

Comparative Study of Reading Comprehension of Boys and Girls at Secondary Level in Karachi - Synopsis

by

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SECTION 1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Background of the study:

The language as a means helps to remember past, manage the present and approach toward future. Language plays an important role in the mental, emotional and social development of a person. It goes without saying that amongst various languages spoken and learnt all around the world, English even borrowed from thousands of miles and belonging to an entirely different nation, may be called the language of the world civilization. "Its richness, its flexibility, its elegance, its dignity seems to have made it universally popular." (Shamsi, 2006, p.7) According to an estimate by Curtis (2006, p.192) approximately 375 million people speak English as their first language while non-native speakers vary greatly from 470 million to over a billion. It is spoken or read by the largest number of people in the world for historical political and economic reasons (Wren, 2006, p.6)

The importance of reading while learning any language cannot be over emphasized. It helps even mastering a native language. "Children are made readers on the laps of their parents." (Emilie Buchwald, n.d.) The ability to read is significant in child development, and reading books to little ones at an early age is essential. In fact, reading children's stories aloud is one of the most important activities parents, grandparents, teachers, and care-givers, can do for kids. "Reading aloud with children is known to be the single most important activity for building the knowledge and skills they will eventually require for learning to read." (Marilyn Jager Adams, n.d.) A W Frisby says. "Many of those who do not approach reading in this life have probably not received in their youth the right encouragement." (Shamsi, 2006, p.303) "The man who does not read good books is no better than the man who can't." (Mark Twain, n.d.)

Reading helps to develop language intuition. It's all about putting lots of correct sentences in the brain to imitate them and producing similar sentences to express the meaning required. Reading a lot, paying attention to useful vocabulary, helps a person start using new words and phrases in speaking and writing and feel what sounds good and what sounds ugly - just as one can do in native language. As Frederick Douglass (n.d.) said, "Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." Singh & Sudarshan favor ability to read in the following words:

The ability to read and translate socio-political texts and popular science texts or prose and poetry is also equally important, which in general prepares the students to read and understand the texts on specialty, as any technical text is composed of general vocabulary and grammar (1996, p.240).

Reading in native language is reading for content. The brain focuses on key words that convey the meaning of the text. This way one is able to read faster. But this is the wrong thing to

do when reading in a foreign language. One wants to concentrate on the grammar, too. Sentences are to be analyzed closely. There could be a useful phrase or an expression that one could have written wrongly. It doesn't have to be a convoluted novel. It can be a comic book, a detective story or a fable. Learner of a foreign language must be able to read that particular language as this competency also leads to speaking and writing competence. While learning English, learners need to be able to know contextual meaning like native speakers do. Before they can form correct sentences, they need to see lots of similar ones in the language being learnt. Speaking or writing in native language, one doesn't have to think about the grammar or the words being used. Correct sentences just come out and brain uses sentences already seen. Likewise learners of a foreign language for the matter of fluency, need to learn the way a native language has been learnt- by massive input. For this purpose reading skill is, undoubtedly of unique importance. R. S. Trivedi and D. A. Chichi write in their book "Teaching English" that:

In fact, the education of a child is imperfect, unless he is equipped with ability to read, to decipher, to interpret and to understand properly the contents of a reading material. The intellectual advancement of child is strictly limited if he is unable to read (Shamsi, 2006, p.303).

While learning to read English, there may be many problems which the students will face. Some of the problems may be timely which will be solved automatically in due course of time while others take a long time to cure. Research suggests that one of the best ways to help students increase their language proficiency is to encourage them to read extensively. Krashen (1993), as a result of an examination of research on in-school reading and "out of school" self-reported free voluntary reading conducted in many different countries, concludes that free voluntary reading or sustained independent reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development.

In addition to its cognitive benefits, extensive reading helps to develop a positive attitude among students towards reading in the second language. It also increases their motivation to read in the second language (Hedge, 1985; Day & Bamford, 1998). It may be as the more one reads, the easier reading becomes. Elley (1991) professes that children who read extensively appear to learn the language incidentally, and to develop positive attitudes towards books when immersed in meaningful text. Shamsi (2006, p.304) defines reading as a process of looking at a written or printed symbol and translating it into an appropriate sound. According to him reading consists of three elements-the symbol, the sound and the sense. "It, in fact, is the ability which enables the pupils sooner or later, to read with the purpose of extracting from the printed page, the thoughts, facts and information that it has to give them." He further discusses how people generally feel that ability to read fluently is the primary aim of learning English. Before 1900, the major aim in teaching reading was just recognition while presently reading is taught to make a person able to recognize words, understand the meanings of words, and react to what has been read and change ideas and behavior of the students.

The most convincing evidence for the benefits of extensive reading comes from "book flood" studies (Elly & Mangubhai, 1981; Elly & Mangubhai 1983), which looked at the effect of extensive reading on the English language proficiency of Fiji elementary school children. These studies provide evidence of the remarkable increase made by the students on measures of language use, language knowledge and academic performance.

