

Reading Comprehension English in relation to Language Learning Strategies and Gender

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to study the role of language learning strategies and gender in Reading Comprehension. The sample comprised of 905 students out of which 410 were males and 495 were females. Reading Comprehension Test developed by the investigator in 2017 was used to assess the reading comprehension level of students in English language and an adapted version of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), Version 7.0 developed by Rebecca Oxford in 1990 was used to assess the level of use of language learning strategies by the students. Results by ANOVA followed by Posthoc test revealed that the students who used more Language learning strategies had better level of Reading Comprehension than the students who used less Language learning strategies. Students who used Language learning strategies at an average level had higher level of Reading Comprehension than the students who used Language learning strategies at a higher level. Students who were Average Language learning strategies users had higher level of Reading Comprehension than students who were Low Language learning strategies users. Male and female students had equal level of Reading Comprehension. Result by 2x3 Factorial Design of ANOVA for Reading Comprehension showed that Reading Comprehension of students was independent of interaction between Gender and Language Learning strategies.

Introduction

Reading, especially for EFL (English as foreign language) students, is an indispensable skill to acquire as their exposure to English environment is less as compared to the native speakers. Children have hardly anywhere to go to hear English or practise English speaking. Due to lack of sufficient exposure to the spoken mode of English in an EFL environment, reading has probably been recognized as the most important skill for foreign language learners in academic contexts (Grabe, 1991). "Reading" is defined as "the skill or activity of getting information from books" (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, 1995). The goal of all reading is the comprehension of meaning. Real reading involves comprehension of the explicit and implicit information contained in the text, self reflection and transfer of knowledge (Wren, 2003). Reading comprehension is one of the most important domains in education, because it is the best predictor of success in higher education and job performance. That is why, it is not only one of the essential components in the syllabus and the scheme of evaluation in languages. Moreover, tests like IELTS and TOEFL which are especially conducted to test one's English language skills also take



into account reading comprehension in their domain of assessing reading skill. Without comprehension, reading is a pointless exercise. According to Grabe (1991), reading is comprehending; the reader typically expects to understand what he/she is reading. Shaywitz (2003) has rightly stated that reading comprehension is an important life skill. Reading is flexible; the reader employs a range of strategies to read efficiently. According to Ehrman and Oxford (1990), "Strategies are the often conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information." Rubin (1975) identified learning strategies as techniques or devices, which a learner may use to acquire knowledge.

The significance of the study lies in the fact that though English language is being taught as a compulsory subject in our national curriculum from the primary to the tertiary level, it has been observed by the investigator, particularly in Punjab, that students are not able to read even the texts included in the syllabus efficiently. There is a need to equip them with the skills and strategies necessary to read extensive texts so as to enable them to exploit the literary resources available in the world. As to the researcher's knowledge, only few studies have focused on the interrelationship of the chosen variables with the reading comprehension and most of the studies have been done either in foreign countries or in other states and on other languages. As whole reviewed literature showed that there is gap for research in reading comprehension with respect to language learning strategies in local context, that is why, these two variables have been selected. Moreover, gender has also been taken as a moderator variable.

Review of Related Literature

The relevant literature was reviewed and most of the results were found to be inconsistent with respect to reading comprehension and use of language learning strategies as well as reading comprehension and gender.

Regarding reading comprehension and use of language learning strategies, there was a significant positive correlation between strategy use and English reading achievement (Zare, 2011; Zhang and Seepho, 2013). It was found that the successful learners used a number of language learning strategies in their English reading comprehension like memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies (Afdaleni, 2013). The only learning strategies having a meaningful relationship with the students' reading proficiency were metacognitive strategies (Tavakoli and Biria, 2014).

In regard to reading comprehension and gender, it has been revealed that there is no effect of gender on reading comprehension and on reading ability of students (Stevens, 1980; Narayanappa et al. 2008; Sotoudehnama and Asadian (2011); Asgarabadi et.al, 2015). On the contrary, significant gender differences favouring females were found in the participants' performance on reading comprehension test (Dass, 1984; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2006; Logan and Johnston, 2009; Li and Chun, 2012). However, Gender significantly affected the students' overall comprehension of the texts (Lahuerta Martínez, 2014).

The investigator found a gap for study related to Reading Comprehension and Language Learning Strategies and gender among government secondary school students in India. That is why, the present study was undertaken in one Indian state- Punjab.



Objectives

- (i) To study the role of gender in Reading Comprehension in English among Secondary School Students
- (ii) To study the role of Language Learning Strategies in Reading Comprehension in English among Secondary School Students
- (iii) To study the interaction effect of Language Learning Strategies and Gender on Reading Comprehension in English among Secondary School Students

METHOD

Sample

The present study was conducted on students of class IX studying in schools affiliated to Punjab School Education Board, Mohali. Out of 23 districts of Punjab, three districts namely, Mohali, Patiala and Sangrur were selected on the basis of literacy rate. The sample comprised of 905 students out of which 410 were males and 495 were females.

