



An Analysis of English Reading Comprehension Performance in Entrance Exams at SBBU University, Pakistan: A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the English reading comprehension abilities of 200 candidates who applied at SBBU University in Pakistan through entrance test. Using a quantitative research approach, the study examines students' reading comprehension exam results to determine performance patterns across literal, inferential, and critical comprehension categories. The results show that Business Administration students outperformed Social Sciences students, with the latter encountering considerable difficulty in higher-order comprehension skills. While female applicants outperformed males somewhat, both genders faced difficulty with inferential and critical reading. The findings underscore the importance of tailored preparatory programs to improve reading competency, particularly advanced comprehension skills, resulting in higher academic outcomes for prospective students.



Introduction

English reading comprehension is aedes as the capacity to read, create meaning out, and evaluate written materials in English. It is critical for language learning and academic accomplishment, especially for children those students who would normally not have English as their first language. Snow (2002) emphasises the relevance of prior knowledge in the reading process, noting that a reader's background knowledge and vocabulary have a substantial impact on their capacity to understand texts. The setting in which reading occurs is also significant. According to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), reading comprehension takes place within a sociocultural framework that both shapes and is shaped by the reader. This viewpoint emphasises the importance of culturally relevant texts and teaching approaches that appeal to various student demographics. Kintsch (1998) found that kids from various demographic origins may encounter significant

obstacles in reading comprehension, necessitating specialised instructional techniques to overcome these discrepancies. Perfetti (2007) emphasises the importance of lexical quality in reading comprehension, suggesting that a reader's ability to understand and manage words is fundamental to comprehending texts. He claims that high-quality lexical representations, which are characterised by rich semantic and phonological knowledge, allow readers to integrate new material with previous knowledge, hence improving comprehension. Reading fluency, in addition to lexical quality and phonological awareness, has been established as an important aspect in understanding. According to Kuhn and Stahl (2003), fluent reading allows readers to devote their cognitive resources on comprehending the text rather than decoding specific words. According to their findings, pupils who read fluently perform better in engaging with and comprehending difficult literature. Further to improve their understanding, effective readers use a variety of tactics including summarising, questioning, and forecasting. Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) emphasise that tactics like as "previewing a text, posing questions, and connecting text to background knowledge" are vital for understanding. According to van den Broek and Kendeou (2017), "prior knowledge is crucial for understanding new information". Readers with relevant previous knowledge are better able to interpret content. Reading comprehension can be divided into three types: Grabe and Stoller (2023), "literal comprehension is the first step in the reading process, allowing readers to grasp the basic content before moving on to more complex interpretations". This fundamental understanding is required for readers to engage with texts in meaningful ways and build higher-order thinking skills. Second inferential comprehension, "inferential comprehension allows readers to construct meaning that is not directly available in the text, enabling them to engage more deeply with the material". This talent is essential for comprehending complex materials and exercising critical thinking. And last type Critical comprehension encourages a more active engagement with the content by enabling readers to not only comprehend the text but also to challenge and evaluate it. This ability is crucial for handling complicated material in both academic and practical settings. Similarly this article is based on reading comprehension on three types on the impact of entry test scoring on the English reading comprehension ability of students from two separate faculties within a university has not received much attention, both generally and specifically in the Pakistani context. As a result, this study filled a gap in the existing literature. From the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University (SBBU), the entrance exam is a critical step for those seeking further education. Despite its relevance, there has been little research on how students do on the reading comprehension component of these tests. This study looks at SBBU students' performance in the reading comprehension component of entrance tests. By analysing test results, it identifies important strengths and weaknesses in fresher students' reading ability, providing evidence-based recommendations to improve academic preparation and drive curriculum design.

Research Methodology

In order to analyse secondary data, this study uses a quantitative research approach. It focuses on the reading comprehension scores of 200 applicants who took the entrance exam at SBBU University in Pakistan. The following is the structure of the research methodology:

Research Design

Finding patterns and trends in academic performance can be accomplished with the help of quantitative methodologies (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2014). Because secondary data analysis is used in this study, the validity and dependability of pre-existing datasets are guaranteed. The

performance disparities between demographic groups are interpreted using statistical tools like regression analysis and ANOVA.

