

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING HABITS AND READING COMPREHENSION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17043449>

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
07 November 2024	07 December, 2024	21 December 2024	28 December 2024

ABSTRACT

Reading is a basic academic skill that has a profound impact on the general learning and understanding levels among students. This research examined a correlation between reading habits and reading comprehension among secondary school students in the District Gujranwala of Pakistan. A correlational research design was implemented and all 9th-grade students of 345 secondary and higher secondary public schools were incorporated as the population. Cluster random sampling was employed where 35 schools were randomly selected with 1,550 students forming part of the area sample. Data were documented using a Reading Habits Questionnaire, and a Reading Comprehension Test, easily analyzed by Pearson correlation. The results found a positive high correlation between reading habit and reading comprehension among students. The correlation was slightly higher in female students and students in urban regions than in male students and students in rural regions. The study concludes that regular and intentional reading behavior greatly contributes to comprehension skills and physical schools should accentuate a reading culture and avail reading resources. It is recommended to implement the systematic reading programs, improve the access to reading materials, and extend special assistance to rural and male students.

Keywords: Reading Habits, Reading Comprehension, Secondary School Students.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is heralded as a critical academic requirement and a lifetime's skill that has a direct impact on the performance of students across all school subjects. Reading plays a particularly important role at the secondary school level when students are expected to shift toward a mode of reading that is oriented toward the process of learning rather than that of learning to read. Such a move demands not only the right decoding of texts but also to interpret and analyze them as well as to engage in a critical process of using information (Cain, 2022). Therefore, reading comprehension has been said to be the key towards

academic success, intellectual enhancement and personal development (Hoover & Gough, 1990). Reading habits have a very close relationship with reading comprehension that includes the quantity, the frequency, and quality of time student devoted to reading. Positive reading culture helps a student to read more diverse texts, widen his/her vocabulary and improve his/her higher-order thinking skills, i.e., development of inference, evaluation, and analysis. In their turn, inadequate reading is a common consequence of poor reading habits that lead, most frequently, to low comprehension, basic vocabulary, and lack of desire to cope with complicated reading material.

Studies show that students who consistently engage in intentional reading experiences are more likely to realize better results of comprehension than those who have little to no attendance of reading activities (Sartika et al., 2020). It is therefore important that reading habits and comprehension go hand in hand in developing good literacy among the secondary school learners.

All over the world, however, the reading adolescents is deteriorating. In Scotland, the reading age level of secondary school pupils was found to be three years below that which was expected of them on average, and the number of books read per head of segregated schools had decreased by a large margin in the space of ten years. The chief factors leading to post-pandemic absenteeism and lower classroom engagement were listed to be absent. The trend is the same in the United Kingdom, where the rate of children reading for pleasure between the ages of 8 and 18 is at a record low because of digital distractions and a lack of accessible reading content (Dungworth et al., 2004). Such disconcerting patterns indicate that students with diminishing reading are less likely to develop their reading skills and overall academic achievements.

The problem of reading habits is only increased in developing countries like Pakistan due to the inadequate resources, limited number of libraries as well as the general lack of the inculcation of reading culture in schools. Shahid et al., (2021) notes that literacy and reading proficiency are 'one of the core priorities, however, there is continued vulnerability to incompetent teacher preparation, limited supply of reading materials, and differences between urbanized and rural schools. Empirical evidence sheds light on these anxieties because Khan et al., (2025) have shown a moderate positive correlation between the study habits (including reading) and English academic achievement among the secondary school students in Punjab. Although reading habits had a significant contribution to academic performance, due to lack of equitable access to resources, the contribution was limited.

The strength of this relationship is also supported by cross cultural evidence. A survey of students enrolled in a junior high school in Indonesia demonstrated that there is a great correlation (r approximately equal to .793) between reading behavior and the ability to comprehend what they are reading (Utami et al., 2021). Similarly, international reports and assessments also prove

that students with higher rates of voluntary reading also have higher results in literacy (PISA, 2018). Findings such as these verify that the positive effects of a good reading habit are valid within various educational and cultural environments.

Theoretically, we can refer to the Simple View of Reading (Hoover & Gough, 1990) in order to explain this correlation. It hypothesizes that reading comprehension has the two aspects of decoding (reading words) and linguistic comprehension (listening and understanding spoken words). The uniformity of reading habits develops both halves because repeated exposure to words improves word recognition and expounds words improve background knowledge. This model explains why students with better reading cultures have better chances of exhibiting outstanding skills in comprehension, regardless of sex, likes of socioeconomic status or geographic locations.

Statement of the Problem

Reading comprehension forms a crucial part of academic success particularly at secondary level where students have to learn through reading. The understanding is, though, highly dependent on the reading habits of the student. The Internet has fostered the problem of the reading habits of adolescents, who are less motivated and face more digital distractions globally, thus worsening their literacy skills. The issue is further complicated by the fact that in Pakistan, there are no libraries, scarcity of material and poor reading culture in educational institutions. Though results indicate that there is a positive relationship between reading behavior and reading comprehension, there is a paucity of literature pertaining to Pakistani secondary students. This difference is an indication that it is necessary to investigate the nature of the relationship between reading habits and reading comprehension within the local context.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. determine the relationship between students' reading habits and their reading comprehension.

