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## Measuring and Increasing Reading Speed and Comprehension in UG Students

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### **Abstract:**

This paper deals with measuring reading speed and reading comprehension level of undergraduate students. Learning to read is one of the most essential skills UG students need to have for excelling in the competitive world. This study helps to identify the student's struggle to comprehend the text to provide them assistance to improve reading skill. Participants were from B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc., groups. Results showed that even though the students are in higher level of their formal education that is UG course, they are lacking ability to comprehend and they need lots of practice in reading and they need to acquire good vocabulary. This study focuses on the importance of reading comprehension and reading speed and suggests measures to improve them.

**Keywords:** Reading comprehension, reading speed, reading struggles, techniques.

### **Introduction**

Reading is the basic literary skill that promotes language proficiency. Reading skills involve comprehending and recognizing the written symbols and words. In order to read well one should have knowledge of language, knowledge of written system and the ability to understand and interpret the given text. One reads to obtain information from several sources like books, journals, scripts posted on the web, advertisements, letters, reports, news papers for several purposes According to Widdowson (1978) and Bru'gelmann (1985) are:

- The perception ability of the text context
- The ability of isolating and retrieving a specific item of information from the text within a predefined time period
- The type of the text, that is, whether it is an advertisement, a story or something else
- The concentration and recollection abilities
- The possible increase of the reading speed

Reading is an interaction between text and the reader. Comprehension is the very essence of reading. The reader draws information from the text basing on her/his knowledge, purpose of reading and nature of the text. One needs to have phonological awareness, orthographic

awareness and knowledge of vocabulary in order to comprehend the text. Few types of reading comprehension are -

- **Global Comprehension:** Holistic understanding of the passage possible.
- **Inferential Comprehension:** Looking into detail parts of the passage and think critically.
- **Evaluative Comprehension:** Assessment of quality of an article, script or a piece of writing which involves critical judgment of language proficiency, organization of ideas and effectiveness.
- **Local or Factual Comprehension:** Understanding the use of vocabulary with precise meaning suitable to the context; locating facts that supports observations and ideas. It enables the reader to contextualize the message.

English is a foreign language and usually not spoken at home. Therefore the learning language is limited to classroom. Seldom students pay attention to improve reading skill, it needs a revamp as the UG students soon will have to appear for many competitive tests either to pursue professional education or to qualify themselves to study or work abroad. One of the important prerequisite to qualify such tests is ability to read faster and answer the comprehension tests in less than a minute. Reading speed refers to the rate at which words are read. More reading in less time techniques help the students to relate directly to better vocabulary and comprehension and it will also improve writing and speaking in English. Skinner (1998) states that, “motivating students to read requires the application of classroom management methods. Students may become aware of and practice responsible self-monitoring of their learning”.

General classification of three levels of reading skills related to the academic level of the student reader. Reading speed is measured in words per minute.

- a. Level one (School level): Reading speed 100 words per minute (WPM)
- b. Level two (college graduates) : Reading speed 150-200 WPM
- c. Level three (Post graduates and above): Reading speed 250 WPM

**Participants:** Participants to assess reading speed and reading comprehension in this study were about hundred randomly selected UG students from B.A., B.Com and B. Sc groups.

**Procedure:**

Two speed reading tests and two reading comprehension tests were administered to the randomly selected group of UG students. The first test was conducted to test their level of speed reading and comprehension and the second test was conducted after orienting the students about the importance of acquiring reading skill, pointing faulty methods of reading and giving reading techniques to the students. The result was recorded and analyzed and suggestions were given for further improvement.

