A STUDY ON READING COMPREHENSION PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH AMONG MATRICULA- TION STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The paper discusses to what extent the benchmarks and reading competencies proposed in existing National Curriculum for English grade X are achieved by the matriculation learners. To be more specific, the study was designed to examine and investigate learners' reading performance after receiving four months reading instruction. Consequently, this study was undertaken to investigate secondary school matriculation students' reading comprehension performance with a particular focus of 'main idea' retrieval after completion of an academic program. In this study three private non-elitist secondary schools were selected from one town which was based on maximal variation sampling. To do so, only grade ten students' reading performance were investigated. All respondents of the selected schools were already formed in intact groups which were opted by the school principals. In order to assess respondents' main idea as a comprehension skill, discreet-point approach is adopted. To execute a comprehension test, ten short passages in conjunction with multiple choices were given as intensive reading tasks. The data were analyzed through a percentage study. The primary findings revealed and indicated that 58.19 percent of matriculation students failed to retrieve main idea when given intensive reading task.

Introduction

Literacy in Pakistan

Quality education is considered a base for social and economic growth and as well as a source for enhancing human potential. However, the current educational system in Pakistan is under criticism from educationist, policy makers, and government itself. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2007) currently documents in Ministry of Education (henceforth, MoE) (2009) that "Pakistan's education system is among the most deficient and backward in Asia" (p. 16). In a current scenario over six million children are out of school in Pakistan and out of those who attend, 45 per cent drop out before completing their primary education (UNESCO's EFA Global Report, 2008, cited in Rahim, 2008). As a result, Pakistan's literacy is not only low but also very meager in terms of quality. Its adult literacy rate of total population is (49.9%) wherein; male (63%) and female (36%). The World Bank (henceforth, TWB) in 2007 reports that this figure is lower than the literacy rate for countries such as: Sri Lanka (90.7%, Iran (82.4%), Indonesia (90.4%), Vietnam (90.3%), Egypt (71.4%) and India (61%). In addition, Education Sector Reform (henceforth, ESR) (2006; 2007) reports that 2.5% of the GDP utilizes on education i.e. for public sector, whereas, 0.5% is estimated to be the contribution of the private sector. The contribution of both private and public is 3% of the GDP which spends on education. This low priority on education sector is relatively less than the countries like: Iran (4.7%), Malaysia (6.2%), Thailand (4.2%), South Korea (4.6%), India (3.8%), and Bangladesh (2.5%) (cited in TWB, 2007). Consequently, it is apparent that the low GDP i.e. 2.5% for public sector spends on education is not adequate and need to be increased in order to augment the literacy rate of the country.

Assessment Practices in Current Scenario

Assessment and public examinations have been considered to play a central role in finding out what Gipps, 1994 & 1996 in Little and Wolf; Black, 1998; Greaney & Hasan 1998; Mirza, 1999; Assessment Reform Group, 1999; Kellaghal & Greaney 2001,

public examinations are conducted all over the world and have been considered to play what goes on in the classroom " in terms of 'what' and 'how' teachers teach and students learn, and can have an impact on both teaching and learning" (p.3) (Rehmani, 2003). In addition, the assessment systems can be used to evaluate the overall system's efficiency as well as student's performance. Above all, it provides feedback for improvements at all tiers "starting from changes in the classroom to improvements in the national systems" (p.41). Rehmani (2003:2) cites that according to crucial role in determining the impact of teaching as well as learning. However, public examinations in Pakistan have more demerits than merits (Rehmani, 2003:2). In this vein Madaus (1988) proposes that teacher-designed tests should be used in assessment. This would give teachers opportunities to think through objectives and identify explicit types of evidence that would demonstrate that the objectives had been met. Likewise, Black and William (1998) also recommend that teacher-designed assessment is extremely significant and acts as a magic bullet for student achievement. On the other hand, Neill, Guisbond, Schaeffer, Madden, and Legeros (2004) point out that any new accountability system provides teachers with high quality assessments that cover a variety of ways to demonstrate knowledge and that fit how children learn. Thus, in an educational setting, Alderson (1996) points out that:

> The results of test can be used to assess how well your students can read. They can also tell you how successful your course has been, or how well you have taught the course. Depending upon your perspective, you can interpret test results as indicating students' strengths and weaknesses, the teacher's strengths and weakness, or the strengths and weaknesses of the course. (p.227)

Accordingly, in Alderson's observation, the interpretation of test results not only exposes the weaknesses or strengths of student's comprehension but also reveals the teacher's and the particular course or program's strength and weaknesses. In addition, Imran (1998) cites Khan (1996) who observes that

