

Measurement System of Reading Literacy in Korea

– Kim, Chang Won (金昶元)¹

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I . Introduction

Republic of Korea is an independent state located at the southern half of the Korean Peninsula in North East Asia. Its size is 99,538km² with the population of 48,422,000, and its GDP per person as of 2005 is \$16,500 USD. In the northern half of the Korean Peninsula lies the communist state, Democratic People's Republic of Korea that is also maintaining an independent state. However, South Korea and North Korea have always shared the sense that they are one country. The South and the North Korea are actually one nationality group in terms of ethnicity, language, culture and history.

In the first half of twentieth century, the Korean Peninsula was a Japanese colony. After the World War II, a self-ruling governments were established both in the North and the South, and the civil war between them solidified the current division. South Korea underwent economical hardship and dictatorship for about twenty years after the war. However, it has achieved a great economical development since the seventies, and South Korea is now a member of OECD, playing a significant role in East Asian economy. In this presentation, 'Korea' refers to South Korea.

Korea could overcome the damage left by colonization and the war by high quality education. Korea has a very influential Confucian tradition, which regards literal studies importantly, and after the establishment of its government in 1945, it quickly imported American educational philosophy and its system. By the end of 1940's, a compulsory education based on 6-3-3-4 schooling system, gender equality, and the balance between the individual and the community had already settled in Korea. Currently as of year 2005, public education up to the ninth grade is compulsory, and the rate of high school graduates who proceed to higher education is 82.1%.

One of the reasons that Korean education could succeed was the use of 'Han-Geul.' Han-Geul is the set of Korean alphabets invented in 1443. (Before this point, the Chinese characters had been used.) It is a phonogram transcribed in syllable unit, and after undergoing

* Professor (Ph. D.)

Department of Korean Language Education

Gyeongin National University of Education, Incheon, Korea

cwkim@ginue.ac.kr

some changes, it now consists of fourteen consonants and ten vowels, which are inter-combined to form all the syllables that are used. (The Korean language phonologically has 19 consonants and 21 vowels.)

Han-Geul is easy to learn, and almost all Korean children acquire Han-Geul before entering the formal education system. In fact, there are numerous kindergartens teaching Han-Geul to children aged 4-5. Primary schools finish teaching written characters within the first semester of the first grade. Consequently, the literacy rate in Korea is near 99%, which is a very high figure.²

Korean education is notorious for its competitive mood. In terms of the formal system, equalization is adopted up to secondary education (Grade 9), but students and parents strive for good grades from students' early age in order to get into prestigious colleges. This is because, like many other Asian countries, the reputation of the college attended serves as a guarantee for one's success. Many students receive tutoring or study with additional study-aid books after school mainly in Korean, English, and Mathematics.

Since almost all school teachings aim for university entrance, Korean education as a whole is heavily influenced by the college entrance exam. Students are required to submit three test scores for college admission; academic reports of high school, College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) score, and the exam administered by each college. Among the three, CSAT, which is administered annually on the same day throughout the country, has the highest stakes. Therefore, not only in high schools but also in middle schools and even in primary schools, the lessons and tests are modeled after CSAT. And, even the exams for adults adapt CSAT, which has been proved for its high validity and reliability.

In today's presentation, I will introduce comprehensively the Measuring system of reading literacy in Korea. I will also examine the factors to the high reading literacy rate in Korea as is shown in many researches such as that of PISA. Lastly, the problems in the tests for measurement of reading literacy in Korea will be analyzed, and I will introduce some studies done in Korea to solve the problems and improve these measurements. I hope that this presentation will provide better understanding of reading literacy education in Korea.

II. Tests for Measurement of Reading Literacy in Korea

1. Tests for the Diagnosis of Reading Literacy and Improvement of Educational Programs

A. National Diagnostic Assessment of the Basic Scholastic Ability for Grade 3 (初等學校3學年 國家水準基礎學力診斷評價, **ABSA 3**)

This is a national level test that measures the basic scholastic ability of the third graders (age 8). The third grade in primary school is the time when abilities for school study and social interaction begin to be established, and if they are not properly acquired, the learning deficiency starts to accumulate. Therefore, the level of scholastic achievement of each student should be assessed to implement appropriate educational program. As of now, only a sample group is selected to take the test, but it is planned to expand this test to the entire students of the third graders. The three test subjects of ABSA are 'Reading,' 'Writing' and 'Arithmetic' (the 3 R's), but in this paper, only the 'Reading' section is described.

- * **Administrator;** Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation (韓國教育課程評價院, KICE)
- * **Test Takers;** 3% of primary school third graders (in 2005, 19,257 test takers)
- * **Test Domains;** Character Decoding, Word Comprehension, Literal Comprehension, Appreciation and Evaluation

² Since 1990, UNESCO annually awards 'Sejong-Daewang Prize' for a distinguished service in illiteracy eradication. Sejong-Daewang is the Korean King in the 15th century who invented the Korean alphabets, Han-Geul.

- * **Test Format;** Connected Format, Multiple-choice (4 options), Single Answer, Short-Sentence Answer
- * **Number of Items;** 25 (5 for Vocabulary Test, 20 for Reading Comprehension)
- * **Time Length;** 40 minutes
- * **Test Scoring;** Pass/Fail for each individual (summative evaluation and formative evaluation for each of the four domains)
- * **Website;** <http://www.kice.re.kr>

This test defines basic reading literacy in terms of character (Han-Geul) decoding, word comprehension, literal comprehension, appreciation and evaluation. [Table 1] shows the achievement criteria for each of these four test domains.

[Table 1] Achievement Criteria for Reading Literacy in ABSA

Domains	Achievement Criteria
Character Decoding	1. Student can read aloud the words accurately. 2. Student can accurately read the sentences. 3. Student can accurately read the passage.
Word Comprehension	4. Student can comprehend the meaning of each word. 5. Student can comprehend the appropriate meaning of the word concerning the context. 6. Student can figure out the inter-relationship between words.
Literal Comprehension	7. Student can understand the details. 8. Student can understand the main idea. 9. Student can understand the structure of the whole passage.
Inference and Evaluation	10. Student can infer the omitted ideas. 11. Student can infer characters' personalities and thoughts from their words and actions. 12. Student can deduce new information from the given text. 13. Student can differentiate between facts and opinions. 14. Student can evaluate the appropriateness of arguments and the supporting ideas.