Procedure

Data was collected only from the students who were willing to give their opinion. It ensured the true responses from the students. The students were approached individually and were given Reading Comprehension Test developed by the investigator as well as an adapted version of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), Version 7.0 developed by Rebecca Oxford in 1990. The data was transferred to SPSS for data analysis in the light of the framed objectives.

Tools

Reading Comprehension Test constructed by the investigator in 2017 was used. It consisted of five paragraphs containing 28 multiple choice questions. The reliability of the test was established using kr formula which came out to be .732.

An Adaptation of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 developed by Rebecca Oxford in 1990 was used to determine the level of use of language learning strategies by the students. This inventory consisted of 50 items. The reliability of the scale was calculated by using Cronbach Alpha which came out to be .924. The content validity of the scale was ensured.

RESULTS

Table 1 : Mean and Std. Deviation of Reading Comprehension at different levels of Language learning strategies

Language learning strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
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Low	149	4.946	1.0641	.0872
High	616	10.144	3.6511	.1471
Average	140	11.393	.5961	.0504
Total	905	9.482	3.6829	.1224

Table 1 displays that the mean scores and standard deviation of Reading Comprehension of students with low Language learning strategies use level are 4.946 and 1.0641 respectively. The mean score and standard deviation of Reading Comprehension of students with High Language learning strategies use level are 10.144 and 3.6511 respectively. The mean score and standard deviation of Reading Comprehension of students with Average Language learning strategies use level are 11.393 and .5961 respectively. The mean score and standard deviation of Reading Comprehension of total students are 9.482 and 3.6829 respectively. The mean scores of *Reading Comprehension of Students at different use levels of Language learning strategies* is presented in figure 1.

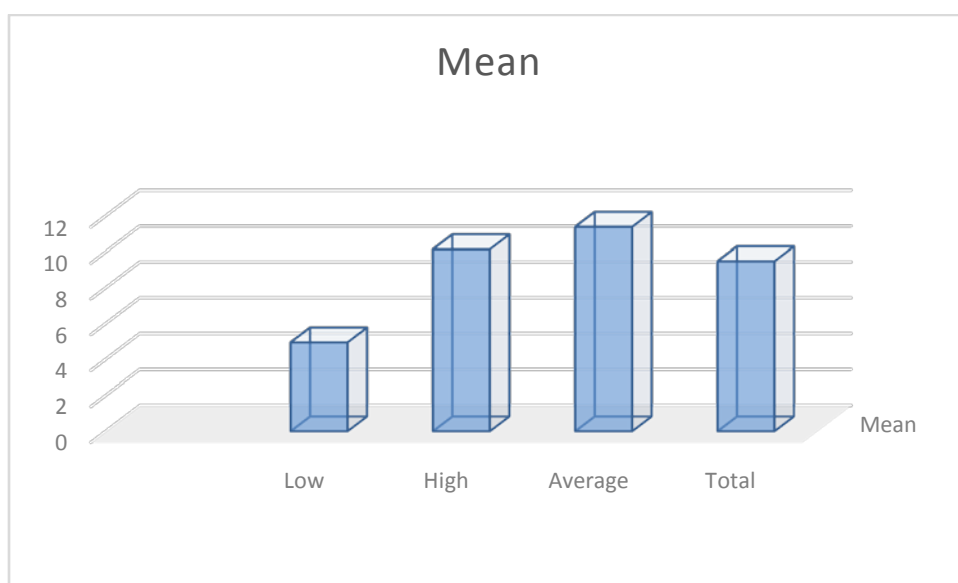


Fig.1 Comparison of mean of Reading Comprehension of Students on the basis of Language learning strategies

Table 2
Summary of ANOVA for Reading Comprehension of Students in English on the basis of Language learning strategies

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Result
Between Groups	3846.845	2	1923.422	206.168	Significant at.01 level
Within Groups	8415.105	902	9.329		

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Result
Between Groups	3846.845	2	1923.422	206.168	Significant at.01 level
Within Groups	8415.105	902	9.329		
Total	12261.949	904			

Table 2 depicts the significance of mean difference in Reading Comprehension of Students in English on the basis of language learning strategies. The F value for mean difference in Reading Comprehension of Students in English with high, average and low level use of Language learning strategies is 206.168, which is significant at 0.1 level. It means that there is significant difference in mean scores of Reading Comprehension of Students in English on the basis of their use of language learning strategies. Further, posthoc tests for each pair of Language learning strategies were computed (applied to compare the pair wise mean difference) which are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Posthoc test for Comparison of eading Comprehension of Students on the basis of three levels of Language learning strategies

English language learning strategies		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Result
High	Low	5.1982 [*]	.2789	Significant at.01 level
High	Average	-1.2484 [*]	.2860	Significant at.01 level
Average	Low	5.1982 [*]	.2789	Significant at.01 level

Table 3 shows that the comparison of Reading Comprehension of students on the basis of High and Low levels of Language learning strategies is significant at.01 level. It means that mean score of students with low Language learning strategies level and high Language learning strategies level differ significantly. On basis of the null hypothesis" "There is no significant difference in Reading Comprehension of students on the basis of High and Low level use of Language learning strategies" is rejected. Further, the Mean Difference in the table indicates (See fig.1) that the score of students who use Language learning strategies at higher level is higher than students who use language learning strategies at a lower level. It may be concluded that students who use more Language learning strategies had better level of Reading Comprehension than students who use less Language learning strategies.