"The research in testing highlights the decline in examination system, its ineffectiveness, and unreliability in diagnosing students' weaknesses and assessing their abilities" (p.6). He (ibid:1996) goes on to reiterate that the "design and content of the test papers is such that students only have to rely on their memories, and do not have a beneficial effect, on syllabi and teaching practice" (p.6). Above all, in technical terms gives negative backwash effect and the tests lack validity and reliability (Khan, 1996 cited in Imran, 1998:6). To be very specific to this issue under discussion Rehmani (2003) identifies that:

> The present system of assessment is based on summative examination system that drives the curriculum rather than assesses achievement. It is mostly based on assessing factual knowledge rather than students' critical thinking and analytical skills as well as their understanding and comprehension. Thus teachers teach for testing, rather than for learning. The examination system reinforces approaches to teaching that reward memorization. The better the reproduction, the better and higher are the scores or marks awarded by the examiners. (p.3)

Consequently, it is presumed from the aforesaid excerpt that in the current scenario learners' learning outcomes are completely ignored. However, testing of memorization is holistically measured.

National curriculum's reading benchmarks

The national curriculum (MoE, 2006) identifies five 'competencies' incorporated with eight 'standards' for key learning areas, for instance; reading and thinking skills, writing skills, oral communication skills, formal and lexical aspects of language, appropriate ethical and social development. However, this study merely focuses on reading skills, to ascertain grade X matriculation students' reading performance after completion their academic program. According to the national curriculum (MoE, 2006), there are two 'standards' for grade X learners of English. These 'standards' are associated to reading and thinking skills. In 'standard' one, "All students will search for, discover and understand a variety of text types through tasks which require multiple reading and thinking strategies for comprehension, fluency and enjoyment."(p.7). Moreover, in 'standard' two, "All students will read and analyze literary text to seek information, ideas, enjoyment, and to relate their own experiences to those of common humanity as depicted in literature." (p.7). In addition, according to national curriculum (MoE, 2006) the rationale of previously mentioned 'standards' of reading is as follow:

> Better readers are the ones who are equipped with the skills of purposeful reading. These skills can be developed through awareness raising and practice activities. The aim should be to use the texts to teach reading, and not reading to teach texts. Written texts that deal with common human experiences, contemporary information and issues are proposed as the context for the learning of processes skills and strategies, but the approach of the curriculum goes beyond reading. In fact, the reading component serves as a spring board for the development of integrated language skills, and for enhancing cognitive and affective domains, enabling the students to think critically and creatively. (p.7)

Accordingly, for purposeful reading, learners ought to develop their reading skills whereby they enhance their cognition in order to become independent and proficient readers. Therefore, the learners have to read and practice a lot with the intention to improve and increase their reading skills. Moreover, in terms of materials and text types in teaching English reading comprehension, the national curriculum (MoE, 2006) also points out:

> The chosen material should be contemporary and should reflect the specified themes. All reading material in the text book should require learners to work at a level slightly above their receptive ability, only then will they be stimulated enough to stretch themselves cognitively. The reading texts will comprise a variety of text types e.g. interpersonal and transactional, expository, descriptive, narrative

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and argumentative with literary texts comprising 25% of the reading material. (p.8)

Accordingly, it is assumed that teachers use contemporary text and other reading material to stimulate their cognition and increase their background knowledge. Furthermore, these text types should be of different genres, for instance, expository, narrative, expressive, argumentative, and descriptive and so on. To sum up the aforementioned discussion on 'competencies' and 'standards' pertinent to English reading MoE (2006) documents that "All students 'will search for, discover and understand a variety of text types through tasks which require multiple reading and thinking strategies for comprehension, fluency and enjoyment." (p.10). Secondly, "All students will read and analyze literary text to seek information, ideas, enjoyment, and to relate their own experiences to those of common humanity as depicted in literature" (p.10). Similarly, for grade X learners, there are five 'benchmarks' of English reading comprehension documented in national curriculum (MoE, 2006). These are as follows:

- Analyze patterns of text organization, and function of various devices used within and beyond a paragraph in a text.
- Analyze complex processes, procedures, events, issues, and various viewpoints, applying reading comprehension and thinking strategies.
- Analyze information from a visual cue or a graphic organizer to show complex processes, procedures, comparisons, contrasts, and cause and effect relationships.
- Gather, analyze, evaluate and synthesize information to use for a variety of purposes including a research project using various aids and study skills.
- Analyze short stories, poems, and essays; make connections between literary texts and their own lives. (Pp. 97-102)

Accordingly, it is expected that secondary school teachers of grade X incorporate the aforementioned benchmarks of teaching English reading comprehension in order to develop students' reading performance. Furthermore, following are the grade X

students reading learning outcomes documented in the national curriculum (2006):