Also, the types of texts and the reading situations were specified, and thus the test was administered according to the framework presented in [Table 2].

[Table 2] Assessment Framework of ABSA ³

Domains	Contents
Reading Tasks	Character Decoding Word Comprehension, Literal Comprehension Appreciation and Evaluation
Text Types	Explanatory Texts Persuasive Texts Literature Figures and Tables
Reading Situations	Readings for Learning Readings of Daily Living

In addition to the test, the background variables were surveyed in order to investigate the correlation with students' basic learning ability. The background variables elicited through the survey were about the factors of student, the lesson, and the school. [Table 3] shows the structure of the survey.

³ Let us compare the Assessment Framework of ABSA to PISA.

[Assessment Framework of PISA]

Domains	Contents
Process; Reading Tasks	Inquiry of the General Idea Inquiry of Detailed Informs Inferential Comprehension Logical Consideration on Contents Critical Consideration on the Form
Content; Types of Reading Texts	Prose (Description, Narration, Interpretation, Essay, Instruction, etc.) non-Prose (Pre-scribed Form, Advertisement, Figure and Graph, Picture, Table, Map, etc.)
Situation; Aims of Reading	Personal Public Occupational Educational

[Table 3] Plan to Survey the Background Variables for ABSA

Area	Variables
Variables by Student	Pre-school Education Prepare items for School Study Daily Living in School Homework After-school Activity Attitude to Subject Study
Variables by Teacher	Personal Background Teaching Methods Instruction of Basic Scholastic Attainment Satisfaction with Teaching Profession Class Activities in Korean and Math
Variables by School	Properties of School Facilities and Finances Instruction of Basic Scholastic Attainment

Through the test and the survey of background variables, the basic scholastic ability can be understood in depth. For example, the reading comprehension ability of explanatory texts and persuasive texts can be examined separately, and also, the scholastic ability of students who received pre-school education and those who had not received any pre-school education can be compared.

Meanwhile, in order to accurately measure the basic scholastic ability, it needs to fit the validity and the equalizing of the test items. To ensure validity and appropriately adjust the item difficulty, pre-tests were administered in two classes from second grade and two classes from fourth grade in six schools (24 classes in total) before the actual tests. With the results of the pilot tests, the item difficulty was modified to suit the level of the third graders. As for the consistency across different test administrations, the equalization tests conducted in eighty classes from ten schools. It integrated items of last three years and underwent consistency analysis. The results impart the item difficulties for each year, and thus the basic scholastic ability can be accurately measured.

B. National Assessment of Educational Achievement (國家水準學業成就度評價, NAEA)

The purpose of this test is to measure the students' educational achievement within national standards at sixth grade (primary school graduates), ninth grade (middle school graduates) and tenth grade (National Common Curriculum graduates), and to improve the educational program. Korean national curriculum consists of Common Curriculum from first grade to tenth grade and Selective Curriculum in eleventh and twelfth grades. This test is designed to measure the level of learning achievement in Common Curriculum. KICE states the purpose of this test as the following;

- To diagnose the educational achievements of elementary, middle and high students and the trends of the achievements systematically and scientifically.
- To provide basic reference data of improving a curriculum by analyzing the degrees of students' achieving educational goals of the curriculum and checking the problems of the embodiments of the curriculum in the classroom.
- To improve the teaching and learning methods and produce basic data used to set up a learning encouragement policy by analyzing assessment items and the relationships between achievements and background variables.
- To guide the schools toward better assessment methods by developing and utilizing new and appropriate assessment methods.
- To investigate and utilize new research design and methods introduced to attain the fundamental goals of the studies on NAEA such as the trend design and technique, the

methods to set achievements levels, in-depth analysis of the relationships with background variables, etc.

This test is administered according to the curriculum standards of the following subjects; 'Korean,' 'Mathematics,' 'Social Studies,' 'Science,' and 'English.' That is, it is an achievement test dependent on the formal school education. In this paper, only the 'Reading' section of 'Korean' is described.⁴

* **Administrator;** KICE

* **Test Takers;** 1% of sixth graders, 1% of ninth graders, 3% of tenth graders (from year 2006, the percentage will be increased to 3% for all of the three grades)

* **Test Domains;** Vocabulary, Literal Comprehension, Inference, Evaluation and Appreciation

* **Test Format;** Multiple-choice (5 options), Single Answer, Short Sentence Answer, Performance-based Test

* **Number of Items;** 30 Selection-based + 10 Performance-based (in the entire test for 'Korean' which includes 'Listening' and 'Writing')

* **Time Length;** 60 minutes (Grade 6), 70 minutes (Grade 9-10)

* **Test Scoring;** 4 grades for each subject, which are 'Good scholastic ability,' 'Fair scholastic ability,' 'Basic scholastic ability,' and 'Insufficient scholastic ability'

* **Website;** <http://www.kice.re.kr>

Like ABSA 3, this test also interprets the results in relation to the background variables such as region, gender and school type. Through these measurements, whether students have attained the curriculum standards can be assessed nationwide and the feedbacks are given to schools and students. [Table 4] shows the detailed assessment areas of the 'Reading' section according to the curriculum.

[Table 4] Assessment Areas of 'Reading' Section of Korean National Common Curriculum

* Nature of Reading	* Principles of Reading	* Attitude of Reading
- Needs	- Vocabulary	- Motivation
- Aims	- Literal Comprehension	- Interest
- Concepts	- Inference	- Custom
- Methods	- Evaluation and Appreciation	- Value
- Situations		
- Property		
* Practice of Reading		
- Reading Informative Texts	- Reading Intensive Texts	
- Reading Emotional Texts	- Reading Phatic Texts	

2. Tests for Reading Literacy Assessment and Admission Decision Material

A. High School Entrance Test (高入選抜考査, HSET)

This test is a selective test that middle school graduates (Grade 9) needs to pass to proceed to high school. Even though it is an entrance test, since 99.7% of the middle school graduates go on to high school (year 2005), the selective function of this test has waned down. However, in the non-equalized regions, this test is considered as a high stakes test.⁵

⁴ Korea is currently implementing the Seventh Curriculum. In the Common Curriculum (Grade 1~10), 'Korean' consists of six domains; 'Listening,' 'Speaking,' 'Reading,' 'Writing,' 'Grammar,' 'Literature.' In the Selective Curriculum (Grade 11~12), there are five relevant but in-depth subjects; 'Speech,' 'Reading,' 'Writing,' 'Grammar' and 'Literature.' From the Eighth Curriculum, 'Media' will be newly added to the five subjects.