Table 3 shows that the comparison of Reading Comprehension of students on the basis of High and Average levels of Language learning strategies is significant at.01 level. It means that mean score of students with Average level use of Language learning strategies and high level use of Language learning strategies differ significantly. On basis of the null hypothesis" "There is no significant difference in Reading Comprehension of students on the basis of High and Average levels of Language learning strategies " is rejected. Further, the Mean Difference in the table 3(-



1.2484) indicates (See fig 1) that score of students who are Average Language learning strategies use is higher than students who are High Language learning strategies users. It may be concluded that students who use Language learning strategies at an average level had better level of Reading Comprehension than students who use Language learning strategies at a high level.

Table 3 shows that the comparison of Reading Comprehension of students on the basis of Average and Low levels of Language learning strategies is significant at.01 level. It means that mean score of students with low Language learning strategies level and Average Language learning strategies level differ significantly. On basis of the null hypothesis" "There is no significant difference in Reading Comprehension of students on the basis of Average and Low level use of Language learning strategies" is rejected. Further, the Mean Difference in the table indicates (See fig.1) that score of students who use Language learning strategies at an average level is higher than the students who use Language learning strategies at a low level. It may be concluded that students who are average Language learning strategies users had better level of Reading Comprehension than students who are Low Language learning strategies users.

Table 4: Summary of 2x3 Factorial Design of ANOVA for Reading Comprehension

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.
Corrected Model	3855.174 ^a	5	771.035	82.453	.01
Intercept	42894.465	1	42894.465	4587.029	.01
Gender	2.091	1	2.091	.224	Not
Language Learning strategies	3794.388	2	1897.194	202.881	Sig at.01
Gender * Language Learning strategies	1.195	2	.597	.064	Not
Error	8406.775	899	9.351		
Total	93625.000	905			

Table 4 shows that the *F*-value for Gender is 2.091 which is not significant at.05 level. It means that there is no significant difference in mean scores of Reading Comprehension between male and female students. In the light of this, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in Reading Comprehension on the basis of Gender, is not rejected. It may be concluded that male and female students had equal level of Reading Comprehension.

The *F*-value (table 4) for interaction between Gender and Language Learning strategies is.064 which is not significant at.05 level. It reflects that mean scores of Reading Comprehension of male and female students with different levels of Language Learning strategies do not differ significantly. In the light of this, the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of Gender



and Language Learning strategies on Reading Comprehension, is not rejected. Therefore, it may be concluded that Reading Comprehension of students was independent of interaction between Gender and Language Learning strategies.

FINDINGS

1. The students who used more Language learning strategies had better level of Reading Comprehension than the students who used less Language learning strategies.
2. Students who used Language learning strategies at an average level had higher level of Reading Comprehension than the students who used Language learning strategies at a higher level.
3. Students who were Average Language learning strategies users had higher level of Reading Comprehension than students who were Low Language learning strategies users.
4. Male and female students had equal level of Reading Comprehension
5. Reading Comprehension of students was independent of interaction between Gender and Language Learning strategies.

Discussion

The present study revealed that the students who used more Language learning strategies had better level of Reading Comprehension than the students who used less Language learning strategies. This is in line with the findings of Zare (2011) and Zhang and Seepho (2013) that there was a significant positive correlation between strategy use and English reading achievement. It is also supported by the findings of Afdaleni (2013) that the successful learners used a number of language learning strategies in their English reading comprehension like memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. As one of the dimensions of the tool used in the present study is 'Metacognitive Strategies', Tavakoli and Biria (2014) also partially supported the present finding.

It is notable that the second finding that students who used Language learning strategies at an average level had higher level of Reading Comprehension than the students who used Language learning strategies at a higher level indicates slight contradiction with previous findings. It is further notable that no study was found which compares Reading Comprehension with three levels of Language Learning Strategies. Moreover, the difference between average and high strategy users is very less than the difference between high and low strategy users. So, here further investigation is indicated.

Furthermore, the finding of the present study that the male and female students had equal level of Reading Comprehension is supported by Stevens (1980), Narayanappa et al.(2008), Sotoudehnama and Asadian (2011) and Asgarabadi et al. (2015). On the contrary, significant gender differences favouring females were found in the participants' performance on reading comprehension test (Dass,1984; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2006; Logan and Johnston ,2009; Li



and chun, 2012). However, Gender significantly affected the students' overall comprehension of the texts (Lahuerta Martínez, 2014).

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