



## Investigating the use of inference-making strategy in reading comprehension: Evidence from strong and weak Persian students in terms of reading comprehension

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of language processing while reading is the comprehension of written text, which requires the simultaneous interaction of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Inference-making is a cognitive strategy that could be defined as using two or more parts of the text information to enable comprehension of implicit information in the text. The cognitive strategies are operational plans used to process the text through words' recognition, combining propositions to obtain the semantic structure of the text, and finally drawing a situation model of the affairs as presented in the text (Kintsch & Van Dijk, 1978). Inference-making is one of the cognitive strategies of reading comprehension, which could be defined as the ability to use two or more parts of the text information to get its implicates (Silagi, et.al. 2015, p. 8). An inference could be either simple like recognizing the reference of a pronoun, or so complex. In fact, it could be said that during the reading comprehension, the reader turns the sentences with a hidden and seemingly incoherent meaning into a coherent one using various inferences. Inference making is one of the main topics in psycholinguistic studies. From this perspective, it is a cognitive strategy through which the reader goes through the text to extract its implied meaning based on two sources of information, i.e., "the propositional content of the text" (the information explicitly stated) and the "prior knowledge." Most of the information extracted from the text is not directly comprehensible through reading but is possible through inference making and text comprehension at high levels. Therefore, inference making helps to create a coherent representation of text by creating a conceptual relation between its different parts (Chikalanga, 1992, p. 699). Considering the above explanations, it could be said that the cognitive strategies enable the reader to activate his/her prior knowledge based on the text and to create a mental representation that facilitates reading comprehension. This mental representation should be enriched enough to provide a deeper understanding of the

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apparent meaning of the text. Such enrichment could be done through strategies, such as inference making as well as using the text structure' knowledge. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the difference in the use of inference-making strategy (coherent and elaborative) in reading comprehension among the MA students with weak and strong reading comprehension abilities. Accordingly, in this research work, there was one main hypothesis and two sub-hypotheses.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study was a quasi-experimental type. The independent variables of this study were the participants' level of reading comprehension (with both weak and strong levels) and the type of inference (with two levels of coherent and elaborative). The dependent variable was their score in the inference-making test.

The research sample consisted of 100 MA Persian speaking students of the University of Guilan; they were selected by convenience sampling method. First, the researcher-made placement test was conducted to divide the participants into two groups with weak and strong reading comprehension. The test's validity and reliability have been confirmed in the previous study (Ghavami et al., 2020). In the next step, the researcher-made inference-making test was distributed among them. This test consists of 4 texts and 16 questions. Each text has 4 questions, two of which are related to coherence inference-making and two are related to elaborative one. Then, five experts checked the content validity of the test. Its test's reliability was computed using Cronbach's alpha. The alpha coefficient of the test was 0.72, showing that the test has rather good reliability. Finally, data were analyzed using MANOVA and independent samples t-test.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results showed a significant difference between MA students with weak and strong reading comprehension according to inference-making strategy, as the strong students use more inference-making strategies. More detailed analysis showed a significant difference between the graduate students with weak and strong reading comprehension regarding the coherent inference making and the elaborative one.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The significant difference between the students with strong and weak reading comprehension (in terms of using the inference making strategy) and outperformance of the strong group compared to the weak group were consistent with the findings of Cain et al. (2001) and Silagi et al., (2015). The findings of this study, theoretically, as one of the first works in using inference making strategy in reading comprehension among literate Persian-speaking adults, could somehow fill in the informational gap in the related literature in Iran. From the educational point of view, the results of this research could provide valuable information on Persian Graduate students' different inference-making strategies for those involved in higher education and planning, including instructors, educational psychologists, and curriculum developing experts.

**Keywords:** Reading comprehension; Inference making; Background knowledge; MA student