

Competence Level of B. Ed First Year Students in Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the competence level of B.Ed. first year students in reading skill under Tribhuvan University. The data were collected by using two types of testing tools constructed from compulsory English text-book selecting two different reading passages. From the first, 14 objective questions were asked as multiple choice items which carried 14 marks; and from the other reading passage, 12 subjective questions were asked which carried 36 marks. The full mark of the test was fifty and the time allotted to conduct the test was an hour (60 minutes). Two campuses were the institutional samples and forty students from one and sixty students from the other were the samples for the study. Out of these hundred samples, 60 girls and 40 boys were selected proportionally. The marks obtained by the students in objective test item, subjective test item and total are the depended variables and the total number of students, the number of boys and girls are the independent variables. Through the study it was found that the students' overall competence in reading comprehension was found around 50% in average. The reading competence they performed in objective test item was comparatively higher than subjective test item. In totality, the reading competence level of the boys was slightly better than the girls but the difference does not seem so significant.

Key words: Competence level, reading comprehension, subjective and objective test item, score

Introduction

Language is used to communicate with other people in various purposes. To fulfill these purposes, every human being should learn language compulsorily. Learning language comprises learning four different but closely related language skills, viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four language skills are integrated both in learning any language and in day-to-day real life situation for communication. It shows that reading has good relationship with other skills of language. According to Grellet (1981), "Reading comprehension should not be separated from other skills. There are few cases in real life when we do not talk or write about what we have read or when we do not relate what we have read to something we might have heard" (p. 8). Among these four language skills, reading is the third in natural order. It is regarded as the most important skill for grasping information and gaining more knowledge and information. It is regarded as the cheapest and the most effective way of acquiring information, knowledge, and skills. The main purpose of reading a variety of English text is to develop the students' ability to comprehend the text written in English and to grasp or elicit the information explored in the written text. To highlight the importance of reading, Harmer (2008) states, "Reading is useful for language acquisition. Provided that students more or less understand what they read, the more they read, the better they get at it" (P.99).

The word competence means the ability or skill to do something expertly and well because of training and practice. If someone can do anything efficiently, he or she is competent in his or her work. Everybody may have skill to do something but the level of competence may differ from person to person, field to field, subject to subject and from one situation to another situation. Here, reading competence is also regarded as reading proficiency which involves the process of acquiring skills or how the students grasp the ideas, knowledge, information, skills etc. given in the text. In other words the level of proficiency or competence level in reading comprehension indicates the ability and skill from which the readers can acquire the information, knowledge and ideas from the texts. The level of understanding or acquiring or grasping information varies according to the level of knowledge of the participants in it. In other words, competence level of students in reading comprehension may differ from person to person, subject to subject, level to level and from one language to another language community. For further teaching the teacher should know the proficiency level of reading comprehension of the students. This type of study is beneficial to both students and teachers for their further step in their teaching and learning.

Background of the Study

In the context of Nepal, the evidence shows that majority of the students who take admission in bachelor of education (B.Ed.) under Tribhuvan University come from remote and rural areas of the country. Majority of them complete their school level education (10+2) from the community schools where English language is still being taught by using outdated, old fashioned grammar translation method. For example, in a constituent campus located in Kathmandu valley, 263 students took admission in B.Ed. first year annual program for the academic session of 2076 B.S. Among them, 236 students were from outside of Kathmandu valley and nearly 80% of them had completed their school level education (10+2) from community schools (source: the campus record). In these schools, they did not have good English environment to promote their English language effectively. Furthermore, Majority of these students had come from economically middle class family background and had to survive in Kathmandu valley. When I talked to them informally, I came to know that they admit in college and search for part time job or wait for visa to foreign countries. Their preference to apply for the visa had been seen either to Japan or Australia or Korea. If they cannot get visa for those countries mentioned above, they decide to apply the visa for the gulf countries. It shows that the students cannot concentrate their mind solely for the development of their academic career in future in Nepal.