Learning Outcomes of Grade X Students
- Analyze passages in the text to identify the theme / general subjects, key idea / central thought (a statement about the general subject), and supporting details.
- Analyze paragraphs to identify words, phrases or sentences that support the main idea through: definition, example / illustration, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, facts, analogies, anecdotes and quotations.
- Identify and recognize the functions of: pronoun-antecedent relationships, anaphoric and cataphoric references, transitional devices used for coherence and cohesion at discourse level.
- Analyze the order of arranging paragraphs: chronological or spatial, general to specific and specific to general, most important to least important and vice versa.
- Use pre-reading strategies to: predict the content of a text from topic / picture, title / headings, key words and visuals etc. by using prior knowledge, asking questions and contextual cues.
- Skim text to have general idea of the text, infer theme and main idea.
- Apply critical thinking to interact with text and use intensive reading strategies (while- reading) to:
 - scan to answer short questions.
 - make simple inferences using context of the text and prior knowledge.
 - distinguish between what is clearly stated and what is implied.
 - deduce meaning of difficult words from context.
 - use context to infer missing words.
 - read silently with comprehension and extract main idea and supporting detail.
 - scan to locate an opinion.
 - distinguish fact from opinion in letters to editors, texts supporting an opinion, etc.
 - locate examples to support an opinion e.g. a personal anecdote, quotations, examples and analogy, etc.

Source: *(National curriculum for English language grades I-XII, 2006:97-98)*

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Defining Reading Comprehension

In general, psycholinguists, educational psychologists, reading researchers, and theorists viewed that comprehension is multifaceted and complex process which is directly related to readers' cognition. According to Bormuth (1969) cited in Harris and Sipay (1980:479) "… comprehension ability is thought to be a set of generalized knowledge-acquisition skills which permit people to acquire and exhibit information gained as a consequence of reading printed language" (p.50).Whereas, Dechant argue that (1982:311) reading comprehension is a complex process and no one has yet been able to identify the components of reading comprehension. However, in comprehending a text a reader first needs to associate correctly meanings with words, organization and retention of meanings, and ability to grasp the entire meaning of the text. Ahuja and Ahuja (2007:27) in this nexus cite Hafner and Jolly's (1972) opinion about comprehension skills. They state that comprehension is happened when reader can: Identify the topic sentences, main ideas, and thesis statements in exposition. Likewise, Munby (1978) and Burns, Roe and Ross (1999) also assert that in order to read effectively main idea inference skill play a vital role. In the same vein Dechant (1982:314) also enunciates that good comprehenders possess this skill so as to interact effectively with the text. On the other hand, Harris and Sipay (1980:73) define 'main idea' in a following manner:

> [Main idea] One of the most valuable comprehension skills is the ability to find the main idea or central thought in what one reads. To be able to select the most important thought from a mass of words calls for an ability to distinguish between essentials and nonessentials, between the most important idea and subordinate details or illustrations. (p. 486)

Consequently, in view of Harris and Sipay; Hafner and Jolly; Munby; Dechant and Burns et. al., main idea inference skill enables learners to read proficiently, competently and with understanding while interacting with a text. Moreover, in view of Yigiter, Saricoban and Gurses (2005) "language teachers should enhance students' ability to read with comprehension. Without comprehension, reading would be empty and meaningless" (p.124).

Methods of Comprehension Assessment

There are various methods of testing reading comprehension whereby different skills can be tested. However, Alderson (1996, 2000) argues that there is no best method for testing reading and no single method can measure all skills in one particular test. Reading comprehension assessment has different purposes, however, Klingner, Vaughn, and Boardman (2007) distinguish three principal purposes:

> One of these is to compare students' comprehension levels to those of students in a norming sample. Another is to find out if students have met reestablished criteria for their grade level. A third purpose is to inform instruction by determining when students understand what they read and how efficiently they use which comprehension strategies. (p.14)

Therefore, it is presumed that teacher before employing assessment of reading comprehension determines some purpose in their mind. According to Invernizzi, Landrum, Howell, and Warley (2005) "Assessment can be technically sound in ways that preserve the theoretical integrity of reading development and provide the flexibility and instructional transparence that teachers need" (p.610). In addition, Invernizzi et. al. (2005) state "Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading, so it is a skill that teachers want to assess accurately and quickly" (p.612). Moreover, in developing a test "Test developers are obligated to state the purpose of a given assessment tool, provide the theoretical framework … item analyses, field tests of revisions, and the validity of their scoring procedures" (p.612-613). Finally, "Test developers are also obligated to demonstrate that their test is fair and free of bias … This means that test should be free of bias in content, materials, and administration procedures that might differentially affect the performance of subgroups of test takers" (p.613) (Invernizzi et. al. 2005). Nevertheless, in testing reading comprehension, discrete-point approach whereby teacher intends to

