

**A STUDY OF GENDER, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
AND LOCATION BASED DIFFERENCES IN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE READING COMPREHENSION**

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the gender, academic achievement and location based differences in English language reading comprehension in the Indian English language context. For the purpose, researcher has selected 589 (age 14 to 15) students from Gujarati medium secondary schools of Anand district, using stratified random sampling method. Implicated school base survey research method, for that researcher has used five reading comprehension test having fifty five multiple choice base and order form questions. The results indicated that girls were higher in reading comprehension than boys. Also boys with higher academic achievement were higher in reading comprehension, and the urban students and rural students were found equal in reading comprehension.

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Introduction

One of the skills of any language is reading. It is also important in the learning English. Reading Comprehension is the process of making meaning from text. The goal, therefore, is to gain in overall understanding of what is described in the text rather than to obtain meaning from isolated words or sentences. Nowadays English is regarded as an international language. Because of this status it has been widely used in different areas. With these uses of English, they're created so many needs to this language. Many researchers have focused on these ways and have carried out some studies in various parts of the world to explore the best ways from which a reader can benefit from his or her reading skills. Grenfell and Harris (1999) pointed at this important fact by saying "Methodology alone can never be a solution for language learning. Rather, it is an aid and suggestion". The teaching of English in the secondary schools of India has become a ticklish problem that needs a patient and scientific treatment by the policy maker, the course designer and the classroom practitioners. Especially, when the teacher has to teach English as the second or the third language, he has to comfort a multi-dimensional problem. The teacher, therefore, needs a good deal of orientation to meet the technical requirements of teaching English in the new-set-up. We know that while introducing a new word, which constitutes a problem for spelling, the teacher should make use of proper gestures and actions to strike the word appropriately in the memory of the pupils.

Reading comprehension is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (RAND, 2002, p. 11). This process entails three elements, the reader, the text, and the activity, which are all situated within a larger sociocultural context (RAND, 2002). The RAND (2002) report defines those three elements as follows: "In considering the reader, we include all the capacities, abilities,

knowledge, and experiences that a person brings to the act of reading. Text is broadly construed to include any printed text or electronic text. In considering activity, we include the purposes, processes, and consequences associated with the act of reading” (p. 11).

Reading Comprehension it can be said that reading is a complicated skill. As Richards (quoted in Aebersold and Field, 1997) says, Reading in a second language is a dynamic and interactive process in which learners make use of background knowledge, text schema, lexical and grammatical awareness, L1- related knowledge, and real world knowledge, as well as their own personal purposes and goals, to arrive at an understanding of written material. However, it is not as easy as it may seem. We need to develop skills holistically, for example, when we are speaking, we are also simultaneously Listening and when we are writing, and we are also reading in a variety of ways. Reading is a large number of interrelated skills which develop gradually over a number of years and reading comprehension is a composite ability of a number of different abilities. Comprehension is critically important to the development of children’s reading skills and therefore their ability to obtain an education. Indeed, reading comprehension has come to be viewed as the “essence of reading” (Durkin, 1993), essential not only to academic learning but to lifelong learning. Listening and reading help develop comprehension skills. Speaking and writing help develop expression. Comprehension is a complex process. There exist as many interpretations of comprehension as there are of reading. This may be so because comprehension is often viewed as “the essence of reading” (Durkin, 1993). Reading comprehension is further defined as “intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader” (Durkin, 1993). According to this view, meaning resides in the intentional, problem-solving, thinking processes of the reader that occur during an interchange with a text. "Just as reading is a name for a number of abilities specifically acquired,

so comprehension is a convenient title given to a list of mental reactions to the printed material." Reading comprehension is developed through activating and adding to students' background. Research over the past 30 years has contributed greatly to our understanding of the thinking processes involved in reading comprehension. Surprisingly, however, little research has focused on the development of young children's comprehension (Reutzel, Smith, & Fawson, 2005).

Presley (2000) describes the development of reading comprehension as a two stage process, beginning with "lower processes" focused at the word level-such as word recognition (phonics, sight words), fluency (rate, accuracy, and expression), and vocabulary (word meanings). The second stage of reading comprehension development focuses on higher-order thinking-relating prior knowledge to text content and consciously learning, selecting, and controlling the use of several cognitive strategies for remembering and learning from text.

The reader has Abilities in Reading Comprehension like, to retain information and recall it when required, to select important points, to interpret information and ideas to make deductions from what has been read, to arrive at general conclusions and judgments, to relate knowledge to experience. Readers also have Comprehension Skill like, reading to find the main idea, reading to answer questions, reading to select significant details, reading to Arrive at generalization reading to summarize and organize reading to follow directions reading graphs, tables, charts and maps, reading to predict outcomes, reading to evaluate critically.