After taking admission in any institutions, it is assumed that the students will continue their study and complete the course in time and achieve the prescribed goals. If they come to the college and attend the classes regularly, they will make significance progress in their study. Because of their irregularities in attending the classes, teaching can be influenced negatively. Considering these situations, as an English teacher, I was interested to study in some detail how these students could comprehend the reading text prescribed for them. After reading the given text, how they could make progress in their reading comprehension during the first year of their study. What the level of competence of the B.Ed. students in their reading is and both boys and girls have the same level of reading competence or different. To answer these questions, this study has been conducted in the first year of their study in college level.

Objectives of the study

This study had some objectives which are mentioned as follows;

- a. To assess the students' competence level in reading comprehension
- b. To compare the competence level between boys and girls in reading comprehension
- c. To suggest some pedagogical implication of the study based on analysis and interpretation of data collected from the study.

Methodology

This study was basically worked out in survey research design and used only the primary data collected from the field. The field areas were the two constituent education campuses of Kathmandu valley where 100 students were taken as samples. Among the total 100 samples, 60 were taken from one campus and 40 were taken from the other. The samples were selected on the basis of quota sampling procedure because the total number of students in the first campus was greater than the total number of students in the second one. In the same way, the total number of girls was greater than the total number of boys in faculty of education. It was found that the ratio of girls and boys was also around 60:40 so, the sample was selected in the same proportion. The tools for the study were the two types of test items along with two reading passages for reading comprehension. These passages were taken from the prescribed text book of B.Ed. first year compulsory English. From one passage 14 objectives questions were asked as multiple choice items which carried 14 marks only; and from another reading passage 12 subjective questions were asked which carried 36 marks. The full mark of the test was 50 and the time allotted to conduct the test was an hour (60 minutes). Furthermore, the answer key and scoring scheme were developed to check the answers of objective and subjective test items respectively. The answer-sheets provided by the students were checked and score obtained by them were calculated. Applying this process, the students' competence level of reading comprehension had been measured. In the process of collecting data the researcher tried to make a careful consideration of ethical issues. The pre-consent of the informants had been taken seriously and they were made certain that the data obtained from them would not be misused and were used only for the research. Their names, identity and score obtained from the test items would be kept confidential.

Study variables

In this study, the score obtained by the students in subjective test items, objective test items and total score are the dependent variables; and the total number of students, the gender category of students as boys and girls are the independent variables.

Statistical Analysis

The answers of both subjective and objective test items collected from the field were checked by using scoring scheme and answer key respectively. The score (marks) obtained by them were set to enter the computer program and analysis was done. They were illustrated, analyzed, interpreted and then presented with the help of tables. The association between dependent variables (scores obtained by the students in total, subjective and objective test item separately) and independent variable (gender of the students as boys and girls) was assessed via bivariate analysis. Comparing the means of the scores obtained by boys and girls, t-test was used. It presented the statistical significance and Cohen's 'd' was used to measure the effect size. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20.0 for windows) software was used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussion

Overall Reading Competence of B. Ed. First year Students

There were total hundred sample and they were involved in two types of tests items with total 50 full marks. After calculating their results, the description was made in the following ways.

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean |
|------------------------|-----|---------|---------|-------|
| Total score | 100 | 12.00 | 33.00 | 25.03 |
| Valid N (list wise) | 100 | | | |

Table 1: Maximum, minimum and average (mean) of total score of students

The table 1 shows that out of 50 full marks the average mark obtained by the students was 25.03 which was calculated as mean. The percentage of average score was 50.06%. It shows that the average mark obtained by the students of B.Ed. first year was around 50% and it was not satisfactory because majority of the students did not obtain the score of higher second division in their reading comprehension. The highest score obtained by the students was 33 out of fifty full marks. That score was obtained by two students; they were one boy and one girl. They obtained 66% score which was calculated as the sum total of these two test items. Their score was satisfactory because they secured first division score in overall reading comprehension. In the same way, only one student obtained 12 marks out of fifty full marks which were also calculated from both subjective and objective test items. That was the lowest score in the group and it was obtained by a girl. Her score was below the pass mark because she only obtained 24% where the pass mark is 35%. The score obtained by other students fluctuated between 12 and 33. It shows that the overall reading competence level of B.Ed. first year students was not excellent. They have to study better for the improvement of their competence level in reading comprehension in the future. The overall reading competence (proficiency of reading) of B.Ed. first year students is presented in table2 below.

