

**Research Project co-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council,
UK**

"Diagnosing reading in a second or foreign language"

OVERALL AIM

- ❑ To increase our understanding of how proficiency in reading in a second or foreign language develops.
- ❑ To develop an approach to the diagnosis of SFL reading ability based on empirical research and applied linguistic theory.

Overall Objectives

- To identify task and text features that contribute to the difficulty of assessment items and tasks in tests of reading in one's first language (L1) and in a second or foreign language (SFL).
- To identify those subskills and cognitive processes that contribute to the ability to perform well on tests of L1 reading ability and reading ability in an SFL.
- To examine the relationship between the overall ability to read in L1 and in an SFL.
- To examine how well diagnostic measures of L1 reading difficulties relate to difficulties in SFL reading.
- To modify L1 diagnostic measures for the diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses in SFL reading.
- To devise new diagnostic measures of SFL reading ability.

This will be achieved through three sub-projects, which have the same objectives and related research questions, findings from which will be combined and compared in order to develop an empirically based model of the diagnosis of reading ability in a second or foreign language.

The ACER/ESRC Reading Sub-Project

OVERALL AIM

This project aims to enhance our understanding of what affects item difficulty in tests of reading in one's first language or in the language of instruction. It will investigate methods for improving the reliability and validity of expert judgements of those features that contribute to the difficulty of reading tests for 15 year olds, as developed for the 2009 PISA study. In addition, the project will compare the ability of English native speakers to read in English with their ability to read in French, German or Spanish.

Research questions

L1 and Second and Foreign Language reading, based on the PISA 2000 and 2009 tests of reading

- 1) What features of task demands and texts best predict item and task difficulty?
- 2) What process of describing item and task content and reaching agreement among judges will result in the greatest reliability of judges?
- 3) What model of reading processes and text variables will be most helpful for test developers, response coders and teachers, to predict difficulty and to use pedagogically?
- 4) How does ability to read in L1 relate to SFL reading ability?

The Finnish Academy of Sciences / ESRC Reading Sub-Project

OVERALL AIM

This project aims to enhance our understanding of difficulty in reading and learning to read in one's second or foreign language. The project will investigate diagnostic tools for assessing learners' strengths and weaknesses in their first language and adjust these tools to the diagnosis of SFL reading ability, using Finnish learners of English and immigrants learning Finnish in Finland.

Research questions

Diagnosis of Second or Foreign Language reading, based on the Finnish National Certificates

- 1) Which diagnostic L1 reading tasks and other diagnostic measures are most promising for SFL learning?
- 2) How do L1 and SFL reading skills relate to each other?
- 3) How might diagnostic L1 reading tasks best be modified for use in SFL reading assessment?
- 4) Which linguistic and non-linguistic skills characterise different reading ability levels on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)?
- 5) How does the development of SFL reading ability relate to various potential diagnostic measures?

The PEARSON/ESRC Reading Sub-Project

OVERALL AIM

This project aims to enhance our understanding of what affects item difficulty in tests of reading in one's second or foreign language. The project will investigate the content and construct validity of a test of English for Academic Purposes, the diagnostic value of the resulting profiles of reading abilities, and the relationship between test developers' intentions and test outcomes.

Research questions

Second and Foreign Language(SFL) reading, based on the Pearson Test of English (Academic)

- 1) Which aspects of the constructs underlying SFL reading tests can expert judges agree upon?
- 2) Which reported SFL reading skills have the greatest predictive validity and diagnostic utility?
- 3) Which learner performance variables best predict item and task difficulty, and measures of learner ability?
- 4) Which background learner variables best predict item and task difficulty, and measures of learner ability?