All these discussions show that comprehension is a complex of many skills, without these skills a pupil will not be able to comprehend well from what he reads. Some consider these skills as the behavioral changes which are generally expected to be developed as a result of teaching reading comprehension.

National Focus Group on the Teaching of Indian Languages (NCERT 2006) recognizes the failure of schools to address the linguistic diversity and multilingual competencies of young learners, claiming that, “most children leave schools with dismal levels of language proficiency in reading comprehension and writing skills even in their own native languages. In reading comprehension three cognitive processes were identified: locating information; grasping ideas and interpreting them; and, inferring and evaluating. Across this domain of Reading Comprehension, Class IX students demonstrated a wide range of ability.

Research review

The irony of ignorance may be greatest in research on reading comprehension. One of such factors which have been focused on to explain the extent of success or failure in reading comprehension is gender. The issue of gender-based differences in reading comprehension is depicted in a number of studies. These studies have reached different conclusions, most favoring females, some favoring males and several others indicating no significant difference between genders (Brantmeier, 2001, 2003; Bugel and Buunk, 1996; Carlton and Harris (1992); Cole (1997); Hyde and Linn, 1988; Myers, 2002; Pae, 2004; Rosén, 2001; Yongqi, 2002). Different explanations have also been put forward for gender differences in reading comprehension. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) explain gender differences based on attitude, whereas Brantmeier (2001 & 2003) claims that gender and passage content are key variables that are associated with individual differences in L2 reading comprehension. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (1972) provides a picture of sex differences in reading across age. In 1971, a national sample of nine, thirteen, and seventeen year olds was tested along with a sample of adults (ages 26-35). Girls consistently outperformed boys on reading comprehension tasks such as identifying the significant facts and main ideas in passages. Only in the adult population made the sex

difference disappear. A second survey taken in 1975 (NAEP, 1976) found quite similar results; nine, thirteen, and seventeen year olds were tested and at each age level sex differences were found. Johnson (1973) has reported data on reading comprehension in four countries. In the United States and Canada, the boys were found to read more poorly than girls. On the other hand, in Nigeria and England the boys' scores were somewhat higher than the girls'. Schueller (1999) controlled for the effects of passage content by gender and found a higher degree of reading comprehension among females studying Germany.

Clark & Foster (2005) reports that girls enjoy reading greater than boys and boys tend to hold more negative attitudes towards reading than girls. McKenna, Kearn & Ellsworth (1995) and Hassell & Rodge (2007) reveal that girls have more favorable attitudes than boys for both recreational and academic reading. Pandey (1992) found that boys were higher in reading comprehension than girls in relation to sex differences, and urban areas were higher in reading comprehension than rural area with regard to area difference, Jadeja (1991) found that students of high academic achievement were higher in level of Sanskrit reading comprehension in relation to academic achievement, Patel R.D. (1994) studied that students of high academic status were higher in reading comprehension in relation to academic status. Chege (2012) found that there was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls in reading comprehension. Chettri (2010) studied that no significant difference was found between the mean scores of urban and rural school students. Tamang (2009) found that there was significant difference was found in the Reading Comprehension in relation to the school management type and place of Habitation (Urban and Rural). Logan and Johnston (2009) found that girls had better reading comprehension, read more frequently and had a more positive attitude to reading and school. Maria Dolores corpus Arrelano (2012) female students obtain better reading comprehension than

their male partners. Patel B.V. (1987) found that there was no significant difference between Mean scores of Sex differences with regard to reading Comprehension from urban areas. Patel K.K. (1975) found that the boys of Khera districts and girls of Panchmahal district proved better in Reading Comprehension. In English, Bharuch context of area urban pupils better in reading comprehension. Gandhi M.N. (1986) examine in the Context of area urban students, gender had girls and caste had non reserve category were higher in reading comprehension. Prajapati & Patel (2013) found that the performance of urban students was better than that of rural students in the Reading comprehension Ability test. The performance of boys was better in the reading comprehension ability test. Panesar H.S. (1992) studied that the pupils of urban area were better at reading comprehension than those of rural areas. In sex difference urban girls were far better than the rural girls. In the study of Awal and Kumar (2013), the findings revealed that though there is no significant difference in the Reading Comprehension in English of the secondary students due to their local variation, but significant difference was observed in the same in relation to their Gender, School Management Type and Parental Education. The research examined reading comprehension with 10 year old children and found gender differences favoring girls in every participating country (Mullis et al. 2003; Mullis et al. 2007). This review so far has highlighted gender differences commonly found in reading comprehension (e.g. Mullis et al. 2003; Ming Chui and McBride-Chang 2006; Mullis et al. 2007). Hedges and Nowell (1995) examined gender differences in reading comprehension, writing, and other academic subjects (e.g., math, science). Overall, females performed slightly better in reading and substantially better in writing, and males performed better in math and science (Hedges and Nowell, 1995). Boys tended to be more varied in their cognitive performance (including reading comprehension and writing), and represented greater proportions at the low and high ends of the skill distribution