**i. Speed reading test - I**

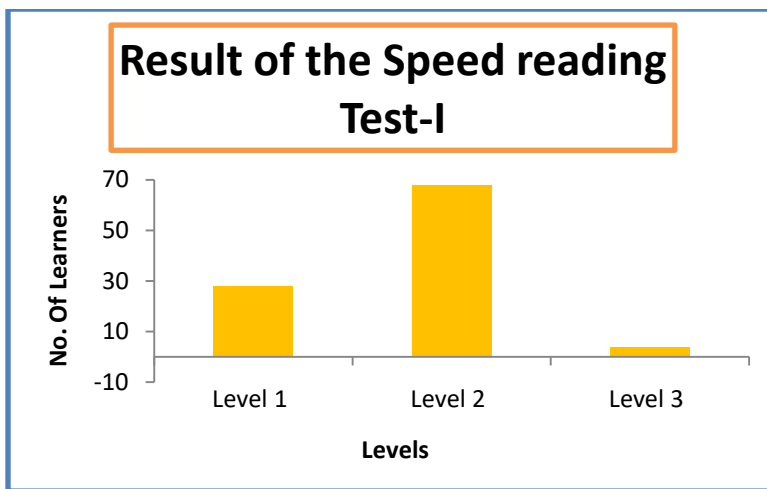
Students were administered a test with a passage of 720 words. Time taken to read the text was measured and recorded. Their ability to read WPM (words per minute) was measured using the following formula

$$\text{No. of words} \div \text{time taken for reading}$$

The score was recorded and the students were oriented and given practice to use speed reading techniques and to avoid faulty methods of reading.

**ii. Result of the Speed reading Test –I**

Measurement levels of speed reading	No. of Students in each level	Percentage
Level 1 (100 – 150 WPM)	28	28 %
Level 2 ( 150 – 250 WPM)	68	68 %
Level 3 ( 250 and more WPM)	04	04 %
Total	100	



**Figure 1: Graph showing the result of Speed Reading Test – I**

The above graphical presentation shows the result of speed reading test administered to the hundred undergraduate students of B.A, B.Com and B. Sc. They were give text of 720 words and time was recorded while they read the text. It was found that 28 students out of hundred were in

level one who were able to read less than 150 words per minute. 68 students were able to read up to 250 WPM whose reading level was found to be in level two and four students were able to read little more than 250 WPM whose reading level was found to be in level three.

**Identified Reading Faults:** Reading faults of the students were identifies as

- ✓ Poor eye movement
- ✓ Slow reading tempo
- ✓ Regression
- ✓ Poor reading stamina
- ✓ Vocalization

**Techniques to improve reading faster:**

- Pointer technique
- Eye span stretch technique
- Phase reading exercise
- Fixations
- Return swing

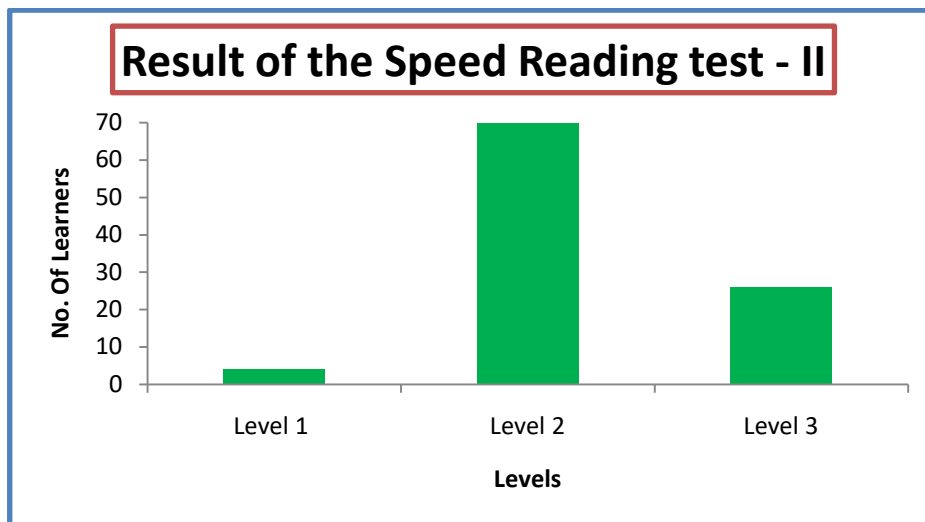
The second test was conducted after training them with techniques to improve their speed of reading.

**iii. Speed reading test - II**

After giving the techniques, the students were asked to read the same text and record the time, following the techniques given to them and the score was recorded.

