

Reading Comprehension Ability in Bengali Language Among Secondary Students in Relation to Gender

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ABSTRACT : Reading comprehension is the procedure of making meaning from text. The goal, therefore, is to gain an overall understanding of what is described in the text rather than to get meaning from isolated words or sentences. The objectives of the study were to compare the reading comprehension ability between Boys and Girls students through two types of tests. Tests were administered on 520 samples from 10 schools (Boys'-5, Girls'-5) of North 24 Pgs. The collected data were analyzed by Mann-Whitney Test. The major findings were observed that in all section Girls scored better than Boys. The probable causes behind this type of result were discussed.

Keywords : Reading comprehension, Location of school, M.C.Q. Test, Cloze Test

Introduction

Comprehension is meaning – making. A text can be viewed as having potential for meaning. Comprehension is the articulation of this potential in the mind of the reader. Like allo-variants, such as articulation, concretization differs from one reader to another. Reading of a text with comprehension is thus reconstruction text-construct with the logic of interpretation with supplementation. For the better understanding

of the process of comprehension, we have to concentrate upon two main aspects:

- A. The aspects of textual material (i.e. text construct).
- B. The socio – psychological factors of the learner (i.e. text reconstruction).

Many times we have seen that a particular sentence comes with different meaning to the different students. In that case the socio-

economic and cultural status of the learners maintained the differences between one another. So many times we have seen that the students give a wrong answer due to lack of comprehensibility of the language of questions. As a researcher I want to observe this weakness or this specified features and diagnosis the problem, as well as give a remedy. Because I think reading comprehension is an ability that helps students to read the words of different subjects. Reading the words lead a student to read the world.

Objectives

1. To study and compare the reading comprehension ability of the Boys and Girls students
2. To assess the reading comprehension ability of the students through
 - a. Comprehension Test (M. C. Q. Test)
 - b. Cloze Test
3. To compare the performance of the total group in M. C. Q. test and Cloze test.

Delimitation

1. The study was conducted in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal.
2. The study was delimited to class IX students only.
3. The study was delimited to Bengali medium schools only.

Hypotheses

For this study following null hypotheses were framed

- i. There was no significant difference between the Boys and Girls students in their performance in M.C.Q. Test in Bengali.
- ii. There was no significant difference between the Boys and Girls students in their performance in Cloze Test in Bengali.
- iii. There was no significant difference in total reading comprehension ability between the Boys and Girls students.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The total schools of North 24 Parganas (Secondary & Higher Secondary) were stratified on the basis of type of school (Boys' & Girls'). Thereafter from the stratum total ten schools were taken randomly. After fixing the schools the researcher has taken all the standard IX students as the sample of the present study. Thus the sample size got a figure of 520. The nature of the final sample of the study is detailed below.

Table 1 : Gender wise distribution list

GENDER	SAMPLE SCHOOLS	SAMPLE STUDENTS
BOYS	5	284
GIRLS	5	236
TOTAL	10	520

Preparing of Research Tools

1. M.C.Q. Test

The researcher selected a short story of reputed Bengali Author for the test. The test was constructed by a passage of 176 words and 10 multiple choice questions. After that he

justified from three Bengali Language teachers of different schools as the test may applicable or not for the standard IX students.

2. Cloze Test

A standard cloze test is a passage with blanks of standard length replacing certain deleted words which students are required to complete by filling in correct words or their equivalents. In traditional 'cloze test', every fifth word is removed from a 250-500 word reading passage. Usually, no word is deleted either in the first or the last sentence of the passage. Students are required to supply either the original word of the author or an appropriate equivalent word in the blank space (Helfeldt et al, 1986:216).

The researcher selected a passage of reputed Bengali Author for the test. After that he justified from three Bengali Language teachers of different schools as the passage may applicable or not for the standard IX students. Then the researcher made the test with the help of his guide following the procedure of a standard cloze test, which was constructed by a passage of 477 words where 100 words were deleted (every fifth word) except in the first and last sentences.