Total score obtained by students:(Full Marks 50)

| Marks Obtained | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| 12. | 1 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| 16. | 2 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 3.0 |
| 17. | 2 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 5.0 |
| 18. | 4 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 9.0 |
| Valid 19. | 4 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 13.0 |
| 20. | 7 | 7.0 | 7.0 | 20.0 |
| 21. | 3 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 23.0 |
| 22. | 5 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 28.0 |
| 23. | 6 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 34.0 |

| | | | | |
|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| 24. | 8 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 42.0 |
| 25. | 5 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 47.0 |
| 26. | 8 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 55.0 |
| 27. | 12 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 67.0 |
| 28. | 12 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 79.0 |
| 29. | 4 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 83.0 |
| 30. | 9 | 9.0 | 9.0 | 92.0 |
| 31. | 3 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 95.0 |
| 32. | 3 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 98.0 |
| 33. | 2 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 100.0 |
| | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 2 Overall reading competence level of B.Ed. first year students

Group Statistics

| | sex of the respondent | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------------|-----------------------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Total score | Girls | 60 | 24.7833 | 4.63988 | .59901 |
| | Boys | 40 | 25.4000 | 4.10003 | .64827 |

Total students: 100

Table 3: Mean score and standard deviation of boys and girls

The table 3 shows that the average mark obtained by the boys was 25.4 out of fifty full marks. The average percentage of the score of the boys was 50.8%. In the same way, the girls obtained 24.78 average marks from these two test items and the average percentage obtained by them was 49.56%. The data show that the overall competence level of reading comprehension of the boys was slightly higher than the girls. T-test was used to compare the means of the total competence level of the boys and girls on reading, and to measure the effect size, Cohen's d was used. In calculation, the value of the effect size, 'd' is 0.141 which is weak because the value of Cohen's 'd' fluctuates between (0_0.20). In independent sample test, Levene's test significance level is 0.333, greater than 0.05, the t-value is -0.681, degree of freedom (df) is 98 and significance level (p value) is .497. According to Muijs, D. (2004), "If the variances are equal (Levene's test significance level is greater than 0.05), we can use top rows of values" (p.134). It shows that there is no significant difference between the competence level of boys and girls that is presented in table 4 below.

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|---|------------------------------|------|-------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|---------|
| | | F | Sig. | T | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Total score | Equal variances assumed | .945 | .333 | -.681 | 98 | .497 | -.61667 | .90487 | 2.41235 | 1.17901 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -.699 | 90.444 | .487 | -.61667 | .88265 | 2.37008 | 1.13675 |

Table 4 Leven's Test for Equality of Variances and t-test for Equality of Means

Overall reading competence level in subjective test item

The data show that the average marks obtained by the students of B.Ed. first year in reading comprehension in the subjective test item was 15.49 out of 36 full marks. The percentage of the average marks was only 43.03% which is slightly higher than the pass marks. According to the present examination system of TU, 35% score is the pass mark for the annual students of B.Ed. level.

Among them, only one student obtained 23 marks out of 36 full marks, it was 63.88% and other two students obtained 22, out of one hundred students only four students obtained the first division score (above 60%) in the subjective test item. Among them, only one student obtained 7 out of 36 full marks that was the lowest in the group. That mark was only 19.44% where the pass mark was 35%.The lowest score was also obtained by a girl in the subjective test item. The score obtained by other students fluctuated between 7 and 23. It shows that the score obtained by the students in the subjective test item was not satisfactory. This evidence shows that they must work hard and study better in future to obtain the good results in subjective test item.