⁵ In most regions in Korea, students cannot choose the school for themselves. Instead,

HSET is administered by each of the Regional Office of Education. There are 16 Regional Offices of Education in Korea, and six of them have entrusted KICE with test design and scoring. The rest of the offices self-administer the test or selects students according to the academic results of middle school. The subjects tested are the ten subjects in National Common Curriculum; 'Korean,' 'Ethics,' 'Social Studies,' 'Mathematics,' 'Science,' 'Technology/Home Management,' 'Physical Education,' 'Music,' 'Art,' and 'English' (P.E is excluded in some regions). The test covers the curriculum of all three grades of middle school, but higher grades are allotted higher percentage of the test. (10% from 7th, 20% from 8th, and 70% from 9th grade). Generally, the test measures contents at middle school's difficulty level, but 'Korean' test uses passages outside the national textbook, so that one needs general Korean language ability.

- * **Administrator;** Regional Office of Education + KICE
- * **Test Takers;** Third graders of Middle School (Grade 9)
- * **Test Domains;** Vocabulary, Literal Comprehension, Inference, Evaluation and Appreciation
- * **Test Format;** Multiple-choice (5 options)
- * **Number of Items;** 32 (in the entire test for 'Korean' which includes ' Writing')
- * **Time Length;** Embedded in one test with other subjects. 1~2 minutes per item.
- * **Test Scoring;** Composite Score (0.5 point per item)
- * **Website;** <http://www.kice.re.kr>

This test is overall similar to NAEA 9. However, NAEA 9 focuses on the scholastic achievement of the given grade, while this test measures the general ability at the level of middle school. Students consider this test easier than NAEA 9.

B. College Scholastic Ability Test (大學修學能力試験, CSAT)

This test is a scholastic aptitude tests that high school graduates (Grade 12) need to enter colleges. Since college entrance is tremendously important for Korean students and parents, CSAT indeed became the most important test. Students begin preparing for CSAT upon entering high school (some even begin in middle school).

CSAT was first administered in 1993. Before this, there was Scholastic Achievement Test (學力考查) based on the contents of each subjects, but since CSAT was introduced, college entrance test became an aptitude test based on thinking ability. In the early phase, the test consisted of 'Language,' 'Math' and 'English' sections, but eventually 'Social Studies Inquiry,' 'Natural Science Inquiry,' 'Occupation Inquiry' and 'Second Language' was added and students had more choice over some subjects.

The 'Language' section of CSAT consists of ' Listening' , ' Writing' , and ' Reading' , and 'Reading' are given the greatest weight. Because new passages are used which requires thinking ability, the test demands high level of comprehension and reasoning skills. If one can say that Korea has high level in reading literacy, CSAT may be one of the factors.

- * **Administrator;** KICE
- * **Test Takers;** College applicants
- * **Test Domains;** Vocabulary, Informative Thinking, Inferential Thinking, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking

the school to attend is determined by drawing lot out of the schools within certain distance. This system is called Equalization (平準化). However, some Regional Offices of Education have refused Equalization. Specialized high schools such as 'Science School' or 'High School for Foreign Language' are also exempted from Equalization. In these non-equalized regions, students are selected according to academic results of middle school and HSET.

- * **Test Format;** Multiple-choice (5 options)
- * **Number of Items;** 60
- * **Time Length;** 90 minutes
- * **Test Scoring;** Composite Score (100 point maximum) and T-score, Grade is given (Grade 1~Grade 9) ⁶
- * **Website;** <http://www.kice.re.kr>

[Table 5] shows the CSAT's assessment areas. As shown in the table, CSAT, which is based on thinking ability, uses texts of diverse themes not directly related to the curriculum. Here, the proportion of Creative Texts (Literature) and Expository Texts (explanatory and persuasive texts) is 4:6. Also, 'Vocabulary', 'Grammar', 'Listening' and 'Writing' are placed 10% of weight.

[Table 5] Assessment Areas of CSAT

Tasks of Reading and Thinking Domains			Vocabulary and Grammar	Informational Thinking	Inferential Thinking	Critical Thinking	Creative Thinking	Percentage
Listening								10
Writing								10
Reading	Expository Texts	Humanities						40
		Social Studies						
		Science						
		Technology						
		Language						
		Art						
	Creative Texts	Poetry						30
		Modern Novel						
		Classical Prose						
		Drama or Essay						
Vocabulary								10
Percentage			15	20	25	25	15	100

Consequently, Korean students take tests listed in [Table 6] for the twelve years of public education. ⁷ Through these tests, students check their level of achievement and Ministry of Education assesses students' achievement level and the amount of progress.

⁶ CSAT give students grade by Stanine Method like below.

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
percentage	4	7	12	17	20	17	12	7	4
accumulated percentage	4	11	23	40	60	77	89	96	100

⁷ Self-study students can surely avoid some of this test. However, they must take CSAT to entrance college.

[Table 6] Disposition of Reading Literacy Assessment in Public Education

Level	Grade	Age	Tests
High School	12	17	CSAT
	11	16	
	10	15	NAEA 10
Middle School	9	14	HSET, NAEA 9
	8	13	
	7	12	
Primary School	6	11	NAEA 6
	5	10	
	4	9	
	3	8	ABSA 3
	2	7	
	1	6	

3. Tests for Measurement and Evaluation of Reading Literacy in relation to General Korean Language Ability

A. Korean Efficiency Test (國語能力認證試驗, KET)

This test gives every Korean having education equal to or higher than middle school the opportunity to measure their own Korean language efficiency. Ministry of Culture and Tourism operating whole Korean language policies legislated 'Fundamental Law for Korean Language (國語基本法)' in 2005, which states a rule about 'The Official Examination on Korean Language Proficiency.' According to this clause, KET is supposed to be conducted four times a year, and the test results can be used for applying for college, graduate school, or company. From 2006, certain independent high schools admit this test as the entrance exam. This test contains five sections of 'Listening,' 'Vocabulary,' 'Sentence Rules,' 'Reading,' and 'Writing.' The following is the description of 'Reading' section.

