states. This sample, as a whole, corresponds
to the population at the time of the 1980 census in terms of gender and measured IQ. The sample underrepresents students in special day schools.

Reliability

Internal consistency was estimated by coefficient alpha. Adjacent age groups were combined (5- and 6-year-olds, 7- and 8-year-olds, and so forth), and the responses for 50 individuals at each age level in the two standardization groups were randomly selected. For the normal-intelligence groups, 42 coefficients were computed (five subtests and total score for the seven ages). The 35 subtest-by-age coefficients ranged from .86 (for the 5- and 6-year-old group) to .97; 25 of the 35 coefficients equaled or exceeded .90. All of the coefficients for the total ABI score exceeded .90. The internal consistency of the ABI short form also exceeded .90 for each of the age groups. Stability was estimated by test–retest reliability using 39 students of normal intelligence who ranged in age from 5 to 18 years and 56 students with mental retardation who ranged in age from 6 to 18 years. The effects of age were held constant statistically. Estimated stabilities for the subtests, the composite, and the short-form composite all exceeded .90.

Validity

Reports on validity data are superficial. Thus, most of the evidence provided is difficult to evaluate. Inspection of the items included in the ABI may provide some evidence of content validity. Some items are too subjective, however, and criteria for scoring/marking
each item may not be clear to the person completing the form. For example, teachers are asked to rate a student's performance on intermediate reading tasks, understanding of basic measurement concepts, knowledge of the approximate cost of common items, and so forth.

As evidence of criterion-related validity, the authors provide correlations with teacher judgments of adaptive behavior and modest to high correlations with the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale and the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales. These studies are incompletely described, however, so it is difficult to evaluate the ABI's criterion-related validity.

As evidence of construct validity, the authors offer the correlations of the ABI with achievement tests, intelligence tests, and age, as well as the intercorrelations of the ABI's subtests. Finally, to show construct validity, the performances of students with mental retardation and normal students in the standardization samples were compared. "In every instance, there were significant differences between each of the pairwise comparisons of the groups, with higher ABI means attributed to students in less restrictive classroom environments" (Brown & Leigh, 1986b, p. 40).

Summary

The ABI is a norm-referenced scale that assesses five aspects of adaptive behavior through ratings by a student's teacher. The norms appear adequate, and the device appears to have adequate reliability and validity.