# Study validates the simple view of reading for enhancing second and foreign language learners' experience

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A meta-analytic structural equation modeling approach lays the foundation for improved teaching methods and learning experience for students in second and foreign languages. Credit: Jirka Matousek

The simple view of reading (SVR) is a widely accepted theory that attempts to define the skills that contribute to early reading comprehension. It attributes a person's reading comprehension ability to two skills—word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension. This theory has been tested in the context of second as well as foreign languages.

However, SVR is known to have some limitations, especially for complex reading, such as second and foreign language (SFL). Recent reading research indicates that SVR needs to be expanded upon to include cognitive factors which may have an impact on reading comprehension, such as working memory and inference making, along with metalinguistic skills. This is also necessary in the context of SFL.

To this end, a study led by Professor Jang Ho Lee of Chung-Ang University along with Professor Hansol Lee of the Korea Military Academy, evaluated SVR in the context of SFL. Aimed at expanding the existing SVR framework, they used a statistical approach known as meta-analytic structural equation modeling (MASEM). Their study, published in *Review of Educational Research*, demonstrates that the primary tenet of SVR holds true in SFL contexts and that it can be adapted to identify reading problems in people reading SFL.

"The SVR model is a time-tested model of reading in the field of first language literacy, and has been used for the development of instructional guidelines of many countries' reading curricula. However, we decided to test the applicability of this model for SFL reading, which has till now been explained by many theories and conflicting ideas," explains Prof. Lee.

The researchers first identified prior studies for building the MASEM model, through a database search. Of the 294 studies identified, 152 were selected. Next, the researchers identified 12 variables spanning

various SFL constructs, such as comprehension, decoding, cognition, and metalinguistic skills. Further, they used a widely used, two-stage modeling approach, known as two-stage structural equation modeling (TSSEM).

They developed four MASEM models, which were variants of the base model, for answering the four research questions in this study. While the base model included variables of reading comprehension, the other three models were expanded to include variables for cognition skills, metalinguistic components, and a combination of both. This helped the researchers to study more complex constructs of SFL reading, compared with the base model.

Their analysis revealed decoding skills and language comprehension skills to be the primary components for effective SFL reading instruction. Moreover, they identified that early instruction should focus mainly on developing decoding skills, along with language comprehension skills, while later instruction should focus mainly on developing language comprehension skills. Their findings also underscore the need for including specific instruction on metalinguistic skills in the SFL-SVR framework.

Furthermore, the researchers detail how the extended SVR models can be implemented practically while teaching students to read, with the eventual goal being to improve the reading abilities of SFL learners. "The findings that components such as decoding and language comprehension are crucial for SFL reading, can help instructors design a more effective and efficient pedagogical approach. This can ultimately help in promoting SFL learners' reading competence," explains Prof. Lee.

This pioneering research could be potentially applied to tackle open research questions in several domains. As Prof. Lee notes, "This is one

of the first studies to use a specialized type of meta-analysis for finding answers to the unanswered questions in the field of applied linguistics. Going ahead, researchers can benefit from using this approach to advance the understanding of several issues that involve the complex relationships among multiple variables."

**More information:** Hansol Lee et al, Extending the Simple View of Reading in Second and Foreign Language Learning: A Meta-Analytic Structural Equation Modeling Approach, *Review of Educational Research* (2023). DOI: 10.3102/00346543231186605