Reading Comprehension Framework

Literal, inferential, and critical comprehension are the three main categories of reading comprehension that are assessed in this study. These classifications are consistent with reading research frameworks that have been established (Grabe & Stoller, 2023). Critical comprehension measures the capacity to critically analyse and appraise textual content, inferential comprehension concentrates on determining implied meanings, and literal comprehension measures the capacity to comprehend information that is expressly given.

Participants

The secondary data used in this study came from SBBU University in Pakistan's official admission exam results records. Literal, inferential, and critical comprehension scores from the English reading comprehension portion were the main focus of the data. A methodical procedure was used to choose the data:

Population and Sampling

200 applicants, grouped by gender and faculty affiliation, who took the entrance tests participated in the study.

Table 1:

Faculty Affiliation	Gender	Number of Students	Percentage
Social Sciences	Male	20	40%
	Female	30	60%
Business Administration	Male	25	50%
	Female	25	50%

Score Range Categorization

Students' scores in the English reading comprehension portion were categorised into predetermined ranges in order to examine performance trends:

Table 2:

Faculty Affiliation	Score Range	Number of Students	Percentage of Faculty
Social Sciences	30-40	50	100%
Business Administration	40-50	30	60%
	51-60	20	40%

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- **Inclusion:** The analysis only took into account results from the English reading comprehension portion. The study's emphasis on literal, inferential, and critical understanding was directly reflected in these ratings.
- **Exclusion:** Results from other admission exam categories, like general knowledge and quantitative reasoning, were not included.

Data Validation

To guarantee correctness and consistency, the statistics were cross-checked against official documents. To preserve participant identities and adhere to ethical study guidelines, anonymisation was used.

Data Analysis

The second and final part of the data analysis section is to discuss the participants' English reading comprehension, measured by their admission exam scores. To find patterns, discrepancies, and possible problems, the analysis was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis involved summarizing the participants' scores based on:

- **Faculty affiliation:** Social Sciences and Business Administration.
- **Score ranges:** Performance categorized into predefined score intervals.
- **Gender differences:** Comparative analysis of male and female participants' performance.

Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions were computed on the entire sample and then on group levels.

Table 3:

Faculty Affiliation	Score Range	Number of Students	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Social Sciences	30-40	50	35	2.5
Business Administration	40-50	30	45	3.2
	51-60	20	55	2.8

Inferential Analysis

The following statistical tests were used to determine if there are significant differences between groups:

- **The Independent Samples t-Test:** compares mean scores between male and female participants in the same faculty.
- **ANOVA (Analysis of Variance):** Applied to compare the mean scores of students from both faculties.

Gender-Based Performance Comparison

Male and female participants' performance discrepancies were explored across faculties. This study shed light on potential gender gaps in reading comprehension scores.

Table 4:

Gender	Faculty	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Male	Social Sciences	34	2.4
Female	Social Sciences	36	2.6
Male	Business Administration	47	3.0
Female	Business Administration	48	3.3

Reading Comprehension Types

The three reading comprehension skills of the participants literal, inferential, and critical were evaluated. Strengths and weaknesses were determined by analysing the scores.

Table 5:

Reading Comprehension Type	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Literal	40	3.1
Inferential	38	3.5
Critical	35	4.0

Performance Trends

The analysis revealed:

- **Social Sciences students:** Concentrated in the 30-40 score range, indicating challenges in higher-level reading comprehension tasks.
- **Business Administration students:** Higher performance, with 40% scoring above 50 marks, showing better inferential and critical comprehension.

Insights and Implications

Performance differences between faculties and genders were brought to light by the analysis. The results point to specific interventions to enhance reading skills, especially for students studying the social sciences and in critical comprehension exercises.

The analysis revealed noteworthy patterns in the reading comprehension abilities of students studying business administration and social sciences:

- **Faculty Performance:** Social Sciences students scored between 30–40 marks, reflecting challenges in advanced reading comprehension. On the other hand, 40% of Business Administration students scored between 51 and 60, demonstrating superior critical and inferential reading abilities.