**iv. Result of the Speed Reading Test – II**

<b>Levels</b>	<b>No. of Students in each level</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Level 1 (100 – 150 WPM)	04	04 %
Level 2 ( 150 – 250 WPM)	70	68 %
Level 3 ( 250 and more WPM)	26	28 %
Total	100	

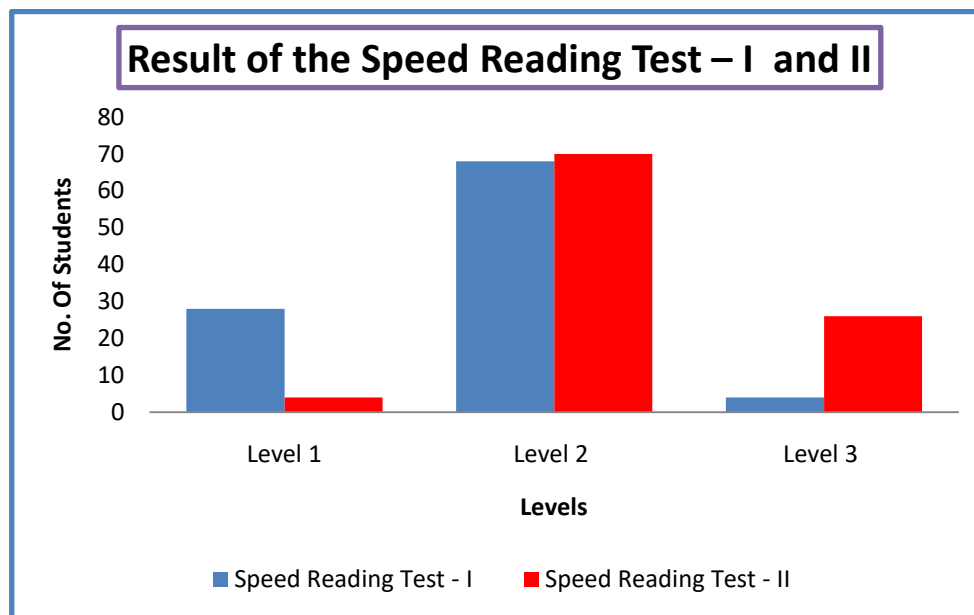


**Figure 2: graph showing the result of Speed Reading Test - II**

The above graphical presentation shows the result of second speed reading test administered to the same hundred undergraduate students of B.A, B.Com and B. Sc. They were give text of 720 words and time was recorded while they read the text. It was found that 4 students out of hundred were in level one who were able to read less than 150 words per minute. 68 students were able to read up to 250 WPM whose reading level was found to be in level two and twenty eight students were able to read little more than 250 WPM whose reading level was found to be in level three.

**Table: Results of speed reading rest I and II**

Levels	Speed Reading Test - I	Speed Reading Test - II
Level 1 (100 – 150 WPM)	28	04
Level 2 ( 150 – 250 WPM)	68	70
Level 3 ( 250 and more WPM)	04	26
Total	100	100