test one thing at a time, whereas integrative approach whereby teacher intends to know the overall performance of a reader (Alderson, ibid). In view of Weir (1990, 1993), Cohen (1998), Ur (1996) and Hughes (2003) multiple-choice is a common device used in testing text comprehension. Ur (1996) defines multiple-choice questions as consisting "... of a stem and a number of options (usually for), from which the testee has to select the right one" (p.38). Whereas, Alderson (1996, 2000) states that multiple- choice, short answer questions, yes/no questions, true or false, and wh-questions questions are commonly used for testing text comprehension. According to Alderson (1996, 2000) short-answer tests is an alternative approach to multiple-choice test whereby learner has to write a brief response to a question and by this technique teacher can interpret students' response whether he/she understood the subject. According to Alderson, (1996) and Cohen, (1998), short-answer questions are not easy to construct therefore, it is essential to put question in such a way that all answers are foreseeable. Hughes (2003) points out that the "best short-answer questions are those with a unique correct response" (p.144). However, he (ibid) states that thorough consideration ought to be observed in preparing answer key, which is essential and on which the scoring depends. Another method for determining reading comprehension is known as cloze technique. Alderson (2000:207) defines cloze test as "... typically constructed by deleting from selected text every nth word ... and simply requiring the test-taker to restore the word that has been deleted". According to Alderson nth refers to every fifth or every twelfth word; for McNamara (2000) nth refers to fifth and seventh; and according to Weir (1990) the nth number is either fifth or eleventh. As an alternative integrated approach C-test is introduced a derivative of the cloze test, in which the second half of every second word is deleted which has to be restored by the reader (Alderson, 1996: 224). A different alternative technique is called the cloze-elide test. In 1960's this is known as 'intrusive word technique' but later relabeled as the 'cloze-elide' test (Alderson, 1996, 2000). According to Alderson (2000), this test is also called "... 'text retrieval', 'text interruption', 'doctored text', 'mutilated text,' and 'negative cloze'..." (p.225). He

(ibid) goes on to state that this type of test is not for comprehension but for a measure of comprehension for instance, "The number of correctly identified items was taken as a measure of reading speed" (p.226). Similarly, another test is also used to measure reading comprehension which is known as 'Free-recall' test. In free-recall test, Alderson (1996:225) points out that, readers are simply asked to read a text and then put it aside. Next, the reader has to write down everything they can remember from the text. In addition, Alderson (1996:224) points out another test which is used to measure student's understanding of texts is the use of information-transfer techniques, often associated with figures, charts, tables and illustrations. In this procedure, test takers have to restore information deleted from a figure, chart, table and so on. Above all, each comprehension assessment technique is unique and distinctive in nature. Nevertheless, prior administering a comprehension test it is critical to note components such as text's genre, layout, constructs, timing, skill, vocabulary, familiarity of text, and so on in order to get reliable and valid outcomes from test-taker.

The current study

The current study adopted a case study approach to ascertain matriculation students' reading performance. This case study is based on maximal variation sampling which is a purposeful sampling. In this nexus, Creswell (2002:194) states that the term purposeful sampling is used for the qualitative sampling approach wherein researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon. In defining maximal variation sampling, he (ibid) further states that "Maximal variation sampling is a purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic" (p.194). Consequently, three private secondary schools were drawn from the target population. All respondents of this study were Pakistan's citizens which belong to one city district i.e. Karachi and from one (urban) town recognized as Gulshan Iqbal. The purpose of the study was discussed with teachers and principals of the selected schools. Later, after getting approval and signing consent forms from the gatekeepers the study was carried out. To do this, the adopted reading

comprehension tests were immediately administered upon completion of the ongoing academic session. These tests were employed in class with assistance of teachers and lasted for about 45 minutes.