than females (Hedges & Nowell, 1995; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2002). Oakhill and Petrides (2007) compared the reading comprehension of 10 and 11 year-old boys and girls. They reported that comprehension was significantly affected by the content of reading passages for boys and they performed significantly better on the texts they were interested in reading. In contrast, girls' performance was the same regardless of their interest in the text. He also investigated poor comprehends performance, and determined that the relationship between text interest and reading performance remained significant for boys, but not for girls, regardless of comprehension level. A factor also affecting Reading Comprehension first is internal factors like logistic competence, interest, motivation, reading ability while external factors are the elements on the page and the qualities of the reading environment. The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and Department of Education (DepEd) Science Education Institute (SEI) in the Philippines singled out the problem with poor reading comprehension as a principal factor in the miserable performance of students in the National Achievement Test (Rimando, 2006). In his study, Imam (2010) reported that DepEd regarded reading comprehension as the single factor which caused frustrations of students to perform better in science achievement test. Therefore, reading comprehension is a factor to be considered in seeking to elevate the academic performance of students. Previous studies provide a solid ground for the present investigation that such reading comprehension skills, play a vital role to educational success (Callahan & Clark, 1988; Bender, Boon, Fore III, Spencer, & Stone, 2008; Corcoran & Mamalakis, 2009). At the same time, the overall performance of English language learners can be improved by focusing on developing their reading comprehension skills (Abedi, 2004) Berkant (2009) It is concluded that students' academic achievement levels and reading comprehension scores are significant predictors of their meaningful causal thinking ability, but their gender was not.

statement of the problem It is a well known fact that success in school is greatly determined by success in reading. The hues and cries that accompany the release of the results of Secondary school students at the different examinations are quite disheartening. Although many reasons have been advanced for this, there seems to be less focus on the reading needs of learners, taking the variables of gender, school location and achievement as major constraints to learners' reading comprehensions. The purpose of this study therefore is to find out whether gender, academic achievement and school location play any role in the reading comprehension of learners of secondary school students.

Rationale of the study

English is taught as a second language all over the country and it has become obligatory for the schools to teach English as it has become a passport to the future prospects for the students. But at present the status of teaching is a matter of concern as because a large number of students fail in the subject every year. Though all the core skills, namely Speaking, Listening, reading and Writing should be given importance equally while teaching English in schools, but unfortunately the writing skill of the students have been dominant over the other skills and reading aspect, along with Speaking and listening have been neglected. But in practical utility of English language the reading is used more frequently than writing.

Gujarat as a part of India started teaching English as a second language from the primary level. So appropriate abilities in English have since then become difficult to be inculcated among the students. Moreover, because of the Three Language formula English Language Comprehension has suffered setback and pupils feel difficulty in Reading Comprehension in English due to negligence in developing speaking, Reading and listening. The components of Reading Comprehension include synonyms, antonyms, contextual meaning of the words,

inference, general significance, identification, noting details, read the passage and identify the most important details, which are not taken care of neither teacher nor the students have taken extra intention to develop those skills. Therefore, it is high time to promote the abilities in Reading Comprehension from the grass root level. In the context of the present study of Reading Comprehension at the school levels in Gujarat has been obligatory on the part of the researcher.

Therefore the following research questions have been asked.

Research Questions

The study aimed at finding the answers to the following research questions

- What is the reading comprehension levels in English language amongst the std. IXth students?
- Are there any gender-related differences in Reading Comprehension?
- Are the differences in Reading Comprehension related to the academic achievement?
- Are the differences in Reading Comprehension related to the locations of the schools?

Hypotheses of the study

The Hypothesis of the present study was as follows:

H₀₁: There will be no significant difference between the mean scores of English reading comprehension of boys and girls students of std IXth.

H₀₂: There will be no significant difference between the mean scores of English reading comprehension of high academic achievement students and low Academic achievement of students of std. IXth.

H₀₃: There will be no significant difference between the mean scores of English reading comprehension of students of the rural area and students of urban area of std. IXth.

Delimitation of the study

The present study was delimited to the students of std. IXth only. Only Gujarati medium schools of Anand district were selected. Data were collected in the year 2013-14.

Method

Participants

Five hundred eighty nine students (327 boys: 262 girls) were selected from the ninth Grade (293 rural: 296 urban) of age between 14 to 15 from Gujarati medium schools of Anand district using stratified random sampling. Test of reading comprehension was administered on the selected sample students. The researcher has selected quantitative survey method (descriptive).

