# Development and Preliminary Implementation of Adults Reading Comprehension Placement Test: Evidence from MA Students of University of Guilan

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**Abstract**
Reading comprehension is the process of reader's interaction with a written language and making meaning from the text. Studies show that there is a great difference between skilled and poor readers in terms of using the fundamental strategies of reading comprehension, i.e., cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Due to the lack of appropriate tool for measuring adults' reading comprehension level in Iran and the lack of appropriate criteria for selecting the texts for such a tool, the aim of this study was to make a placement tool for evaluating adult Persian speakers' reading comprehension level. It was a mixed methods study and the aim was to answer three main questions about finding a text selection criterion for reading comprehension tests, using the selected criteria for making reading comprehension placement test and studying the validity and reliability of the devised test. Findings showed that text selection criteria should be fitted with patterns of international tests and the linguistic principles of text. The content validity of the text was approved by experts, after implementing their comments on the texts and questions. To ensure the test reliability and to do item analysis, the test was distributed among a sample of 60 MA students of University of Guilan at two stages. The reliability of the test was computed and Cronbach's alpha were 0.84 and 0.82 respectively, showing the appropriate reliability of the tool. After normalization, this tool can be used to evaluate adult reading comprehension and in educational planning, it can be used for selecting the educational content.

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**Introduction:** Reading comprehension is the process of reader's interaction with a written language and drawing meaning from the text. Generally, reading comprehension is a complex and multidimensional process which is done through two core processes. The first is decoding the symbols and recognizing the words, and the second is integrating the meaning of words in the context of the text (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; in: Atkinson, 2014). Learning reading comprehension is a long-term process; so it is at the end of the learning process that the adult reader can easily read different texts and draw the meaning from them. Studies show that there is a great difference between skilled and poor readers in terms of using the fundamental strategies of reading comprehension, i.e., cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Cain, Oakhill & Bryant, 2000). Weakness in the prerequisites of reading comprehension and failure in selecting the appropriate comprehension strategies are some of the important problems of students at different educational levels when reading different types of texts. Some international studies have been done on the reading comprehension such as PIRLS[1] and PISA[2] tests. During the recent years, the number of such studies has increased in Iran. Perhaps it could be due to the Iranian students' low performance in the PIRLS test at different time intervals which shows their weakness in reading comprehension. Despite such weak results in international tests, and doing some related research in Iran, still there is no appropriate tool for determining the reading comprehension of Iranian people, especially adults. Living in the modern society needs learning and reading various texts. Despite the importance of this issue and the quantitative progress in the number of graduate students, there is no specific criterion to determine the educated adults' level of reading comprehension. The development of higher education is a great scientific evolution that despite its positive effects has some shortcomings as well. One of the most important shortcomings is the lack of an appropriate placement tool for evaluating students' reading comprehension in order to prepare suitable educational material. The aim of this study was to develop a placement tool for evaluating adult Persian speakers' reading comprehension. The study followed three main objectives, i.e. finding text selection criteria and the related questions for reading comprehension tests, using the selected criteria for developing reading comprehension placement test and finally determining the validity and reliability of the designed test.

**Questions:** There were three main questions in this study: 1. What are the text and question selection criteria for developing a reading comprehension placement test? 2. Which reading comprehension placement test could be designed for adults, implementing the above-mentioned criteria? 3. Does the designed test have validity and reliability?

**Method:** It was a mixed methods study. The qualitative part included finding the text and question selection criteria for developing the adult Persian speakers' reading comprehension placement test and the steps of its development. Also, the quantitative part of the study included the pilot study of the mentioned test to determine its validity and reliability. The content validity of the test was checked by 5 experts. To examine its reliability, the test was distributed among two groups of MA students of

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[1] The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
[2] The Program for International Student Assessment

the University of Guilan, who were selected using convenience sampling method (each group 30 students) with two months interval and the level of reliability was computed using Cronbach's alpha. Along with calculation of the reliability of the test, the test items were analyzed in terms of item facility, item discrimination, and the distractors' distribution.

**Findings:** To select the texts, a combination of criteria introduced by the International Institute for the study of Reading Literacy for PIRLS test and Educational Testing Service (ETS) has been used. It was tried to match the selected texts in accordance with patterns of international tests and linguistic characteristics of the texts. These criteria included lexical and grammatical cohesion and also coherence of the texts. Taking into account all of the strategies underlying reading comprehension (i.e., inference-making, comprehension monitoring, text structure, etc.) the test questions were designed at 6 levels. These levels were selected based on the integration of Day and Park (2005) model and the design of TOFEL tests for reading comprehension placement tests. The content validity of the test was approved by 5 linguists, English language teaching, and Persian language teaching experts, after implementing their comments on the texts and questions. To ensure the test reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. First, the test was distributed among a sample of 30 MA students of University of Guilan and the level of Cronbach's alpha was 0.82. Also, different levels of item analysis were conducted, including item facility, item discrimination, and the distractors' distribution. To make sure of the reliability of the test, after revising the items, and with two months interval, the test was distributed among a new sample of 30 MA students of the University of Guilan. Again, the reliability of the test was computed and Cronbach's alpha was 0.84, showing the appropriate reliability of the tool.

**Conclusion:** This test could be used to assess adult Persian speakers' level of reading comprehension and also its results could be used to select appropriate educational material. In the next step of this research, this tool should be distributed among a larger sample to determine its construct validity and also to compute its norms so that its results could be cited with more confidence.

**Keywords:** reading comprehension, placement test, test development, adults, MA students