This study reports the answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the matriculation students' reading performances after completion of an academic session?
2. To what extent established benchmarks and competencies in English reading of National Curriculum are achieved by the matriculation students?
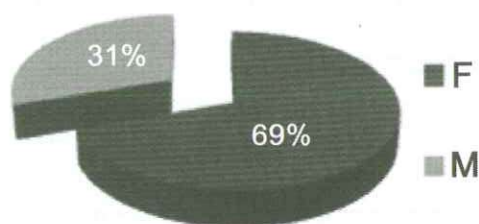
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Method

### Participants of the study

In this study three private non elitist schools were selected. School one had four sections of grade X;

however as a case, only one section (class) of grade X was investigated wherein there were total forty-five students, n = 45 enrolled. Amongst, twenty-four were male and twenty-one were female students. The second school also had four sections of grade X and there were total twenty-eight students, n = 28 enrolled in this class. Amongst, eleven were male and seventeen were female students.
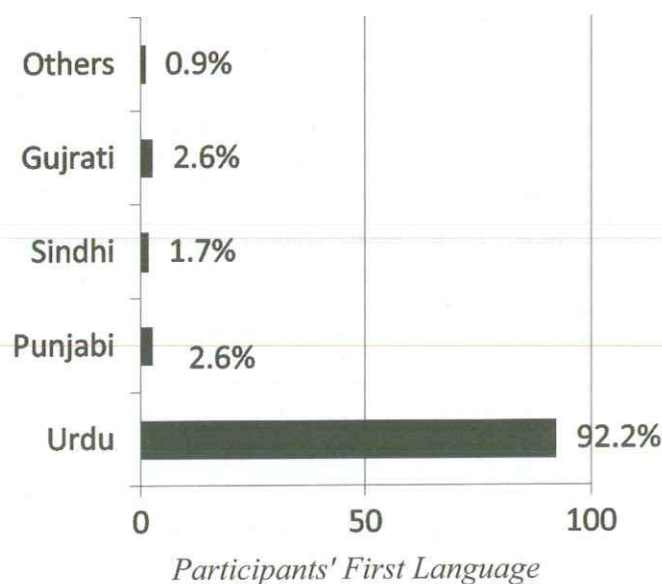
Finally, the third school had nine sections of grade X; and similar to school 1 and school 2, in this school
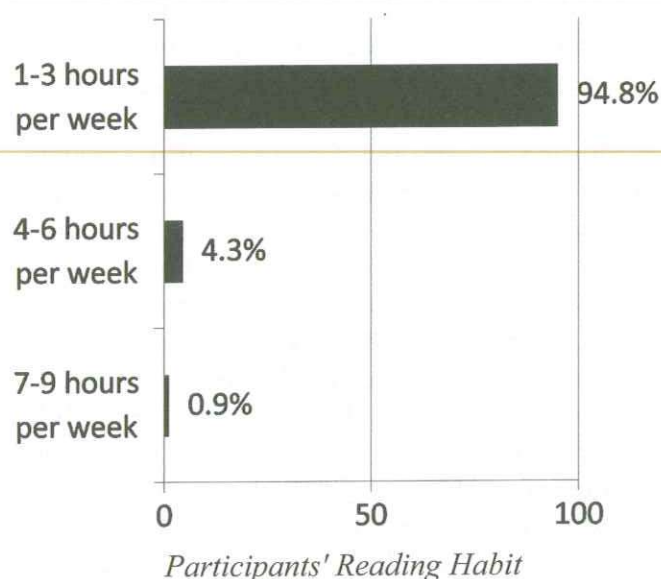

Gender Distribution: Three Cases

Others 0.9%
Gujrati 2.6%
Sindhi 1.7%
Punjabi 2.6%
Urdu 92.2%
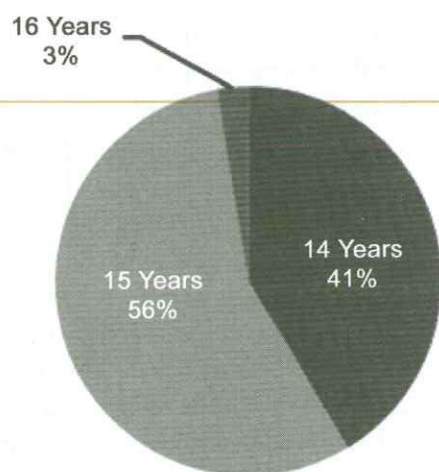
Participants' First Language

Participants' Age

1-3 hours per week 94.8%
4-6 hours per week 4.3%
7-9 hours per week 0.9%

Participants' Reading Habit

only one section as a case was investigated. In this section there were total forty-three students, n = 43 enrolled. All forty-three students were female. Further demographic factors of respondents are shown in the following graphs. The rationale of selecting three schools was kept into consideration as a triangulation method of the test data. In this accord, Brown and Rodgers (2002) state that "If you can examine your data from at least two points of view, you will maximize the possibility of getting credible findings by cross-validating those findings."(p.243). In the same nexus, Cohen and Manion (1994), McKay (2006), Fraenkel & Wallen (1993), and Tailor (2006) also stress that in order to increase the credibility of research findings, its validity, and reliability researchers have to triangulate their data.