- * **Administrator;** The Research Foundation of Korean Language (韓國言語文化研究院)
- * **Test Takers;** Koreans having education equal to or higher than middle school
- * **Test Domains;** Understanding, Logic, Critical ability, Inference
- * **Test Format;** Multiple-choice (5 options), Single Answer
- * **Number of Items;** 90 (the total number of items including 'Vocabulary,' 'Listening,' 'Writing')
- * **Test Length;** 120 minutes total
- * **Test Scoring;** Composite Score (200 points maximum), Grade is given (Level 1~Level 5)
- * **Website;** <http://www.goket.com>

KET determines the level of test takers by measuring and evaluating their overall language efficiency. The levels are as shown in [Table 7]. Level 1 indicates the degree of efficiency corresponding to that of those who major in 'Korean Language and Literature' in College. For test takers who has reached level 2 or above, universities may admit extra credits for certain language courses or such test takers may be benefited from an exam-free admission policy requiring no examination other than the test results.

[Table 7] Grading Criteria of KET

Level 1 (185~200)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * creative Korean language users * those who possess abilities apt for journalism, broadcasting, writing, Korean language education, planning and promotion tasks, etc.
Level 2 (169~184)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * excellent Korean language users who can communicate appropriately and accurately * those who can organize and provide information through language and whose linguistic abilities can bring high flexibility for office works like management, documenting, etc. * Additionally, advanced readers who can make further academic achievements and active discussion leaders who show highly critical thinking and expressions
Level 3 (153~168)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * good Korean language users corresponding to general adult efficiency * those who can enjoy cultural legacy and popular culture extensively in Korean context and have sufficient understanding and abilities to express themselves necessary for social life * those who can understand and process linguistic information, having no trouble in carrying out documented public works.
Level 4 (137~152)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * common Korean language users who rarely experience severe breakdown in daily communication * those who can basically understand the points of others' speaking and writing and deliver their own thoughts and feelings in a simple manner * In order for users of this level to achieve better, more accurate, and creative Korean language style, they are required to be more accustomed to the standard Korean usage and extensive reading and writing.
Level 5 (121~136)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * less fulfilled Korean language users who have acquired a language command corresponding to high school education * It is required for users of this level to improve abilities to select words appropriate for their intention, understand the point of given information as accurately and quickly as possible, and infer implicit intention of a given text.
No marked level (below 120)	No rating

B. KBS Korean Language Test (KBS韓國語能力試験, KBS KLT)

This test is another Korean efficiency test conducted by Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), the leading public service broadcaster of Korean. Though this test shares many characteristics with KET above, it is far more widely conducted with the support of broadcasters. Applicants of KBS must take this test. Recently, increasing number of companies other than KBS replace their entrance exam with this test.

This test contains more number of questions and covers broader ranges of contents than other Korean Efficiency Tests. Moreover, because many language experts from broadcasters take part in this test, it shows a strong practicality. From 2006, like KET, this test has been approved as a proper entrance exam for certain independent high school.

- * **Administrator;** KBS Korean Language Research Institute + KBS Media (a subsidiary company of KBS)
- * **Test Takers;** Koreans having education equal to or higher than middle school (mostly high school). Especially applicants for KBS
- * **Test Domains;** Vocabulary & Grammar, Reading Comprehension (Listening & Reading), Expression (Speaking & Writing), Creativity (creative language use), Understanding Korean language and Culture (cultural background knowledge of Korean language subject)
- * **Test Format;** Multiple-choice (5 options)

- * **Number of Items;** 80~100 ⁸
- * **Test Length;** 120 minutes
- * **Test Scoring;** Composite Score (990 points maximum) and percentage for each five section
- * **Website;** <http://www.klt.or.kr>

The distinctive feature of this test is that it includes 'creativity' and 'Korean language and culture' as main domains in addition to <listening, speaking, reading, and writing>. It expands the concept of 'Reading Literacy' from simple reading to creative problem solving which takes contexts into account.

4. Tests for Reading Literacy Assessment in relation to Occupational Literacy

A. Public Service Aptitude Test (公職適性評価, PSAT)

This test is an aptitude test used to recruit public service employees. Korean public service system is made up of employees ranging from ninth grade (the bottom of the scale) to first grade (the top of the scale, except for vice-ministers and ministers). Ninth, seventh and fifth grade public employees are newly recruited on a yearly basis through state examination. PSAT was introduced since 2004. Applicants for fifth grade public employees, especially for administration, diplomacy and technology divisions, must take this test. It is supposed to become a requirement for seventh grade public employees.

PSAT contains three sections of 'Language Logic,' 'Material Interpretation,' and 'Situational Judgment.' 'Language Logic' section measures test takers' problem solving abilities by presenting various types of written texts from humanities, social studies, science, culture, current events, practical writing, and so on. This section is characterized by the use of lengthy texts of great difficulty such as legal texts or academic papers as the test items.

- * **Administrator;** Civil Service Commission (中央人事委員會)
- * **Test Takers;** applicants for fifth grade public service employees of administration, diplomacy, and technology divisions (supposed to expand to seventh grade public employees)
- * **Test Domains;** Sentence Structure, Comprehension, Expression, Logical Thinking, Inference
- * **Test Format;** Multiple-choice (5 options)
- * **Number of Items;** 40
- * **Test Length;** 80 minutes
- * **Test Scoring;** Composite Score (100 points maximum)
- * **Website;** <http://www.csc.go.kr>

PSAT requires advanced levels of reading literacy in 'Material Interpretation' and 'Situational Judgment' sections as well as 'Language Logic' section. This is because general administrative affairs are conducted through the medium of language. To be sure, PSAT does not measure test takers' language proficiency but only aptitude. Therefore, test takers of PSAT usually have to take another major written test. This is a quite distinguishing point when compared to the ninth grade public service employment policy that only requires a conceptual knowledge-based exam results.