Data Collection

After preparing the tools, the researcher went to the selected

Table 2 : Descriptive statistics of data

		Statistics	Std. Error
M.C.Q. Test	Mean	5.93	.076
	Median	6.00	
	Variance	2.992	
	Std. Deviation	1.730	
	Skewness	-.093	.107
	Kurtosis	-.570	.214
Cloze Test	Mean	45.0337	.89896
	Median	45.000	
	Variance	420.225	
	Std. Deviation	20.49938	
	Skewness	.255	.107
	Kurtosis	-.630	.214
Total Reading Ability	Mean	50.9663	.92765
	Median	50.000	
	Variance	447.478	
	Std. Deviation	21.15368	
	Skewness	.250	.107
	Kurtosis	-.639	.214

Descriptive Statistics of Data

Table 3 : M.C.Q. Test - Cloze Test - Total Reading Ability

GENDER		M.C.Q. Test	Cloze Test	Total reading ability
BOYS	Mean	5.90	38.9693	44.8676
	Std. Deviation	1.795	17.79016	18.46926
	N	236	236	236
GIRLS	Mean	5.96	50.0731	56.0343
	Std. Deviation	1.676	21.25314	21.92237
	N	284	284	284
Total	Mean	5.93	45.0337	50.9663
	Std. Deviation	1.730	20.49938	21.15368
	N	520	520	520

schools and concern with the Headmaster or Headmistress. With their permission and help the tests (M.C.Q. Test & Cloze Test) were administered on all the 520 subjects of different schools. For the M.C.Q. Test they had given only 15 minutes and for the Cloze Test 50 minutes were given to the subjects. The data were collected and organized in tabular form for analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

The collected data were analyzed following appropriate statistical procedures (SPSS, Version - 20) as given below:

Testing of Null Hypotheses

H_0 : There will be no significant difference in reading comprehension ability between the Boys and Girls students in their performance in M.C.Q. Test in Bengali.

For comparing the M.C.Q. Test performance between boys and girls, the Mann-Whitney test was conducted. The calculated 'U' value found as 33271.00 and 'Z' = -1.43, the 'P' value is .886 ($P > 0.05$). Hence the null hypothesis is retained. It can be concluded that in case of performance in M.C.Q. Test boys and girls do not differ significantly.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
M.C.Q. Test	520	5.93	1.730	2	10
Cloze Test	520	45.0337	20.49938	1.00	97.50
Total Reading Ability	520	50.9663	21.15368	8.00	104.50

Comparison of Scores

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
MCQ TEST	BOYS	236	261.52	61719.00
	GIRLS	284	259.65	73741.00
	Total	520		
CLOZE TEST	BOYS	236	217.52	51335.00
	GIRLS	284	296.21	84125.00
	Total	520		
TOTAL READING ABILITY	BOYS	236	218.79	51635.00
	GIRLS	284	295.16	83825.00
	Total	520		

Test Statistics of M.C.Q. Test

	MCQ TEST
Mann-Whitney U	33271.000
Wilcoxon W	73741.000
Z	-.143
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.886

H_02 : *There will be no significant difference in reading comprehension ability between the Boys and Girls students in their performance in Cloze Test in Bengali.*

For comparing the Cloze Test performance between boys and girls, the Mann-Whitney test was conducted. The calculated 'U' value found as 23369.00 and 'Z' = -5.946, the 'P' value is .000 ($P < 0.05$). Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It can be concluded that in case of performance in Cloze Test boys and girls differ significantly.

Test Statistics of Cloze Test

	CLOZE TEST
Mann-Whitney U	23369.000
Wilcoxon W	51335.000
Z	-5.946
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

H_03 : *There will be no significant difference in total reading comprehension ability between the Boys and Girls students.*

For comparing the performance in reading comprehension test (both M.C.Q. Test & Cloze Test) between boys and girls, the Mann-Whitney test was conducted. The calculated 'U' value found as 23669.00 and 'Z' = -5.770, the 'P' value is .000 ($P > 0.05$). Hence the null

hypothesis is rejected. It can be concluded that in case of performance in reading comprehension test (both M.C.Q. Test & Cloze Test) boys and girls differ significantly.

Test Statistics of Total Reading Ability

	TOTAL READING ABILITY
Mann-Whitney U	23669.000
Wilcoxon W	51635.000
Z	-5.770
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Findings of the Study

- i. In M.C.Q. Test boys and girls of standard IX do not differ significantly. Though the mean of score of girls is little better than the boys.
- ii. Girls are better than the boys in *Cloze test* performance of reading comprehension ability in Bengali language.
- iii. Girls are better than boys in total reading comprehension ability on the basis of both type of test (M.C.Q. Test & *Cloze Test*) in Bengali language.

Discussion

Boys and Girls of standard IX are very much identical in their skill of Reading comprehension in Bengali. The present study was made with an assumption that Gender would not influence the skill of Reading comprehension. Though in West Bengal there are cultural differences in the bringing of girls and boys in all aspects. Compared to boys, girls are soon withdrawn from schools and this reflects the society's

attitudes towards girls. Boys are free to have friends and to spend their time in friends' company. They are free to receive and visit friends. Not only they are permitted to visit friends but also to go to various places where they could get variety of exposure. They are independent inside and outside home and they are not much restricted like girls. Relatively they think on their own and act according to their likes and dislikes. Thus they are more domineering at home and school compared to girls.