Instrument's Reliability and Scoring Criteria

In order to assess respondents' main idea as a comprehension skill, *discreet-point* approach is adopted. To do this, ten short passages in conjunction with multiple choices were taken and adopted from, *'Five Hundred One Reading Comprehension Questions'*, Learning Express (2005) 3rd edition. Comprehensive readability statistics of the selected texts are shown in table 1a and 1b. Test comprehension rubrics were established

prior executing in the field; for instance, test's purpose, its difficulty level, length of the text, time management, instructions for each questions, layout, and familiarity. In order to ensure instrument's content and face validity these were disseminated among field experts who are affiliated with different universities and from Applied Linguistics discipline. To be more specific, the instrument was disseminated to five field experts for their comments and input. Secondly, to make sure that tests genuinely measure what it is supposed to measure in order to attain positive backwash effect. In addition, these five experts as coders also gave their agreement in accordance with each item of the instrument so as to compute the indices. The indices of inter-coder reliability of the instrument were computed and consequently, 0.80 and 0.89 value of Cohen's Kappa and Lin's Concordance were achieved respectively (see table 1c). There were total 10 objective type questions posed in the test. In context of objective marking, Alderson, Clapham, and Wall (1995) state that " … Objective marking is used for multiple-choice, true/false, error-recognition, and other item types where the candidate is required to produce a response which can be marked as either 'correct' or 'incorrect'" (p. 106-107). Therefore, these 10 questions which were objective in setting were marked by means of an answer

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Table 1(a): Texts' Descriptive Statistics

Passages	Counts				Averages		
	Words	Characters	Paragraphs	Sentences	Sentences per paragraph	Words per sentences	Characters per word
Text 1	47	199	1	4	4.0	11.7	4.1
Text 2	54	289	1	3	3.0	18.0	5.2
Text 3	43	228	1	4	4.0	10.7	5.0
Text 4	52	264	1	3	3.0	17.3	5.0
Text 5	53	286	1	3	3.0	17.6	5.3
Text 6	43	241	1	4	4.0	10.7	5.4
Text 7	45	236	1	4	4.0	11.2	5.1
Text 8	75	350	1	5	5.0	15.0	4.5
Text 9	36	200	1	2	2.0	18.0	5.4
Text 10	46	232	1	3	3.0	15.3	4.9

Table 1(b): Texts' Readability Statistics

Passages	Texts' Readability		
	Passive sentences	Flesch Reading Ease	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level
Text 1	0%	83.3	4.5
Text 2	0%	35.0	12.8
Text 3	0%	60.1	7.5
Text 4	66%	63.9	8.6
Text 5	66%	46.8	11.1
Text 6	0%	46.3	9.4
Text 7	25%	54.4	8.4
Text 8	20%	70.9	7.0
Text 9	0%	24.0	14.3
Text	100%	53.3	9.6

Text 1(c): Inter-coder Reliability Results

Coder Pair	Agreement and Cohen's Kappa	Agreement and Lin's Concordance
1, 2	0.821	0.909
1, 3	1	1
1, 4	1	1
1, 5	0.688	0.839
2, 3	0.821	0.909
2, 4	0.821	0.909
2, 5	0.516	0.727
3, 4	1	1
3, 5	0.688	0.839
4, 5	0.688	0.839
Cohen's Kappa: 0.804		**Lin's Concordance:** 0.897

key having either 'right' or 'wrong' responses of respondents. In this vein, Alderson et. al. (1995) note that "…marking of tests which have keys is mechanical and may be carried out by clerical staff or by machine" (p. 107). Consequently, these 10 questions were measured and considered as either right or wrong selection of the choices given.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data was carried out using two softwares namely: Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 16 and Pram Alpha version 4.5. The respondents reading comprehension performances' scores were analysed using descriptive statistics and crosstabs. Percentages and frequencies of their scores were computed. In addition, cross case analysis was also computed among three schools. Besides, reading outcome percentages in conjunction with gender and age were also examined.

Findings

Data analysis revealed that among three selected schools, 58.19% respondents were failed to retrieve main ideas from 10 given short texts, however, only 41.81% respondents were successful. Moreover, from total respondents of three selected schools i.e. (N=116:

male = 36 and female = 80), question one's MI was successfully retrieved by 52 respondents; q2 by 30; q3 by 63; q4 by 25; q5 by 55; q6 by 46; q7 by 76; q8 by 56; q9 by 66; and q10 MI was retrieved by 16 respondents. On the other hand, question 1 MI was incorrectly retrieved by 64 respondents; q2 by 86; q3 by 53; q4 by 91; q5 by 61; q6 by 70; q7 by 40; q8 by 60; q9 by 50; and q10 by 100 respondents. Similarly, in accordance with gender variable it was revealed that among three selected schools only 44.45 % male and 40.63% female respondents were successful to retrieve MI. Whereas, 55.56% male and 59.38% female respondents were unsuccessful to retrieve MI. Furthermore, in terms of age variable 16.21% respondents of age 14, 24.14% of 15 and 1.47% of 16 years were sucessful to retrieve MI. While, 25.17% respondents of age 14, 31.90% of 15 and 1.12% of 16 years were unsuccessful to retrieve MI from the given texts. For comprehensive frequencies and percentages reading outcome of each text's main idea retrieval see table 2 and associated graphs.