B. Medical Education Eligibility Test and Dental Education Eligibility Test (醫,齒醫學教育入門検査, MEET/DEET)

This test is an aptitude test used for medical and dental school admission. Until now, every

⁸ When the test contains total number of 100 items, the whole sections are made up of 10 items for listening, 30 for vocabulary, 5 for writing, 5 for speaking, 10 for creativity, 30 for reading, and 10 for Korean language and culture.

doctor and dentist in Korea should complete six-year term medical or dental college courses. However, as specialized graduate school system was introduced in 2005, any four-year university graduate can become a doctor after completing four-year specialized graduate school courses.⁹

MEET/DEET is conducted by the joint medical and dental organization named Conference of Medical & Dental Colleges. However, test question organization and scoring are under the charge of KICE. These tests are made up of three sections, respectively, 'Language Reasoning,' 'Natural Science Reasoning 1 (Biology),' and 'Natural Science Reasoning 2 (Physics, Chemistry).' 'Language Reasoning' is a reading section focusing on thinking ability. This test is the highest-leveled reading literacy test along with PSAT. Specialized graduate school applicants should submit a MEET/DEET score as well as their college grades in advance before they are allowed to take a main test.

- * **Administrator;** Conference of Medical & Dental Colleges (醫・齒醫學專門大學院協議會) + KICE
- * **Test Takers;** university graduates applying for medical or dental school
- * **Test Domains;** Vocabulary and Grammar, Analysis, Reasoning, Critical Thinking, Synthesis
- * **Test Format;** Multiple-choice (5 options)
- * **Number of Items;** 40
- * **Test Length;** 90 minutes
- * **Test Scoring;** Composite score (100 points maximum) and T-score
- * **Website;** <http://www.mdeet.org>

Because MEET/DEET are targeted at medical and dental school applicants, this test heavily consist of texts from medical ethics, biology, or basic science fields. However, this does not mean that this tests completely lack of texts from humanities, social studies, or literature. Both tests are basically upgraded versions of CSAT.

5. Tests for Specialized Domains, which includes Reading Literacy

Additional tests concerning reading literacy are 'High School Entrance and Graduation Certificate Test for Self-Study Students (高入・高卒 検定考試),' 'Test of Proficiency in Korean (韓國語能力試驗, TOPIK),' 'Korean Language Proficiency Test (世界韓國語認證試驗, KLPT),' etc.

Test for Self-Study Students conducted by KICE has similar characteristics to High School Entrance Test. Anyone without official education should pass this test in order to get middle and high school graduate certificates.¹⁰

TOPIK by KICE and KLPT by the Korean Language Society (Society of Han-Geul) are both targeted at those who learn Korean as a second language. Test takers of both TOPIK and KLPT are marked Korean proficiency grades after the tests, and are allowed to challenge for higher grades when qualified. Both tests measure basic understanding of vocabularies, grammar, reading and writing. Especially, the International Korean Language Foundation (韓國語世界化財團), in cooperation with The Korean Language Society and Ministry of Labor, is administering EPS-KLT which is targeted at foreign laborers in Korea.

[Table 8] shows the properties of the tests for measurement of reading literacy in Korea except mentioned above in [Table 6] for standardization tests conducted by schools. Both KET and KBS KLT are the most general type of tests. PSAT and MEET/DEET show the

⁹ From 2008, law-school is supposed to be introduced in Korea. Then, graduates can be qualified as lawyers after completing 3-year law school courses. Currently, the issue of introducing 'Language Reasoning' into law school entrance exam is being discussed.

¹⁰ Middle school attendance is obligatory. Thus, less people take exams for middle school graduate certificates year by year.

highest level of reading literacy tests as they are targeted at university graduate. TOPIK, KLPT and EPS-KLT measure basic Korean language proficiency as they are directed at non-native Korean speakers.

[Table 8] Reading Literacy tests outside the School

Test Type	Test Name	Test Taker	Testing Institute	Property
General Korean Language Proficiency Test	KET	ordinary people	The Research Foundation of Korean Language	measures overall and universal Korean language proficiency conducted on the basis of 'Fundamental Law for Korean Language'
General Korean Language Proficiency Test	KBS KLT	ordinary people	KBS	measures overall and universal Korean language proficiency conducted on the basis of 'Fundamental Law for Korean Language'
Occupational Literacy Test	PSAT	public service employee	Civil Service Commission	public service employment test
Occupational Literacy Test	MEET /DEET	specialized graduate school applicant	Conference of Medical & Dental Colleges+ KICE	aptitude test for medical and dental school
Others	TOPIK	foreigner, overseas Korean	KICE	speakers of Korean as a second language
Others	KLPT	foreigner, overseas Korean	The Korean Language Society	speakers of Korean as a second language
Others	EPS-KLT	foreigner, overseas Korean	The International Korean Language Foundation	foreign laborers in Korea

III. Discussions on Reading Literacy Tests in Korea

1. Trends of Reading Literacy Tests in Korea

Reading literacy tests in Korea, regardless of being conducted either inside or outside the school, share several basic premises in common. Those premises became concrete as researches on reading literacy had been started during 1980s, and CSAT had been conducted in the middle of 1990s. In the late 1990s, other reading tests adopted those premises. Now, many reading literacy tests in Korea are based on similar format and method to each other.

*** The Concept of Reading Literacy;** Reading literacy is divided into three separate domains; 'basic literacy,' 'functional literacy,' and 'cultural literacy.' Reading literacy tests in Korea measure each of them. At first, basic literacy contains 'understanding and acquisition of the alphabet,' 'vocabulary,' and 'grammar.' Secondly, functional literacy centers on 'analytical thinking,' 'critical thinking,' and 'creative thinking.' Lastly, cultural literacy deals with 'genre characteristics (including literature),' 'cultural background,' 'communicational context,' and 'world knowledge.' Elementary proficiency tests like ABSA or Korean language test as a second language such as TOPIK, KLPT place higher importance on basic literacy. Clearly, the

importance of functional literacy becomes even greater as the difficulty of a test arises. Recently, cultural literacy is drawing greater attention than ever, though literature texts appear less and less in the tests. Instead, the cultural literacy domain is more focused on traditional culture, popular culture and media culture.

*** Reading as the Construction of Meaning;** It became common sense in Korea that reading is not the decoding process of written information, but the process of constructing meaning by grasping the cues in the texts. Moreover, it is well understood that, for the construction of meaning to be successful, it needs the interplay between objective meaning which texts present, reader's world knowledge and reading context. Therefore, reading is defined as the process of problem solving and interaction among variable texts and readers, which readers construct meaning by considering contexts, deriving world knowledge and using their own thinking abilities. So, administrators of reading literacy tests make attempts to get valid and accurate measurement on these abilities.