**Figure 3: Graphical presentation of comparison of Speed reading test I and II**

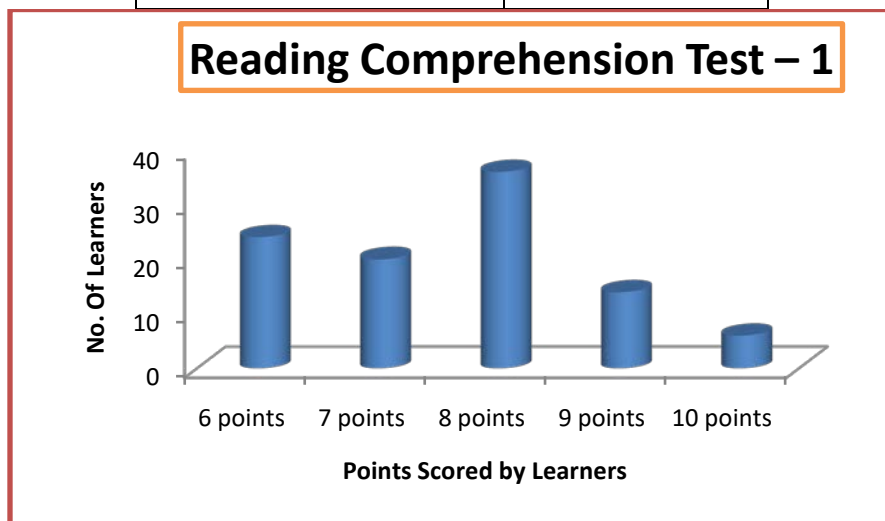
The above graphical presentation shows result of first and second speed reading test administered to the hundred undergraduate students of B.A, B.Com and B. Sc. They were give text of 720 words and time was recorded while they read the text. It was found that 28 students out of hundred were in level one who were able to read less than 150 words per minute in the test – I and the number came down to 4 in the test – 2 which shows considerable improvement after applying techniques . 68 students were able to read up to 250 WPM in test – I and in test – II the number reached to 70 whose reading level was found to be in level two. There is only slight variation in from 68 to 70 but the fact is that those who were in level one in teat – I reached to level two and those who were in level two reached to level three. It was found only 4 students were in level three in test – I and it reached to 26 in test – II which shows improvement after applying the techniques.

**v. Reading Comprehension test - I**

Reading comprehension test was administered and the students were given a paragraph with 403 words with maximum time period of three minutes to read and answer the questions that followed. The score was recorded.

**vi. Result of Reading Comprehension Test – 1**

No. of points scored by Students	No. of Students
6 points	24
7 points	20
8 points	36
9 points	14
10 points	6
Total	100



**Figure 4: Graphical presentation of Reading comprehension test - I**

The above graph presents the result of reading comprehension test – I with 403 words with maximum time period of three minutes administered to UG students from B.A., B.Com., and B. Sc. Out of hundred students 24 students scored 6 points, 20 students scored 7 points, 36 students scored 8 points, 14 students scored 9 points and 6 students scored ten on ten points. It was found that though the students are in higher level of their formal education that is UG course, they are lacking ability to comprehend and they need lot of practice and acquire good vocabulary. Second reading comprehension test was conducted after training with techniques.

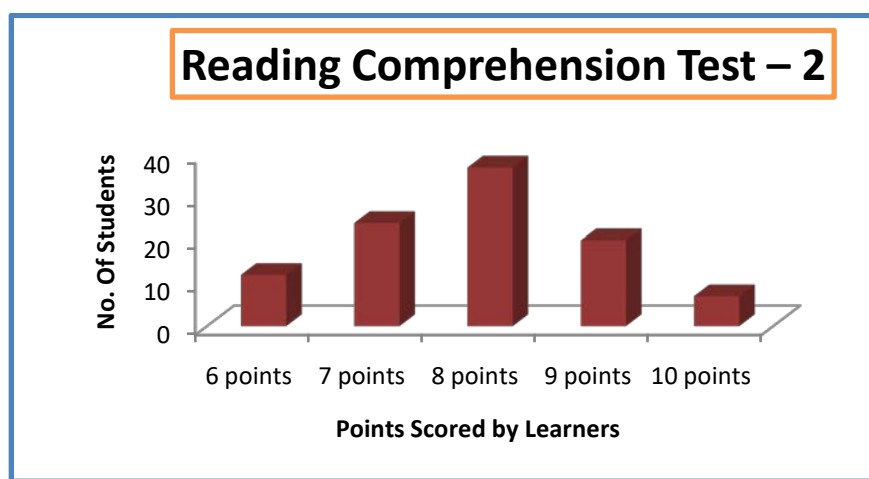
**vii. Reading Comprehension test – II**

The students were given a paragraph with 403 words with maximum time period of three minutes to read and answer the questions that followed, using the given techniques. The score was recorded.