From the data analysis it was revealed that in school one, 57.11% students were failed to retrieve correct main ideas (henceforth, MI) from the given passages. Nevertheless, 42.89% were successful i.e. (Male = 24
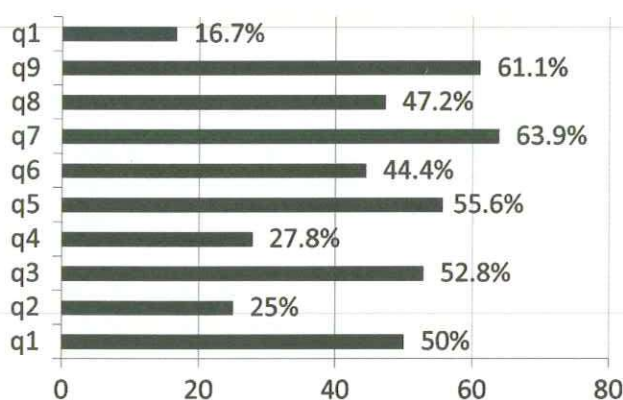
and Female = 21). To be more specific, 43.33% male and 42.38% female were successful, whereas, 56.67% male and 57.62% female were unsuccessful to retrieve correct MIs. On the other hand, in school 2, 52.86% students were failed to retrieve correct MIs from the given passages. However, 47.14% were successful i.e.

Table 2: Reading Performance of Matriculation Students

| Qs.	Gender		Total	Age		
	M= (36)	**F= (80)**	**N = 116**	**(14 Years)**	**(15 Years)**	**(16 Years)**
1.	18=50%	34=42.5%	52=44.8%	14=29.2%	36=55.4%	2=66.7%
2.	9=25%	21=26.2%	30=25.9%	12=25%	17=26.2%	1=33.3%
3.	19=52.8%	44=55%	63=54.3%	20=41.7%	40=61.5%	3=100%
4.	10=27.8%	15=18.8%	25=21.6%	14=29.2%	11=16.9%	0=0%
5.	20=55.6%	35=43.8%	55=47.4%	25=52.1%	28=43.1%	2=66.7%
6.	16=44.4%	30=37.5%	46=39.7%	18=37.5%	27=41.5%	1=33.3%
7.	23=63.9%	53=66.2%	76=65.5%	29=60.4%	45=69.2%	2=66.7%
8.	17=47.2%	39=48.8%	56=48.3%	25=52.1%	28=43.1%	3=100%
9.	22=61.1%	44=55%	66=56.9%	23=47.9%	40=61.5%	3=100%
10.	6=16.7%	10=12.5%	16=13.8%	8=16.7%	8=12.3%	0=0%

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Reading Performance of Male Respondents
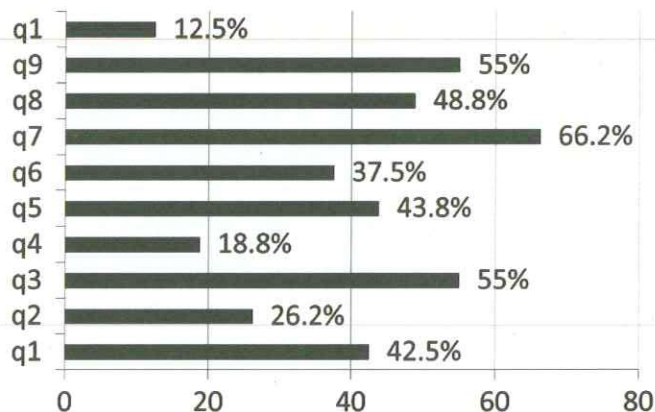
Reading Performance of Female Respondents
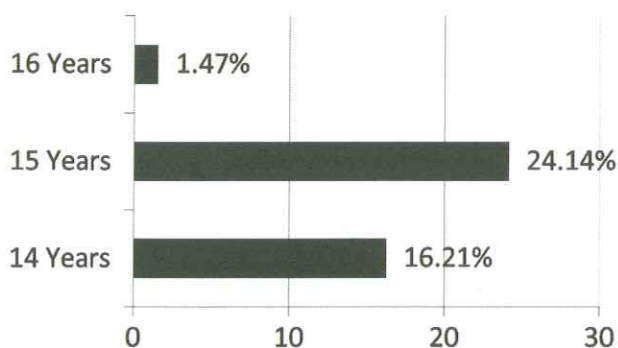
Reading Performance by Age