- **Gender Differences:** Female students outperformed male students slightly in both faculties, but the differences were not statistically significant.
- **Types of Reading Comprehension:** While students scored well in literal comprehension (mean = 40), they did poorly in inferential (mean = 38) and critical (mean = 35) comprehension. This emphasises how important it is to cultivate higher-order reading abilities.

The results highlight the value of focused interventions to enhance inferential and critical comprehension skills, especially for students studying the social sciences.

Challenges in Reading Comprehension

According to earlier research, second-language learners have difficulties that are addressed in this study (Brown, 2007). These difficulties include cognitive burden while digesting complex messages, limited vocabulary, and trouble understanding context. The study's purpose is to identify these problems and propose practical strategies for improving reading proficiency. The examination of pupils' English reading comprehension skills identified a number of issues that must be resolved in order to raise general competency:

Inferential and Critical Reading Difficulties

In contrast to literal comprehension (mean = 40), students performed worse in inferential (mean = 38) and critical comprehension (mean = 35). This implies challenges with critical text evaluation, logical linkage, and implicit meaning comprehension. These difficulties are a sign of either a lack of exposure to advanced reading assignments or a lack of focus on these abilities in earlier schooling.

Faculty-Specific Challenges

Significant difficulties with higher-order reading tasks were highlighted by the concentration of social science students in the 30–40 score range. These results suggest that there may be gaps in the curriculum or that students are not receiving enough intensive instruction in reading comprehension and analysis. Business Administration students, on the other hand, demonstrated variability even though their total performance was greater, with 60% of them receiving scores below 50.

Gender-Based Observations

Overall performance patterns show that both genders struggle to grasp inferential and critical comprehension skills, even though female students did marginally better than male students in both faculties. This emphasises the necessity for all students to get focused instruction in reading skills.

Educational and Preparatory Gaps

The difficulties with advanced reading comprehension could be caused by a lack of exposure to difficult literature, inadequate critical thinking exercise, and a dearth of entrance exam-specific study materials. These problems point to the necessity of improved preparatory courses and faculty-specific initiatives.

Results

The study's findings are based on how well 200 applicants performed on the English reading comprehension portion of the SBBU University entrance tests. The investigation focuses on reading comprehension kinds, gender, and performance trends across faculties.

Faculty-Based Performance

Social Sciences: All 50 students scored between 30–40 marks, with a mean score of 35. This narrow score range suggests challenges in mastering advanced reading comprehension skills.

Business Administration: Among 50 students, 60% (30 students) scored between 40–50 marks, while 40% (20 students) scored between 51–60 marks. The mean score for this group was 48; indicating better performance compared to Social Sciences students.

Gender-Based Performance

Male Students: Male participants across both faculties scored a mean of 37. **Female Students:** Female participants scored slightly higher, with a mean of 40. Although female students showed slightly better performance, the differences were not statistically significant.

Reading Comprehension Types

Literal Comprehension: Students performed best in this category, with a mean score of 40. **Inferential Comprehension:** The mean score was 38, reflecting moderate ability to deduce implicit meanings. **Critical Comprehension:** Students scored the lowest in this category, with a mean score of 35, highlighting difficulties in evaluating and critically analyzing text.

Overall Performance

The overall mean score of the 200 candidates was 40, with performance disparities evident across faculties and comprehension types. Business Administration students outperformed Social Sciences students in all categories

Discussion

The study revealed notable trends in English reading comprehension performance among candidates: **Faculty-Based Performance:** Business Administration students performed better, with higher scores in all comprehension types. Social Sciences students, scoring primarily between 30–40 marks, require targeted support to improve their reading skills. **Reading Challenges:** Students excelled in literal comprehension but struggled with inferential and critical reading, highlighting a need to focus on developing higher-order comprehension skills. **Gender Trends:** Female students performed slightly better than males, but the difference was not significant, suggesting shared challenges across genders. **Implications:** The findings emphasize the need for enhanced preparatory programs that focus on inferential and critical reading skills, especially for Social Sciences students.

Conclusion

This study examines the performance of students at SBBU University in the English reading comprehension section of entrance exams. The findings highlight the need for focused interventions to improve reading comprehension, particularly inferential and critical comprehension skills. By addressing these gaps, educational institutions can better support prospective students and enhance their academic success.

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