*** Reading Literacy Tests as the Measurement of Thinking Ability;** Reading literacy tests make strenuous efforts to measure thinking ability in the sense that reading is the process of constructing meaning. For example, CSAT measures 'Informative Thinking,' 'Inferential Thinking,' 'Critical Thinking,' and 'Creative Thinking.' In the same way, MEET/DEET measure 'Analysis,' 'Reasoning,' 'Critical Thinking,' 'Synthesis.' Other tests have similar frame to these tests. Generally, critical and creative thinking are placed on the top of the scale of thinking ability, being supported by logical thinking below. To measure thinking ability, reading literacy tests should contain questions that can be solved by utilizing information gained in the texts beyond the basic understanding of them.

*** The Emphasis on Genre;** High leveled reading literacy means outstanding ability to interpret and utilize various types of texts. In that respect, reading literacy tests in Korea make questions by taking texts from many different genres. Those texts include short advertisements or lyrics, and for advanced levels, questions are made up of legal texts or academic papers. Most frequent type of texts is the popular explanation on professional concepts.

General reading literacy tests categorize texts into 'Daily Living Texts,' 'Explanatory Texts,' 'Persuasive Texts,' and 'Literary Texts.' 'Daily Living Texts' contains newspaper articles, manuals and advertisements, while 'Persuasive Texts' covers official speeches, columns and critical essays. 'Literary texts' consist of traditional genres of poetry, novel, essay, and drama. 'Explanatory texts,' appears most frequently in reading literary tests, contains every type of formal informative writing.

*** The Usefulness of Multiple-Choice;** Most large-scale tests in Korea adopt multiple-choice. The multiple-choice was made up of four options in the past, but it's been changed to five since mid-90s (primary school tests have four yet). Though multiple-choice has strength in test objectivity and easy scoring, it is doubtful whether it adequately reflects students' abilities. Therefore, tests not aiming at competition (as does in entrance exam) use questions asking one or two-word answers or short sentences. However, there are still no tests actually based on long descriptive answers or problem-solving tasks.

*** Focus on Lengthy Texts Reading;** Reading literacy tests in Korea mostly take the form of reading and responding lengthy passages in a short time. As a rule, three or four items make up a set of questions for a passage.¹¹ For example, CSAT contains 10 sets of questions made up of 4 or 5 items for each. Questions in the same set are interrelated, which makes it possible for test takers to fail all the questions for exceedingly difficult texts. So, test takers often claim that they

¹¹ In case of PSAT, a passage has only one item. In case of KET, the number of items in a set varies from two to four. Three or four items per set, I mean, is the most usual case.

don't have enough time to handle all the questions.¹²

*** Arrangement of Subject Domain;** In the above paragraph, I mentioned 'Daily Living Texts,' 'Explanatory Texts,' 'Persuasive Texts,' and 'Literary Texts. Reading literacy tests in Korea put great importance on non-literary or expository texts, which are the combined genres of explanatory and persuasive texts. The tests are supposed to cover many different fields of study or subject. For example, CSAT chooses equal number of texts from humanities, social studies, science, technology, and arts. Other tests show similar text arrangement to this. It is meant to avoid advantages and disadvantages according to test takers' major and measure how rich and broad their common sense is. In preparation for this trend, test takers are required to build up wide range of reading experience.

*** The Emphasis on Whole Language;** In Korea, it is more common to measure reading literacy along with other language skills than to measure it independently. Most tests take listening, writing, and reading skills all together, and the 'Reading' section measures both vocabulary and grammar. At times, there appear questions integrating reading and writing. This reflects the fact that ordinary speech acts are conducted in an integrated manner. Therefore, in order to analyze the measurement system of reading literacy in Korea, it is necessary to analyze the measurement system of all four skills in Korea.

2. Issues Concerning the Direction of Measurement of Reading Literacy

In Korea, reading literacy is studied by many researchers, measured by many tests, and arouses considerable controversy. On the one hand, the result of OECD/PISA assures some people,¹³ on the other hand, it causes worries over poor reading literacy of young generations. College freshmen are often condemned by their lack of reading experience despite of their excellent reading ability. This is one of the reasons by which CSAT is criticized to measure microscopic reading skills. I'll take a look at some of the issues on reading literacy and the measurement of it.

*** The Relation between 'Korean Language' Subject and Reading Literacy;** Before 1993 when CSAT was introduced, college applicants must submit the 'Scholastic Achievement Test (學力考查)' score. At that time, SAT was an achievement test based on subjects like as 'Korean Language,' 'Mathematics,' 'Social Studies,' 'Science,' and 'English.' Unlike SAT, CSAT, as the name is not 'Scholastic Achievement,' but 'College Scholastic Ability', is a test that measures learning aptitude for college courses instead of schoolwork achievement. CSAT approaches language in terms of learning ability rather than subject.

This movement was a right decision at that time. The result, however, brought in high school students' complaints that school learning alone couldn't make sure adequate preparation for college entrance exam. Teachers also encountered difficulties in guidance counseling. That led CSAT which started with basic sections of 'Language,' 'Math,' and 'Foreign Language' to add up 'Social Studies' and 'Science' according to high school curriculum. These two newly added up sections measure the exact high school contents. The same pressure was placed upon the 'Language' section, but it still does not measure the high school contents. Instead, it takes one out of ten texts from high school textbook ('Korean Language' textbook is state-authorized). The matter of relating 'Scholastic Achievement' to 'Reading Literacy' still needs an answer.

¹² It is questionable whether reading literacy test should be 'Speed Test' or 'Power Test.' Though every test is basically oriented to Power Test, when it comes to native language test, a test taker's comprehension speed can exhibit his or her power.

¹³ At PISA 2003 conducted in 41 countries, Korean students gained 534 points in average and were ranked second next to Finland. However, they displayed low interest in reading.

*** The Necessity and Opposition of Achievement Test;** Both ABSA and NAEA are tests that aim at measuring reading literacy and improving the quality of education at national level. The government had planned to administer a trial test and gradually let all students take part in this test. This effort met severe opposition of some of the teachers and parents organizations and was not eventually put into practice. Those organizations opposing to ABSA and NAEA warned that this test would promote competition between not only schools but also students and make students slaves of tests. Besides, they also worried about that, if tests like this will be conducted nationwide at the same time, all schools will lost distinctiveness to meet the test standards. Furthermore, they condemned the central government for trying to reassume lost authority over classroom through this test.¹⁴ As a result, the plan to let all students participate in this test was cancelled, and the test was carried out by sampling three percent of entire students. This means that not every student can gain the access to this test in order to get information on his or her own reading literacy. When reliable standards are set at national level as more students take this test, it can show individual persons' reading literacy level.

