

Evaluation and Certification of Reading Comprehension of a Foreign Language at The University of Mexico

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Abstract. Certification is a special type of evaluation, and in foreign languages the most important questions are: What do we evaluate? Why is it required? Also, in the case of large numbers of students, such as the figures at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) the most important question and also a huge challenge is: How can we do that? For this reason we initiated a case research project at the Foreign Language Center that includes interviews with the professors, evaluators and administrators; and on the other hand with students. The purpose of our investigation is to identify the best ways to evaluate and certificate reading comprehension of around 20,000 students per year in an effective and fair way. The evaluations are requested for a variety of reasons, in the case of UNAM the most relevant is to certify that students can read and understand fluently academic texts in the most important languages for nowadays sciences: English, French, Portuguese, Italian, German, Japanese and Arabic. The challenge of designing evaluation instruments that provide the required information about a person's reading comprehension within the limitations set by a specific exam context is not one to be taken lightly, especially since to the classic elements of validity, reliability and practicality, one adds the desire to produce a useful tool that contributes to the Centro de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjera's vast experience in this area, adhering to Bachman and Palmer's definition of usefulness as reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactiveness, impact and practicality. This way we will be able to justify different courses of action and will be skilled to compare approaches and methodologies.