Tools

For the present study, the researcher used reading comprehension in English test which was developed and standardized, by Prof. K.S. Likhia. Here in this Reading Comprehension test has five tests. Test-1, the first passage concerned with old man named Bhupat. He faced many struggles in his life. The total score of this passage was 11 marks. Test-2, it was a passage describing one of the incidents from Shibi Raja's life. It told about Shibi Raja's justice. This test contained 11 marks. Test-3, it was a story of man saw a vivid dream and this dream was so great that it killed him. The score of this passage was 11 marks. Test-4, it was tea and how the people of Europe were puzzled on seeing the tea. The score the test contained 9 marks. Test-5, it was a passage describing an incident from the life of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. This test scored 13 marks. The total marks were fifty five marks. The tests were having efficient, quality to measure all the components of reading ability and comprehension. The test was limited to Gujarati medium students only. The reading comprehension instruments used in the survey comprised

five passages and number the passage in such a way that the easy ones be followed by difficult ones. As the reading comprehension in English test of multiple choice items, the answers were predetermined. Each correct answer was given a score of one mark. Items like arranging the sentences in sequences of events, each correct sequence was also given one mark. Each passage was given different weighted the reliability coefficient of reading comprehension test is ranging between 0.91 and 0.96. The reliability of the test has been studied by split-half method and K-R Formula. The reliability coefficients as found out by these methods are 0.86 and 0.89 respectively. The test was validated with care and caution using external criteria. The validity coefficients of reading comprehension test are 0.704 and 0.602 respectively. The validity of coefficient is 0.503 which is substantially good predictive validity. The test processes the difficulty ranges between 20 and 80 percent. The justification of sampling and the study of the kurtosis also revealed that the test was quite suitable to the group chosen.

Results

The mean of reading comprehension of the participants (589) was 16.98 with a standard deviation of 6.03. The range is the 38 between the highest score 42 and lowest scores 4. The result is shown below in table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Descriptive statics of Reading Comprehension of Students

Measure	N	Range	Mini.	Maxi.	Mean	S.D.
Reading Comprehension	589	38	4	42	16.98	6.03

To study the difference between the groups, mean scores of reading comprehension in relation to variables, t-ratio was computed and the results are shown below in table 1.2

Table1.2

Testing of hypotheses and the t-ratio

H ₀	Group	t- ratio	Level of Significance	Accepted or Rejected
H ₀₁	Boys and Girls	2.26	0.05	Rejected
H ₀₂	High achievement students and Low achievement students	2.15	0.05	Rejected
H ₀₃	Rural Students and urban Students	1.18	0.05	Accepted

From the table 1.2, it can be seen that

1. t-ratio of difference between Mean scores of English reading comprehension of boys and girls is 2.26 (df=587), which is significant at 0.05 level of confidence. The mean score of English reading comprehension of girls' students is significantly higher than that of Boys students.
2. t-ratio of difference between Mean scores of English reading comprehension of high academic achievement students and low academic achievement students is 2.15 (df=587), which is significant at 0.05 level of confidence. The mean score of English reading comprehension of high academic achievement students is significantly higher than that of low academic achieving students.

3. t-ratio of difference between Mean scores of English reading comprehension of students of the rural area and students of urban area is 1.18 (df=587), which is not significant at 0.05 level of confidence.

Mean scores of English reading comprehension of students of the rural area and students of urban area are equal.

Findings

1. Mean scores of English reading comprehension of girls' students is significantly higher than that of Boys students.
2. Mean scores of English reading comprehension of high academic achievement students is significantly higher than that of low academic achievement of students.
3. Mean scores of English reading comprehension of urban students and rural students are equal. The effect of area was not found on reading comprehension.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicated that get girls is higher in reading comprehension, this finding is supported the studies of Tamang (2009), Logan and Johnston (2009), Maria Dolores Corpas Arellano (2012), Patel K.K. (1975), Gandhi M.N. (1986), Panesar H.N. (1992), NAEP (1971), Johnson (1973), (Hedges & Nowell, 1995; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2002) and this result is inconsistent with that of Pandey (1992).

Researchers found that the boys with higher academic achievement are higher in reading comprehension. This finding supports the studies of Patel K.K. (1975), Jadeja (1991), Prajapati Y.N. (2013).

In the present study Researcher found that the urban students and rural students were found equal in reading comprehension. This finding supports the studies of Chettri (2010), Patel B.V. (1987). Also, this finding inconsistent with the Pandey (1992), Tamang (2009), Patel K.K. (1975), Gandhi M.N. (1986), Prajapati & Patel (2013) , Panesar H.S. (1992).

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