*** The Necessity of Understanding Chinese Characters;** Even though Korea has its own language, it did not have its own alphabet until the 15th century. Most common people were far from letters and intellectuals used Chinese characters. After the 15th century when Han-Geul (Korean alphabet) was created, information of great importance was still recorded in Chinese characters. During the 19th century, it became usual to mix Han-Geul with Chinese characters in a text (similar to Japan). Today, it is assumed that over a half of Korean vocabularies are from Chinese.

After the independence, Korea has adopted Han-Geul as an official alphabet in 1948 because it is the most proper letter to spell Korean. However, Chinese characters still remain influential on Korean. Therefore, learning Chinese characters is very helpful to use Korean. According to this, it is claimed that measurement of reading literacy should go along with that of Chinese characters understanding. Until now, official reading literacy test does not deal with Chinese characters. However, those who favor Chinese characters do not change their mind.

*** The Usefulness of Literary Text;** To put it simple, reading literacy means the ability to understand, analyze and evaluate written texts and respond creatively to them. These abilities are essential for educational and occupational success as well as for daily living. The problem is how the ability to read literary texts is related to general reading literacy. Most scholars agree with the idea of using literary texts in the measurement of reading literacy. However, they differ in the proper amount of using them. Early CSAT contained Expository Texts and Creative Texts (literature) 50 % each, which caused complaints, especially with the science and engineering faculties on its center. They insisted that 50 % of literary texts do not any good for students majoring in science, medicine or engineering. This caused CSAT to adjust the proportion into 60:40. Both ABSA and NAEA, which follow the school curriculum, maintain the proportion of literary texts as 40 % or above. However, when it comes to PSAT and MEET/DEET concerning occupational literacy, they keep considerably low proportion of literary texts. It is also true to TOPIK and KLPT measuring proficiency of Korean language as a second language. KET and KBS KLT that measure general Korean proficiency take the middle. Does an individual's literary ability predict his or her general reading literacy?

*** Measurement of Reading literacy Focused on Thinking Ability and Academic Power;** In Korea, reading literacy tends to be measured in accordance with thinking ability. The problem is that the difference between linguistic ability and thinking ability is not clear enough

¹⁴ Some critics group has similar opinion to this about OECD/PISA. They argue that OECD/PISA foster competitive mind as it pursues western-oriented neo-liberal educational perspective. They also doubt whether tests like this intend to standardize education by taking United States as an example.

to distinguish. To find logical errors in a text – is it a linguistic ability or thinking ability? This is not a serious issue for test takers, but this addresses quite complex matters to test administrators. To put it straightforward, linguists and philosophers have found themselves in conflict over the hegemony of the measurement system of reading literacy. Most of reading literacy tests is under the charge of linguists and language instructors, while the highest level tests like PSAT and MEET/DEET let philosophers take part in. In spite of basic similarity between reading literacy tests, they show differences between those administered by linguists and philosophers.

*** Occupational Literacy and Reading Literacy;** Many experts offer different opinions about the relationship between reading literacy and occupational literacy. Reading literacy has an obvious relationship with school achievement, while it is vague with occupational literacy. Especially, it was hotly debated around the adequate importance of reading literacy test in the college and company entrance exam. The debate on the necessity of reading test in the MEET/DEET is a clear example. Conference of Medical and Dental Colleges admitted the importance of personality and communication skills and requested a reading literacy test which includes literary texts, which was quite opposite to the ideas of medical and dental school professors and applicants. As a result, 'Reading' section of MEET/DEET was reduced from initial 60 items to 50, eventually to 40. The relationship between occupational literacy and reading literacy still needs further research.

*** Reading Literacy and Multimedia;** Today, the concept of 'Reading' has expanded beyond reading written texts into reading multimedia. Especially, reading pictures, tables, or graphs is an essential element of reading literacy. According to this, claims that the measurement of reading literacy should accept multimedia become more persuasive. This is why ABSA has adopted 'Figure (圖式)' as well as 'Explanatory Texts,' 'Persuasive Texts,' and 'Literature' as one of the main genres. However, most reading literacy tests still take a conservative perspective. The difficulty of making adequate tool to measure multimedia reading ability prevents the change. This problem can be more properly dealt with by technologies rather than by theories.

3. Efforts for Improving Reading Literacy Test

The Reading Literacy level of Korea is quite high. By the time students complete their compulsory education (9 years), most of them reach the level that is needed for daily living. However, new problems are arising recently. As internet, cell phones, mass culture and visual media are becoming commonplace, the signs are appearing that indicate the decrease of advanced reading ability of long texts. The market of high quality books is dwindling, college students are not able to grasp demanding textbooks, and more people score high in tests but have less actual ability. To cope with these problems, the government, experts and teachers are putting their efforts together. Scholarly associations such as 'Korean Reading Association', civilian organizations that encourage reading, reading programs in colleges and universities, the press and publishers are all groups that work to foster reading literacy of the society as a whole. At the same time, there are continuing endeavors, with KICE at the core, to improve the measuring tools. Let's look into some of the directions of these ventures.

*** The Integration and Separation of Comprehension and Performance;** Most of the reading literacy tests do not measure the reading process itself but rather observe the behaviors that result from the reading. For example, if a task asks the test takers to read and summarize a long text, it requires the process of understanding the text, summarizing the text, and writing out the summary. Therefore, when evaluating the task result as good or bad, both the reading ability and the writing ability are being assessed. Likewise, most reading literacy tests extend the measuring target to a combined ability. Korean experts in measurement of reading literacy are trying to design assessment methods to measure reading literacy through the visible reactions of test takers. Integrating for testing, and separating for measuring! Performance-based test and

multiple-choice each have their strength, and thus, elaboration of multiple-choice is a meaningful work. Currently, KICE is indeed the best in Korea in measuring reading literacy through multiple-choice.