Comparison between boys' and girls' achievements in subjective test item

| | sex of the respondent | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| score of subjective test | Girls | 60 | 15.4000 | 3.64622 | .47072 |
| | Boys | 40 | 15.6250 | 3.55677 | .56238 |

Table 5: Comparison between boys' and girls' achievements in subjective test item

The table 5 shows that the average mark obtained by the boys in the subjective test item was 15.63 out of 36 full marks. The average percentage of the mark obtained by them was

43.41%. In the same test item the girls secured only 15.40 score out of 36 full marks that was calculated as mean for average. The average percentage obtained by the girls was 42.78%. It clearly shows that the competence level of reading comprehension of B.Ed. first year students was not excellent. They have to study the texts very carefully to comprehend the course more attentively. The competence level of reading comprehension of the boys was slightly higher than the girls in the subjective test item. To compare the means of the competence level of the boys and girls on reading comprehension from the subjective test, t-test was used. It shows from table six that Levene's test significance level is greater than 0.020. It clarifies that there is no significant variances between the competence level of the boys and the girls in reading comprehension from the subjective test item. The effect size (Cohen's d) is weak because the value of 'd' is 0.0625 which lies between (0- 0.20).

Independent samples test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|---------|---------|
| | F | Sig. | T | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper | |
| score of subjective test | Equal variances assumed | .858 | .356 | -.305 | 98 | .761 | -.22500 | .73707 | 1.68769 | 1.23769 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -.307 | 85.160 | .760 | -.22500 | .73338 | 1.68312 | 1.23312 |

Table six: Leven's Test for Equality of Variances and t-test for Equality of Means

Overall reading competence in objective test item

Among the total one hundred students, the average marks calculated as mean was 9.53 out of 14 full marks. If it is calculated in percentage, they obtained 68.07% marks in average. This means the students of B.Ed. first year had better competence level in objective test item than in subjective test item. The highest score was 12 and lowest score was 5 out of 14 full marks. When we calculated them in percentage, the highest percentage was 85.71% and the lowest was 35.71%. The students who obtained the lowest score in the objective test item also passed that objective test because the pass mark of the theoretical test in B.Ed. level is only 35%. The score obtained by other students fluctuated between 5 (the lowest) and 12 (the highest). The result showed that the score obtained by the students from the objective test item was more satisfactory because all the students secured pass marks in this test item.

Comparison between boys' and girls' achievements in objective test item**Group Statistics**

| | sex of the respondent | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| score of objective test | Girls | 60 | 9.3833 | 1.65797 | .21404 |
| | Boys | 40 | 9.7500 | 1.25576 | .19855 |

Table seven: Comparison between boys' and girls' achievements in objective test item

In this study, it was found that the boys secured 9.75 as the average marks in the objective test item. The full mark of the objective test item was 14 and out of it the average percentage of the score obtained by the boys was 69.64%. In the same test item, the girls obtained only 9.38 marks in average (calculated as mean) which was only 67%. It shows that the average competence level of the boys was 2.64% better or higher than the average competence level of the girls in the objective test item. For comparing the means of the competence level of the boys and the girls in objective test item, t-test was used. For the calculation of the effect size Cohen's 'd' was used. In this calculation, the difference between the score of the boys and the girls seems to be modest effect size because the value of d is 0.25 which is greater than 0.20 and smaller than 0.50. There is no significant difference between the competence level of the boys and the girls because the value of p is 0.237 which is greater than 0.05 and the alternative hypothesis (Equal variances not assumed) was rejected which is presented in table eight.

Independent Samples Test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|--------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| score of objective test | 1.891 | .051 | 1.189 | 89 | .237 | .36667 | .30839 | -.97865 | .24532 |
| qual variance assumed | | | | | | | | | |
| qual variance not assumed | | | 1.256 | 6.325 | .212 | .36667 | .29195 | -.94617 | .21283 |

Table: 8 Levene's test for Equality of variances and t-test for Equality of Means