Reading of mother tongue and reading of a foreign language are fundamentally the same processes. The learners face problems in both the cases. However in case of mother tongue, the problems are few because he has already learnt listening and speaking at home. In case of a foreign language, practice in listening or speaking is given in the school. Comparatively, the

learners have less practice in aural-oral aspect of the language. Besides, English is not a phonetic language. Its spelling system creates problems in reading. Readers must be proficient in various strategies and sub-skills also e.g. reading for the gist of the text, for specific information or for a piece of information. All these skills must be developed and assessed in the classroom. The level of reading proficiency according to IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) is quoted by Peter Lucantoni (2002, p.59) as that learner of English as a second language should be able to recognize public notices and signs, extract, scan and organize relevant information from forms, brochures, identify themes within a piece of writing and draw conclusions and see relations within an extended text. Tony Parkinson (2002, p.8) elaborates a first language learner's reading ability as to be able to understand and select relevant information, appreciate the difference between facts, ideas and opinions, recognize implicit meaning and attitude, evaluate information and detect bias, and appreciate a writer's use of language. "Reading skill in its true sense of the word can be realised only when the reader automatically can perceive and understand greater part of the lexico-grammatical material contained in the text." (Singh & Sudarshan, p.240) In the words of H. A. Cartledge, of the four skills involved in language learning, the one which is likely to be most useful for students of a foreign language is reading. according to him, most of them unless they visit the country in which it is spoken do not get any sort of real exposure to it but if they are able to read it without difficulty, they can improve their knowledge about that language. (Shamsi, 2006, p.303)

Considering the importance of reading comprehension of English in our educational system, the present study has been designed to evaluate it with regards to a comparison between boys and girls students at secondary level. It is generally observed that the majority of the students at secondary level are unable to read and comprehend the contents of English and do not possess the required comprehension level. On the other hand to keep abreast with latest knowledge, our students need to acquire this skill quite efficiently. In school curriculum, the study of English is compulsory for everyone and while framing the training programs much attention is given to it by allotting first periods to the teaching of English. So it is naturally expected that after long years of learning English as a second language, the students will be effective in communicating and serving in various walks of life at their best. It is also expected that learners will develop a perfect control over language skills.

So, in view of the importance of English and the role of reading comprehension in learning of English language, the present study has been designed for the following purpose:

Purpose of the study:

The present study will test the following hypotheses:

Hypotheses:

1. There will be no statistical difference between male and female secondary school students in their reading comprehension scores.
2. There will be no significant correlation in the reading comprehension scores of male and female students.

Justification of the study:

This study is expected to provide the following benefits:

1. The students can use the results for evaluating their interest of reading comprehension.
2. The findings of the study can help to develop attitude and habits of reading comprehension for their better academic performance.
3. The study would determine attitude and habits of reading comprehension on part of our students.
4. The study would also help in personal development of reader.
5. The textbook writers, curriculum planners and publishers can use the results in creating more interesting material for English as a subject.
6. Teachers of English can use the scores to develop reading comprehension amongst their students.
7. It will lead to understand and predict the performance of schools under investigations.
8. It will also indicate the problems in areas where difficulties are faced for better teaching and learning of English language.
9. The study will be useful to highlight the necessary steps to be taken for improvement in teaching of English.
10. The participants besides improving their performance can find learning experience enjoyable.

Scope of the study:

The study will be limited to the Secondary Schools curriculum of English as prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education, Karachi. It is limited to secondary schools and their students enrolled with the Board.

Definitions of key terms:

1. **Comparative study:** A study of two groups to find out similarities or differences between them
2. **English language:** This refers to the native language of the British people, the official language of the members of the British Commonwealth, the United States, etc.
3. **Government schools:** All secondary schools run by the provincial government of Sindh.
4. **Interview:** Securing of information about a person through a professional conversation with him for a research study or to aid in social diagnosis or treatment.
5. **Reading comprehension:** The ability to read and understand a piece of writing in any language.
6. **Sample:** A group which is selected from a large group or population for the purpose of examination.
7. **Sampling survey:** Educational survey based on an examination of a representative part of the total population.
8. **Secondary school:** An educational institution, which provides education to children from classes VI-X.
9. **Target language:** English language.
10. **Teacher:** A person who helps the student learn, often in a school.
11. **TESL:** Teaching of English as a Second Language.

Basic assumptions:

The study is based on the following assumption:

1. Proficiency in reading comprehension results in language proficiency.
2. The secondary school students cannot read English language to meet their academic and social requirement effectively.
3. Teaching methods used for English Language are obsolete and inappropriate to develop desired English language proficiency and need to be studied.
4. The present study can help in raising poor standards.

SECTION 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Strategy:

The strategy of research adopted in this study will be a survey using written questionnaire and interview.

Population, Sampling and Size:

Population:

The population of the study will consist of all the male and female students of class IX-X studying in government secondary schools in Karachi.

Sampling:

100 male and 100 female students, and 100 teachers, selected randomly will form the sample for the study.

Research Instruments:

To determine the causes of lack of comprehension on part of the students, questionnaire will be developed for the secondary school teachers and administered personally. A text for reading by subjects will be developed.

SECTION 3

PLAN OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data Collection Procedure:

All the students included in the sample will be given an English text to read. They would be given a multiple-choice test based on the text and a cloze test to determine their reading comprehension score. Male and female reading comprehension scores will be compared.

Plan of Data Analysis:

t-test for independent samples will be administered to determine significant differences between the two groups. Pearson Product Movement correlation coefficient (r) will be calculated to determine the correlation between the two groups. Following groups will be compared in the study:

- a. Male vs Female
- b. Government vs Private

TIME ACTIVITY CHART

Activity	Months											
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Research Design	*											
Research Instrumentation		*	*									
Review of Related Literature				*	*							
Data Collection						*	*					
Data Analysis								*	*			
Report Writing & Submission of Dissertation										*	*	*

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