(Male = 12 and Female = 16). To be more specific, 46.67% male and 47.5% female students were successful, whereas, 53.33% male and 52.5% female students were unsuccessful to retrieve correct MIs. Finally, in school 3 it was found from the data analysis that 62.79% students were failed to retrieve correct MIs from the given passages i.e. (female = 43). On the other hand, 37.21% female students were successful to retrieve correct MIs.

Discussion

Based on the research findings it can be surmised from the foregoing data that secondary school matriculation learners' reading performance was meager and not up to the mark. To be more specific, the respondents of the study were considered as poor comprehenders when attempting intensive reading tasks. Holistically they were unsuccessful to retrieve MIs from the short given texts. The data revealed almost the same findings in all three cases. As a matter of fact, genders were also having the same problem and yield more or less the same results. The data indicated that male were (44.45%) somewhat better than female respondents (40.63%) in terms of reading performance. Whereas, (55.56%) male respondents as compare to female ones i.e. (59.38%) were unsuccessful in intensive reading. With respect to schools, we found that (43.33%) male respondents in case 1 and (46.67%) of case 2 were successful. Likewise, (42.38%) of female respondents in case 1, (47.5%) of case 2 and (37.21%) of case were successful. Nevertheless, in context of age (16.21%) of 14, (24.14%) of 15, and (1.47%) of 16 years were successful in all three schools. On the other hand, (25.17%) of 14, (31.90%) of 15 and (1.12%) of 16 years were unsuccessful. Since the age demographic factor was not equally distributed in all three cases, consequently, it cannot be presumed this very variable has any impact of reading performance in this study. Notwithstanding, it can be surmised that due to inadequate time i.e. merely 1-3 hours per week given to reading among (94.8%) respondents in three cases they were not good in reading performance.

The findings of the study are useful for the language teachers either EFL or ESL context to consider MI as distinct and discrete variable in assessment of reading comprehension. In a Pakistan secondary school's context and at matriculation in particular, discrete point approach is not being in practice for determining students' reading performance. Accordingly, it is apparent from that assessment system suffers from multiple deficiencies such as fostering rote-learning, and not adopting critical or analytical approach of assessing learners. Unfortunately, the existing system of assessment in Pakistan reward memorization to the

learner. The better the reproduction the better and higher scores or marks awarded by the examiner (Rehmani, 2003). On the other hand, Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers (1986) also points out that textbook material are prescribed by the teacher for their learners "to be learnt and explained word by word and sentence by sentence" (p.12). Due to this approach of teaching and learning students become passive receivers of prescribed content knowledge of the textbooks. Secondly, it is also assumed that the ongoing English course textbook along with current reading instruction practices did not promote this very skill. Teachers did not focus and practice on assessing students' reading skills solely, whereas, MI is supposed to be the *most valuable comprehension skill* in words of Harris and Sipay (1980:486). In the same nexus, Dechant (1982:313) cites Lanier and Davis's (1972) taxonomy of comprehension levels and asserts that good comprehenders recognize, organize, recall facts, grasp details, know sequence, and identify main ideas in the text. Keeping the same vision, we incorporated these in our reading comprehension test. With good reading skills, learners of English make greater progress in other fields of language learning (Anderson, 2003: 2). In this lieu, Ur (1996) points out, "Reading skills need to be fostered so that learners can cope with more and more sophisticated texts and tasks, and deal with them efficiently: quickly, appropriately and skillfully." (p.147). With the same view, Leppanen, Niemi, Aunola and Nurmi (2004) observe and assert that " Children who encounter problems while learning to read, read less, and without practice they fall behind in reading skill development" (p.72). Albeit, Yigiter et. al. (2005) recommend and stress that "effective teaching of reading depends on a teacher who is enthusiastic about reading [thus] teachers should prepare students to reach a deeper level of understanding in reading process" (132).

In conclusion, it is suggested that in order to develop learners' reading skills with a deep approach of reading, teachers of foreign and second language must foster and augment their reading instruction. Schools which are the learning foundation for learners should adopt *collaborative strategic reading approach* and be equipped

their students with essential reading skills. If learners at the age of 14-15 are prepared according to this very perspective they will sure be not only become proficient and skilled readers at the secondary level, on the other hand, they will be skillful and capable to cope up with their pre-university academic reading materials.

Acknowledgements

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