At the end, I had compared the findings of my study with the findings of three other researchers' studies, two from Nepal and one from the outside of the country. G.C. (2002) carried out a research on **Reading Comprehension Ability of PCL First Year Students**. He compared the mean score of boys and girls in percentage and found that the girls obtained 64.95% and the boys obtained only 63.15% in average. In the same way, Pandey (2016) had studied on **Reading Comprehension Ability of Higher Secondary Level Students** and compared the score obtained by the boys and girls. She concluded that the reading comprehension ability of the girls was better than the boys. In average, the girls obtained 80.03% mean score and the boys obtained 78.78% in totality. Similarly, Oda, A.H. (2018) conducted a research on **Relationship between Gender and Reading Comprehension at College Level** and mentioned his result as, "There are no statistically significant differences between the two groups of gender on three levels of reading (literal, inferential and appreciative), but for 'critical level' females are outperforming males". It shows that the results of my study contrasted with the results of their studies because in their studies they found that the score obtained by the girls was slightly better or higher than the score obtained by the boys; but in my study I found quite contrasting results.

Finding, Conclusion and Reflection

Findings

On the basis of the analysis and interpretation of the data, the result was drawn which shows that the students of B.Ed. first year have average competence level in reading comprehension. They obtained only 50.06% average score which was calculated as total from both subjective and objective test items. In overall competence level, the boys were found slightly better than the girls. The boys obtained 50.8% and the girls obtained 49.56% score in average. It shows that the average score obtained by the boys was 1.24% higher than the girls in the same level. In totality 66% was the highest and 24% was the lowest score obtained by them in reading comprehension. Here, the highest score was obtained by two students; one was a boy and the other was a girl. In the same way, the lowest score was obtained by only one student and she was a girl.

When their competence level of reading comprehension was compared between subjective and objective test items, both boys and girls obtained better or higher score in objective test item than in subjective test item. Here, the boys obtained 69.64% average marks and the girls obtained 67% in the objective test item. In average, 2.64% score was the difference between them. In the case of subjective test item, the students obtained comparatively lower score. The average percentage of the score obtained by them in the subjective test item was only 43.03% where the boys obtained 43.41% and the girls obtained 42.78%. The difference between them was only 0.25% in their average score of the subjective test item. Individually the highest score they obtained in the subjective test item was 63.89% and the lowest was only 19.44%. In the case of objective test item, the highest score was 85.71% and the lowest score was 35.71%. The study showed that the overall competence level of reading comprehension of the girls was slightly lower than the boys. But the evidence showed that the majority of the students who admit and attend the regular classes in faculty of education were the girls.

Conclusion and Reflection

On the basis of the findings of this study, we can conclude that the students who admit in Bachelor's degree in Education are comparatively weaker at reading comprehension in English.

The score obtained by them in subjective test item was lower than the score obtained by them in objective test item. Therefore, the students should be encouraged to be involved in intensive reading. For it, the subject teacher should provide plenty of authentic reading materials to the students and manage different classroom activities in groups as group work, pair work, task-based exercises, project work etc to improve their competence level in reading skill. These activities can be effective for the poor students to develop the higher competence level of reading comprehension in the given texts. They can share the ideas from more intelligent students in comprehending the text. From this kind of teaching strategy, both intelligent and weak students can be benefitted. At our campus level, particularly in faculty of education, the available data show that majority of the students who admit and attend the classes regularly are girls. But this study showed that the competence level in reading comprehension of the girls was lower than the boys so the campus authorities, university and the central and local governments should give more emphasis to them. If the girls have particular problems related to the academic area, the authorities should be responsible and co-operative to minimize their problems. After teaching different kinds of reading texts, the students should be provided with sufficient exercises. They should be asked varieties of questions from the reading texts and their answers of these questions should be checked properly. On the basis of evaluation, the students should be provided necessary feedback effectively. If they commit any errors in their expressions, they should be corrected immediately so that every student will be motivated towards learning. Such activities can be the effective tools to minimize or reduce errors in their future study. At last, I haven't claimed that my study is sufficient, the result of this study is accurate because it was carried out within the short and unfavorable (at the pandemic period of COVID- 19) time on limited sources. Therefore, it is recommended for further research to be conducted by the interested scholars, students, teachers and researchers to find more about the competence level of students in reading comprehension and other problems faced by the students at the campus level. Such studies will be fruitful to the teachers, evaluators, course material developers as well as the policy makers in the days to come.

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