Research Questions

To investigate the research problem and achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher developed following research questions.

1. Is there any relationship between students' reading habits and their reading comprehension?
2. Is there any relationship between male students' reading habits and their reading comprehension?
3. Is there any relationship between female students' reading habits and their reading comprehension?
4. Is there any relationship between urban school students' reading habits and their reading comprehension?
5. Is there any relationship between rural school students' reading habits and their reading comprehension?

Review of Literature

Reading comprehension is a multifaceted cognitive process involving the construction of meaning from text. At the secondary school level, students transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," requiring accurate decoding, integration of prior knowledge, inference-making, and analytical skills (Cain, 2022). Reading comprehension is widely recognized as a cornerstone of academic achievement, intellectual development, and lifelong learning (Hoover & Gough, 1990). Students with strong comprehension skills can better understand subject content across disciplines, solve problems, and engage in higher-order thinking.

Reading habits—encompassing the frequency, duration, and quality of reading activities—play a critical role in literacy development. Research indicates that students who engage regularly in purposeful reading activities achieve higher comprehension levels. Abid et al. (2023) found that secondary school students in Punjab who maintained consistent reading routines demonstrated significantly higher achievement in English comprehension. Regular engagement with texts enhances vocabulary, syntax, and cognitive skills such as analysis, inference, and critical thinking, whereas poor reading habits are linked to weaker comprehension and lower academic motivation (Utami et al., 2022).

Globally, adolescent reading engagement has declined due to digital distractions, reduced access to appealing reading materials, and post-pandemic learning disruptions. For instance, Fang (2023) reported that reading for pleasure among children aged 8–18 in the United Kingdom has dropped to its lowest point in two decades. Similarly, in Scotland, secondary students' reading ages were

found to be substantially below expectations, and the number of books read annually has decreased (Hooley and Tysseling, 2013). These trends emphasize the importance of fostering effective reading habits to maintain literacy and comprehension skills.

Gender significantly influences reading engagement and comprehension. Female students generally exhibit stronger reading habits and higher comprehension levels than male students, possibly due to differences in motivation, interest, and self-discipline (OECD, 2019). Speed et al., (2024) found that female secondary students in Karachi not only read more frequently but also engaged in more reflective reading practices, resulting in higher comprehension scores. These findings highlight the need for interventions targeting male students to enhance reading engagement and reduce gender disparities.

Locality also affects students' reading habits and comprehension. Urban students typically have better access to educational resources, libraries, and digital tools, which promote stronger reading habits and higher comprehension levels. In contrast, rural students face challenges such as limited access to reading materials and less supportive learning environments. Samuel et al., (2023) found that urban secondary school students exhibited more favorable reading habits and higher comprehension scores compared to rural students, emphasizing the importance of equitable resource allocation to support literacy across diverse contexts.

The Simple View of Reading (Hoover & Gough, 1990) provides a framework for understanding the link between reading habits and comprehension. According to this model, reading comprehension is the product of decoding (word recognition skills) and linguistic comprehension (understanding language). Regular reading habits contribute to both components by enhancing word recognition and expanding vocabulary, which collectively improve overall comprehension.

Despite extensive research on reading habits and comprehension, gaps remain in the Pakistani context. Most studies have focused on general study habits or English academic achievement rather than directly examining the relationship between reading habits and reading comprehension. Additionally, limited research has investigated subgroup differences across gender and locality at the secondary school level.

Addressing these gaps is crucial for designing effective interventions to improve literacy outcomes and promote a reading culture among secondary school students in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

In this study, the correlation research design has been used to examine the correlation between reading habits and reading comprehension in students because this kind of research design can be used to analyze the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables without any kind of manipulation (Creswell, 2014). The study also sought to examine the existence of subgroup differences by gender (male/female) and locality (urban/rural). All students of the 9th grade in secondary and higher secondary public schools of District Gujranwala, Pakistan, composing 345 schools were the population. Cluster random sampling involving 10 percent of the schools (35 schools) was used to select the final sample based on 9th-grade students representing the stage when students were shifting toward the reading to learn stage and developing higher-level reading comprehension skills. 1550 students were randomly selected for the data collection.

Instrumentation

In this study, the data was gathered with the help of two self-designed assessment tools a Reading Habits Questionnaire and a Reading Comprehension Test. The Reading Habits

Questionnaire assessed the ability of students to how often and how long they read, as well as the quality of the reading (reading pleasure, reading studies, reading other materials). It involved a Likert-scale format with the answer spectrum of Never to Always. The Reading Comprehension Test measured the skills of students in reading comprehension, ability to interpret the texts, analyze them, etc., with multiple-choice questions, short-answer tasks, and texts which had to be analyzed critically and some inferences had to be made. These two instruments were validated using expert review, which comprised content and face validity, and also there was a pilot study, used to establish reliability. The Cronbach alpha values were 0.82 and 0.87 respectively in the Reading Habits Questionnaire and in the Reading Comprehension Test, indicating good internal consistency.