Moreover Boys have freedom in decision making even in their education, i.e., in selecting courses of study, they act more independently. They are allowed to leave their home and home town for the sake of getting higher education. On the contrary, girls are allowed to select their course of study with much restriction. They are not easily allowed to go to distant places for their education. Parents feel that it is better to educate their female wards in the nearby educational institutions. Though the course they are interested in is not available in the nearby institutions, they are forced to join there only. Boys have more time to study and they can maximum utilize the study time available. But, at the same time due to their physical condition and the duties at home girls are not able to utilize their free time available for their studies. They are supposed to help their mother and other family members. At times they are supposed to take care of the younger ones also. Boys are encouraged to participate in Co-curricular and Extra-curricular activities, which are denied to girls though they are interested in them. Girls are unable to make use of their latent talents and they are in a shell. Due to all the above

reasons a difference was expected in Reading comprehension and its skills.

But the result of the present study shows that girls are much better than the boys. It shows that Reading comprehension is a cognitive characteristic and affected by the cultural elements found in the life style of both the sexes. Though it may be attributed to the similarity of the educational environment available for them. First of all both of them have the same school setting. There is no separate library and classroom for boys and girls. The learning materials provided to them are the same and both undergo the same mode of teaching. The type of examination is the same for both boys and girls. Due to these, the cultural variations in the bringing up of boys and girls are found to be nullified so as to wield any influence over their skills of Reading comprehension.

The differences are seen on deeper analysis on the basis of their mean scores. Girls seem to score better than boys in all the dimensions of the skill of Reading comprehension. Most of the studies reveal that girls have better achievement compared to boys. In the skill of Reading comprehension in English also many studies, for example Dass (1984), Bharat Joshi (1996) and others state that girls score higher in Reading comprehension than boys. This supremacy of girls may be attributed to their general higher achievement in all the subjects of study.

It is a fact that both boys and girls are joyful towards the learning of Bengali. However girls by virtue of their characteristic-patience may concentrate more on their learning tasks in spite of the negative attitude of parents towards female education. They listen to all instructions

carefully and do work in a more involved way. They are regular in their work and have the will to follow instructions without fail, and fulfill teachers' expectations. In fact one can see willful involvement in all the tasks they undertake.

Moreover girls' superior social relation with elders may also be a reason for their achievement. As they are generally cordial to all, there is a congenial teacher student relationship and this may facilitate their achievement. Shivapuri (1982) states that the relationship between personality factors and educational achievement is significant only for girls. As girls are less critical about their teachers and elders, they get good encouragement from them for a better attainment. Direct intervention of parent or teacher or tutor in the comprehension process increases reading comprehension (Bos, 1982). Thus elders can prompt thinking, and can provide an insight into the language ability of girls. It may be confirmed therefore, that these characteristics of girls may help them overcome the hurdles in language learning and cause them score higher than boys in Reading comprehension.

Cognitively too girls are more inclined to gain proficiency in language. Agrawal (1981) found that personal and cognitive factors were meaningful in the context of reading ability. Reading readiness and its components Perceiving information (R.R1), Perceiving similar expressions (R.R4) and Readiness to guess the meaning (R.R5) are found to be influenced by Gender. In Reading readiness girls seem to score better than boys. This may be attributed to the linguistic aptitude of the girls. Girls seem to lead boys in Perceiving information

(R.R1) and Readiness to guess the meaning (R.R5). Such superiority in Reading readiness seems to account for their better achievement in Reading comprehension and its dimensions. In Girls' schools one can witness more discipline, and the school authorities also pay more attention to academic works. Teachers are said to take strenuous effort in such schools to impart effective learning. No wonder, there could be more teacher-student interaction too. Over and above girls are known for their hard work and they take learning as a serious task. Therefore they tend to pay more attention to their studies. Moreover, Girls are endowed with higher linguistic aptitude and thus naturally students from Girls' schools are bound to score better in Reading comprehension than the students of Boys' schools and the present study shows that.

Conclusion

The present study may create an awareness among the Bengali language experts to make use of the clues available in the form of findings, discussion, for designing programmes towards developing techniques suitable for the target population to make 'reading' a pleasurable and purposeful act at all levels of schooling.

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