Persian proficiency test: Designing and analyzing the structure, reliability, and validity

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1. Introduction

The expansion of Persian language teaching in various institutes and universities in Iran and the demand of Persian students outside Iran to participate in these courses for various reasons led the authorities to establish a method for measuring the proficiency level of Persian language learners. This resulted in the design of SAMFA and AMFA tests as the first Persian proficiency tests. To respond to the needs of one of the Persian language training centers, Al-Zahra University Persian Language Center designed a proficiency test called Aspa. This study examined the different dimensions and structure of this test and measured its reliability and validity. The research participants of this study were 41 learners, studying Persian language courses in Mashhad. After estimating its reliability using Cronbach's alpha, 20 experts in the field of Teaching Persian to Non-Persian Speakers were asked to examine the content validity of the test.

2. Materials and method

This test was designed and administered by a group of specialists in teaching Persian to non-Persian speakers at the Azfa Center of Al-Zahra University. A multidimensional language model was used to design this test, following the standard models such as TOEFL or IELTS. After forming an expert group with 6 members to design the test and determining the experts to design the questions for each skill, the standards observed in the design of TOEFL and IELTS tests as standard models of question design were examined. Subsequently, the initial draft was developed, and the questions were discussed, exchanged in various sessions, modified, and edited. These questions were arranged in a booklet, presenting the listening, grammar, reading comprehension, and writing sections, respectively. The test entailed a total of 62 questions, which was administered to the test takers. As for the scoring of the test, 80 points out of 100 were assigned to the above questions and the remaining 20 scores were assigned to the oral test. Oral test questions were provided to the interviewers in another booklet.

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Due to the limited number of participants in the test, which was lower than usual in quantitative measurements, content validity analysis was used to identify the relationship between the test questions and language knowledge constructs. One of the methods of conducting content validity is using the experts' opinions and judgements in each field. To this end, first, a survey form was created through Google Forms, in which sample questions of each skill at different levels, including elementary, intermediate, and advanced, were brought on different pages. After designing the desired form, the link of this survey was sent to 20 Persian language teaching experts, and they were asked to comment on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the questions in terms of language and content. The survey, designed on Google Forms, had 6 pages with each page dedicated to the skill being tested. After receiving the link and entering the personal details, including the name and surname, the level of Persian teaching experience to non-Persiavn speakers, and

their e-mail, the experts commenced the process of answering and expressing their opinions on the test questions on the first page. Sample questions for each skill were placed on each page of the Google Forms, and at the end, the instructors were asked to comment on the language and content appropriateness of the questions.

3. Results and discussion
The research results indicated that this test has a good content validity. In particular, examination of the content validity index of this test showed that the grammar and writing skills, by obtaining 90% of the experts' views, had the highest rate. The lowest content validity in the questions was related to the reading skill. The results of this test also showed that the vocabulary and grammar section had a higher level of easiness and writing had a higher level of difficulty in the statistical population. Cronbach's alpha was also used, to assess the reliability of the test, whose results showed that the test had an appropriate level of internal consistency or reliability.

4. Conclusion
It can be concluded that Aspa as a Persian proficiency test has an optimal level of reliability and content validity and can be used for native and non-native Persian speakers.

Keywords: Aspa (Persian language test); Content validity; Reliability; Teaching Persian to foreigners