

Evaluation of Gender Performance on the Reading Comprehension Based on STS and TTS approach

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ABSTRACT

This study was an examination of an approach to teaching reading: to investigate which of the two genders would perform better on a typical reading comprehension task when granted the power to choose topics of their own interest. To answer these Questions, a 12-week reading course was offered to both STS (students' topic selection) and TTS (teacher's topic selection) groups, where in the former, the teacher dictated the topics, whereas in the latter the Students chose topics of their own interest. An independent t-test run to compare the performance of the two groups revealed that when granted the option to choose their favorite topics, there was no difference between men and women in their performance on a reading comprehension task. Some implications are provided and suggestions are made for future studies.

Keywords: gender differences, reading comprehension, students' topic selection, teacher's topic selection, interesting reading materials.

INTRODUCTION

The idea that topic choice has an impact on both reading comprehension and learning is not new. Nearly two centuries ago, Hare & Devine (2011) believed that there is a very close relation between interest and learning, arguing that interest is a primary force behind recognition of an object, meaningful learning, long-term storage of knowledge, and motivation for continued learning. Reading is the method for learning anything one desires. It is an essential tool if one is to continuously increase the level of knowledge throughout his/her lifespan; however, adolescents today are not actively engaged in daily reading by taking advantage of the books at their disposal. According to Walker, Noland, & Greenshields (2015), it appears that most students in senior high schools do not read for enjoyment or for feeding their imaginations. Most middle school students are not reading for comprehension or knowledge, but for a grade. Because reading is an effortful activity that

often involves choice, motivation is crucial to reading engagement. Motivation theorists attempt to understand the choices that individuals make among different activities available to them and their effort and persistence at the activities they choose.

Thus, the present study intends to investigate which of the two genders, males or females, would perform better on a typical reading comprehension task when granted the power to choose topics of their own interest.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One of the biggest issues in teaching reading to middle school students is the choice of reading materials because it must match the attitudes and interests of the adolescents. Lack of student motivation in the topics dictated to them by the Ministry of Education can play a big role in lowering literacy competence (Tajik, 2020). When students become interested in what is being read, curiosity develops into motivation to read more. Instructional approaches or materials that are motivating, as well as teachers who show interest and enjoyment in the subject or activity, can sometimes create long-term interest (Javadi and Tajik., 2021).

Teachers have long recognized that lack of motivation contributes to many of the problems we face in teaching young children to read. The value teachers place on motivation is supported by a robust research literature that documents the link between motivation and achievement (Gardner and Lambert., 2015).

According to Asher, Hymel, & Wigfield (2014), motivation is of two distinct types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation has to do with pleasurable internal feelings or thoughts. Intrinsic motivation refers to being motivated and curious to be engaged in an activity for its own sake, rather than for reasons of reward.

Baldwin, Peleg-Bruckner, & McClintock (2011) suggested that attention to and measurement of affective aspects of reading, such as motivation, may help to reverse the current trend of literacy.

Considerable concern has been given over the past decade to the lack of literacy achievement of boys in the western world. Average scale scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that girls score higher than boys in reading at ages 9 and 17. The reading achievement of adolescent African American males is a concern for educators. Self-concept and identity issues serve as barriers to achievement for African American males. Negative stereotypes and low socioeconomic status in high-risk neighborhoods compound the problems for the African American male adolescent. Research has shown boys' lack of success using traditional literacies; however, it has failed to

recognize their skill in using alternative digital literacies (Reilly, Neumann, & Andrews, 2019).

Text comprehension is a complex cognitive skill in which the reader should construct meaning by using all the available resources from both the text and previous knowledge. These resources assist readers in utilizing lexis and syntax, retrieving their meanings from one's mental lexicon, making inferences, and employing schemata. The correct implementation of these resources can help readers in the successful comprehension of the text (Wei, 2009; Bergold, Wendt, Kasper, & Steinmayr, 2017)

Readers' level of mastery in text comprehension can be assessed by different measures. Some reading test methods include several types of questions including multiple choice, open-ended question, doze, true/false/not given, fill-in the blank, written recall, sentence completion, matching activity, and checklist tests. These question-types can measure readers' ability to identify main idea, guess meaning from context, read for specific ideas, identify referential meaning, identify the tone of the reading passage, make inferences, identify the gist of the reading, make summaries, etc. Based on the ability measured in each question, the reader adopts a special approach—top-down, bottom-up, or both. In other words, it is the test item that demands a reader to employ certain strategies in answering reading comprehension questions. For example, some items required test-takers to reread parts of the passage, process deep level comprehension, or scan, while items merely required a surface level understanding of the passage. Test conditions are also essential in affecting the way readers interact with the test. Yazdanpanah (2007) states that “in a high-stakes test situation” learners may use strategies different from normal reading conditions.

What is more, a bulk of research findings show that males and females use different strategies in language learning particularly in reading comprehension (Abu-Rabia, 2004; Chavez, 2001). Poole (2005), for example, states that males tend to be more analytic while females tend to be more global in their approach to language learning. Males adhere more to rules while females adhere more to cultural differences. Furthermore, males and females may use the same number of strategies in language learning but females are more skillful at applying these strategies qualitatively.

It is now widely accepted that affective factors influence readers' motivation to master reading and their persistence with demanding reading tasks. Positive self-concepts and attitudes are crucial components of intrinsic motivation and are important predictors of children's success both in the beginning stages of reading and in the acquisition of higher-order reading skills (Logan, & Johnston, 2009).