*** Improving the Macro System;** Korean Ministry of Education and KICE are working toward a better measurement system of reading literacy that accurately tests the ability and gives feedbacks to the test takers. Currently, it is systematized as in the levels shown in <ABSA 3→NAEA 6/9/10>. The test takers of each test are 3% sample groups, and items are structured considering the components of language, reading process, types of thinking ability, genres, and testing situations. The background variables relevant to reading education are investigated together, so that their effect may be analyzed. The achievement criteria appropriate for each grade are created, test items are fitted to suit the grade level, and item difficulty undergoes the process of equalization. The long-term work is to expand the percentage of test takers and to modify the achievement criteria so that they match international standards. In addition, data about students' language development should be gathered abundantly.

*** Expanding Assessment tools for Reading Ability;** The current reading literacy tests are administered in limited time and space, with limited amount of text, and for limited testing targets. These are inevitable limitations of large-scale standardized tests. These tests can measure the narrow definition of reading literacy, but they cannot assess the attitude of reading and the reading experience. And, the test takers who knew and prepared for the test pattern tend to obtain high scores. True reading ability includes knowledge about reading, reading skill, attitude of reading, and reading experiences, which work together organically. Therefore, more comprehensive assessment methods are needed.

Relating to this issue, new methods such as reading list, amount of reading survey, portfolio on reading, and meta-evaluation on reading are given much interest. They cost time and money, but they are very meaningful in that they show the readers' authentic ability of reading. Together with the improvements of reading literacy tests, supplemental testing tools will soon come to the surface.

*** Test Fitting and Equalization;** In order to test reading literacy objectively, and compare the results with the results from the past or from other countries, it is need to fit and equalize the item difficulty.¹⁵ The current method is to administer pilot tests, but it is hard to prove their validity. The validity of fitting and equalization will increase as more test results are accumulated.

*** Analysis and Applying Test Results;** Aptitude tests like CSAT, PSAT or MEET/DEET aim to use the results in admission or employment decisions. In the case of ABSA or NAEA, their purpose is to analyze the results and use them for improvement of reading curriculum. The reports on these tests are published every year, but they are not utilized in any other ways. For example, the report may show that critical reading ability has decreased compared to last year, or the teacher's reading lessons had some effects on students' reading literacy, but no follow-up measures are made. This is because the number of samples is too small and the precision of the result analysis is low, and thus, it is hard to warranty the validity of the discussion. Therefore,

¹⁵ Fitting the item difficulty involves administering a pretest to second graders and fourth graders, then adjusting the item difficulty according to the percentage of correct answer. However, the number of students taking the pretest is too small and there is little evidence that the test takers are representative of the level of second and fourth grade. As for equalization, items are randomly coded either A, B, or C, conduct pretests only with the A (or B or C) group in the tests administered over the last three years, then compare the result with this year's test result. When test difficulty is calculated, the standard score is adjusted.

the test takers are not given concrete feedbacks and the results are used only to reflect in some policy making. However, many organizations strive to increase the validity of the analysis. Such endeavors are made enthusiastically in teachers associations like 'Korean Teachers Meeting,' as well as KICE. Similar works are done in publishers that publish supplemental textbooks.

*** Treatment of Reading Deficiency;** Reading literacy is a basic factor for academic success. Even though Korean students do not have deep problems with basic literacy, but they cannot be said to be perfect in functional literacy and cultural literacy. Reading deficiency usually appears in these domains.

Reading deficiency is generally known to begin during the third grade. This is the reason why ABSA is implemented in grade 3. For students who are diagnosed to have reading deficiency, KICE and Korea Institute for Special Education (KISE) have developed and diffused specialized educational programs.¹⁶ Separate from this, there are many schools that run specialized program for illiterate children of Han-Geul. Notably, there are studies attempting develop supplementary programs for students whose literacy development are behind students of their age by more than two years.

*** Library as Reading Education Center;** Reading literacy develops when reading skills and reading experiences complement each other. Researches on reading literacy in Korea are centered on major fields of Korean Language, Philosophy, Psychology, and Education. Their interest is mainly on reading skill. On the other hand, major fields of Sociology, Library Information Science, and Culture Theory focus on comprehensive reading activity and the experience. Teachers and NGO's share their interests with the latter. Relating to this, there are efforts, having local or school libraries as the center, to promote culture of reading in the whole society and to develop theoretical support. Their claim is that, in order to foster reading literacy, supportive reading environment should be built up and rich reading materials should be given. Measurement of reading literacy is trying to embrace these movements as well.

IV. Summary

It was late 1980's that reading literacy emerged as a core issue of education in Korea. Although the importance of reading had been acknowledged before this point, the eastern tradition centered classical literature could not be overcome. Reading theory began to develop fully in the late 1980's and finally reading began to be understood in terms of literacy. An example is the Fifth National Curriculum, launched in 1987, that had three separate textbooks for primary school: <Speaking & Listening>, <Reading> and <Writing>. Middle schools and high schools also began to consider genres and reading process in organizing textbook units.

However, the effort to accurately measure the reading literacy came much later. The initiation of CSAT in 1993 probably was its beginning. The success of CSAT influenced all primary and secondary education, and even tests for adults like as MEET/DEET were modeled after CSAT. Today, the reading literacy tests in school are systematized as <ABSA - NAEA - HSET - CSAT> in Korea. And the tests outside of school can be categorized according to their purposes; KET, KBS KLT as universal Korean language test, TOPIK, KLPT as Korean language test as a second language, and PSAT, MEET/DEET as language test for measurement of occupational aptitude. They attempt to measure the reading literacy considering their specific purposes in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension.

Since 1990's, the main stream of reading literacy test measures it in terms of genres (explanatory texts, persuasive texts, and literature), thinking ability (informative thinking, inferential thinking, critical thinking and creating thinking) and themes (humanities, social studies, science, technology and art). Recent additions are measurement skills according to

¹⁶ KICE develops and provides programs for students in the lower 25%, and programs for children with mental disabilities, deaf-and-dumb person, and retarded children.

reading process (pre-reading, reading, post-reading) and holistic assessment methods integrated with writing and multimedia. However, the cultural components and problem-solving/decision-making model have not been actively studied. The main assessment tool is single answer and short sentence answer format centered around multiple-choice. Recently, performance-based test was introduced but it is not yet widely used. The Korean reading literacy tests are generally effective in measuring individual's reading skill, but it is limited in assessing attitude of reading, reading experiences, and cultural backgrounds. There are continuing efforts to study and develop these issues.

– *Measurement System of Reading Literacy in Korea*
(06.Aug.2006, Kim, Chang Won)