Data Analysis and Results

The Reading Habits Questionnaire as well as Reading Comprehension Test results were subjected to analysis by use of SPSS. In order to investigate the dependence between reading habits and reading comprehension, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used. Additionally, when examining the relationship, subgroup analyses were performed to determine how the relationship varied by gender (male/female) and locality (urban/rural).

Table 1: Relationship between students' reading habits and their reading comprehension(N=1550)

Variables	1	2	p-value
1. Reading Habits Total	1	.835**	.000
2. Reading Comprehension Test	.835**	1	.000

The results in Table 1 indicate that there is a strong positive relation between the reading habits and reading comprehension of the students ($r = .835$, $p < 0.01$). This means that the more students read in a purposeful and regular manner the better the comprehension tasks they will perform. This finding is important as it shows that reading patterns are a powerful indicator of a grasp of the material and following this direction, practices of reading every day may contribute to enhancing vocabulary, logical thinking, and comprehension. In practice, this would require a new focus on consistent and purposeful reading with secondary school students that would help them in their academic performance.

Table 2: Relationship between male students' reading habits and their reading comprehension (N=745)

Variables	1	2	p-value
1. Reading Habits	1	.821**	.000
2. Reading Comprehension	.821**	1	.000

The findings show that there is a high positive correlation ($r = .821$, $p < 0.01$) between reading habits of the male students and their reading comprehension. This indicates that male students with higher levels and efficiency of reading is more likely to perform better in terms of their results in comprehension scores emphasizing the role that should be played in cultivating regular reading habits.

Table 3: Relationship between female students' reading habits and their reading comprehension

Variables	1	2	p-value
1. Reading Habits	1	.843**	.000
2. Reading Comprehension	.843**	1	.000

The table depicts a very high positive correlation ($r = .843$, $p < 0.01$) between the reading habits of female students and their reading comprehension. This is a pointer to the fact that girls, who read consistently and successfully, are more likely to score better in comprehension, and this means that good reading practice substantially helps their academic performance.

Table 4: relationship between urban students' reading habits and their reading comprehension (N=845)

Variables	1	2	p-value
1. Reading Habits	1	.812**	.000
2. Reading Comprehension	.812**	1	.000

The table indicates that there is significant positive relationship ($r = .812$, $p < 0.01$) between reading habits and reading comprehension of urban students. It follows that the urban students with reading activities also have better achievement scores and showing that a continued reading practice and access to reading materials are good practices in urban schools.

Table 5: Relationship between rural students' reading habits and their reading comprehension (N=705)

Variables	1	2	p-value
1. Reading Habits	1	.829**	.000
2. Reading Comprehension	.829**	1	.000

The finding shows that there is a strong positive relationship ($r = .829$, $p < 0.01$) between the reading habits of rural students and their reading comprehension. This indicates the higher the frequency of reading, the higher the score by the rural students in the comprehension, which makes it important to encourage reading among rural schoolchildren despite the lack of resources.

Conclusions

The results of this research signify the close, positive correlation between the reading habits of students and reading comprehension. Learners that attend to reading activities often and successfully also do well in comprehension tasks which shows that the value of developing a more consistent reading activity within the learner is indeed important. Getting into the subgroup analysis, it is possible to note that though the overall effect of reading habits on comprehension is the same across the board among all types of

students, female students tend to manifest a somewhat stronger effect than as established among male students. In a similar fashion, urban students would seem to reap greater benefits of reading tendencies than rural students, probably because they have more resources and favorable educational settings. In sum, since learning how to purposefully read is one the most valuable things that a student can learn in secondary school, it is imperative to attempt to foster purposeful reading among secondary school students.

Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that there is a strong positive correlation between reading habits and reading comprehension among students and this is expected to be valid since earlier research has shown how reading often determines academic performance (Utami, 2021; OECD, 2019). Because they read regularly, such students have higher chances to build vocabulary, enrich linguistic understanding, and constructive thinking, which then leads to better text comprehension (Hoover & Gough, 1990; Nation, 2022). These results are also indicative of the female population of students performing more rigorous reading habits and better comprehension levels in comparison with males, which is consistent with both domestic and international data (OECD, 2019). Also, urban students tended to have a higher reading comprehension linked to reading habits than rural students, because of differences in access to libraries, reading materials, and other positive learning environments (Batool & Mahmood, 2023; National Education Policy, 2021). These findings support the need to foster uniform and goal-oriented reading among all student groups, especially males and students in rural areas, to enhance the outcomes of literacy and general academic performance.

Recommendations

The schools should create structured programs to develop reading (including reading to students) promoting daily reading (both for academic and pleasure) towards building comprehension skills. To make it possible to provide all students with equal opportunities to build strong reading habits, urban and rural schools must have access to proper libraries and reading materials as well as digital resources. Special programs, including reading clubs or mentorship, are needed to attract male or rural students too less likely to have access to reading. Arbesters ought to be given professional growth on how to foster proper reading habits and reading strategies to be applied by students to enhance comprehension with various grades.

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