Some researchers maintain that attitudes are key elements in the factors influencing an individual's reading intentions. The attitudes that readers bring to the task of learning to read help determine success and, in turn, successful reading encounters influence these very attitudes (McKenna and Kear, 1995).

Hare & Devine (2011) argued that the score gap between males and females on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) was largely due to the content of the reading materials in the test. According to them, the reading passages on verbal section of the SAT have covered more technical topics (e.g., physics or chemistry). Thus females have disadvantage in performance on this test. Klein (2012), however, found that females scored higher than males in humanities-oriented reading passages, but lower than males in science-oriented passages. Similarly, in a study on the relationships between readers' gender, enjoyment, interest and L2 reading performance, Brantmeier (2003) indicated that reading performance, as measured by recall comprehension, was significantly influenced by passage content and readers' gender, whereas enjoyment and interest mattered little.

METHODOLOGY

This study was developed around the following question:

- Do males and females perform differently on a reading task when they have their own choice of topic?

Based on this question, the following hypothesis was developed.

H. There is no difference in the rate of reading comprehension achievement between different genders when granted choice of power ability.

The design of the present study was quasi-experimental. The data collected was both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

The design of the present study was quasi-experimental. The data collected was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. In the first phase of the study, a survey was used to collect middle school students' interests in the topic choice for reading comprehension materials based on the information they provided on a questionnaire. The survey included gathering a list of topics and themes, and also consisted of some questions regarding the students' reading interests in topics and themes. The students were asked to mark their favorite topics and themes of the reading materials. The second part of the research design involved a content analysis of the topics dictated to the students by the teacher in contrast with the topics selected by the middle school students. Once the survey was completed, and

the topics were analyzed, a comparative analysis was conducted to address our research questions.

The participants in this investigation were 96 male and female students aged between 16 and 17 studying in the third grade of high school: 50 male and 46 female students. The school was located in the city of Varamin.

Based on the scores on their final English exam (i.e., the pre-test), the participants were found to be initially homogeneous, and were then randomly classified into two groups.

In the next phase of the study, a 12-week reading course was offered to each of the two groups, with one major difference that in the STS group, the teacher took reading passages of his interest to the class, whereas in the other group, i.e., TTS, the students themselves chose topics and passages of their interest for the classroom.

A survey was done via a questionnaire relating to the topics of interest of the middle school students in this questionnaire, the participants were asked to answer the question, “what do you like to read about?” in order to determine topics of interest. They were asked by the researcher which topics interested them most. Based on the data collected, it was discovered that altogether, the sample was interested in six topics including animals, sports, historical figures, musicians, romance, and science fiction. The phase of the survey was extremely important as without it, the researcher would have no idea what topics would interest my middle school subjects, who could more or less represent their population in Iran. After the data were collected, the interval data obtained from the post-test was plugged into the t-test.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to Investigate which of the two genders, males or females would perform better on a typical reading comprehension task when granted the power to choose topics of their own interest.

This study investigated the quality of reading achievement among 96 middle school students in Varamin. The primary factor deemed to influence achievement across the two groups were: whether gender could make a difference as to which sex achieves better? With respect to the second hypothesis of the present study, stating that “there is no difference in the rate of reading comprehension achievement between different genders when granted choice of power ability”, another independent t-test was run to compare the male and female students' mean scores on the posttest of RC. The t-observed value was found to be .18 (Table 1). This amount of t-value is lower than the critical value of 1.97 at 123 degrees of freedom.

	Leven's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-Tailed)	Mean differences	Std. Error Differences	950/0 Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								lower	Upper
Equal Variances Assumed	.595	.442	.188	123	.851	.47257	2.52479	4.50530	5.45043
Equal Variances not Assumed			.194	121.680	.846	.47257	2.43523	4.34834	5.29348

Table 1: Independent t-test Posttest of Reading Comprehension by Gender

Based on these results it can be concluded that there is not any significant difference between the mean scores of the male and female students on the posttest of reading comprehension.

As displayed in Table 2 the mean scores for the male and female students are 73.92 and 74.39 respectively. Thus the null-hypothesis as there is not any difference in the rate of reading comprehension achievement of male and female students is supported.

Table 2: Posttest of Reading Comprehension by Gender

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
FEMALE	46	74.3929	11.45881	1.53125
MALE	50	73.9203	15.72924	1.89358

It was also found that freedom in the choice of topics does not make any distinction between male and female learners as to which may perform better. It was further revealed that the two genders perform similarly when they are allowed to choose their own topics the results of the present study both contravene and support those found elsewhere.

Results of the study revealed no significant differences between males and females in reading comprehension scores across these passages when the students are granted the power to

choose the topics of their own interests and bring them to class. Thus, when examining reading comprehension across multiple passages, males and females had no advantage over each other. This finding contrasts research which suggests that females are better second language learners than males and another research which suggests that male students performed significantly better than females in comprehending gender-neutral texts (Brantmeier, 2003). Brantmeier found that females achieved higher scores for a list of text topics that included a housewife's dilemma and males scored higher on those that included sports.

Conclusion

The results of the study revealed no significant differences between males and females in reading comprehension scores across these passages. Thus, when examining reading comprehension across multiple passages, males had no advantage over females, and females had no advantage over males. This finding counters another research which suggests that females are better second language learners than males (Brantmeier, 2004).

Caution should consider when using this study to generalize the effects are that the sample group comprised two classes of male and female students of the same level. Conducting the study at different levels of English mastery might render different results. In order to collect as much information as possible on reading comprehension, it would be useful to apply as many different techniques as possible to get meaningful data. This study used multiple choice and short answer questions based on the reading texts. Other test methods can be used for measuring reading achievement of the students.

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