**viii. Result of Reading Comprehension Test – II**

Marks	No. of Students
6 points	12
7 points	24
8 points	37
9 points	20
10 points	7
Total	100

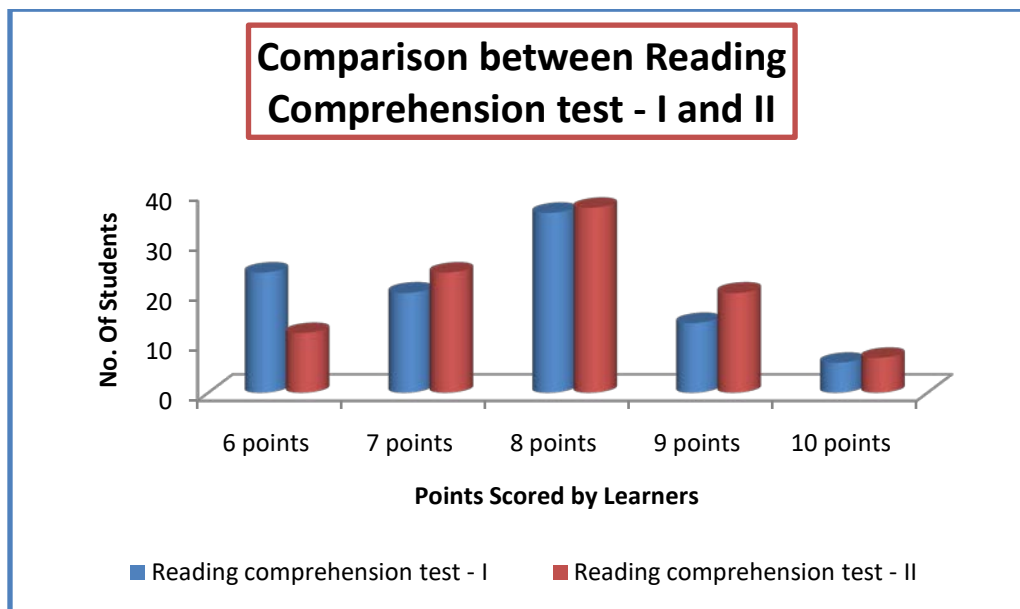


**Figure 5: Graphical presentation of Reading comprehension test - II**

The above graph presents the result of reading comprehension test – I with 403 words with maximum time period of three minutes administered to UG students from B.A., B.Com., and B. Sc. Out of hundred students 12 students scored 6 points, 28 students scored 7 points, 37 students scored 8 points, 18 students scored 9 points and 6 students scored ten on ten points. It was found that though the students are in higher level of their formal education that is UG course, they are lacking ability to comprehend and they need lot of practice and acquire vocabulary.

**Table: Results of reading comprehension test I and II**

Marks	Reading comprehension test - I	Reading comprehension test - II
6 points	24	12
7 points	20	24
8 points	36	37
9 points	14	20
10 points	6	7
Total	100	100



**Figure 6: Graphical presentation of comparison of reading comprehension test I and II**

The above graph presents the comparable result of reading comprehension test – I and II with 403 words with maximum time period of three minutes administered to UG students from B.A., B.Com., and B. Sc. Out of hundred students 24 students scored 6 points in the test – I and 12 students score 6 points in test- II, 20 students scored 7 points in test I and 24 in test II, 36 students scored 8 points in test – I and 37 in test - II, 14 students scored 9 points in test – I and 20 in test – II and 6 students scored ten on ten points in test I and 7 students scored ten on ten in

test - II. Even though there is slight improvement in the comprehension level of the Students, there is a need for persistent practice to acquire the reading skill.

### **Learning Outcome**

1. Students understand that reading is one of the most basic skills which is not acquired overnight but need to work at it systematically.
2. Students become aware of their reading speed and try to improve their reading speed and comprehension following the techniques given. They realize that speed reading is not at the cost of comprehension as they need to go on hand in hand.
3. Students grasp the importance of inculcating reading habit everyday which will help them to improve reading skill.
4. Students feel the need of putting more systematic, conscious control and energy in their reading.
5. Students realize that persistence and determination in acquiring reading skill will determine their success in future career.
6. Students become conscious that acquiring reading skill will determine their success in competitive exams like IELTS, TOEFL, Civil services and other CETs.
7. Students realize that reading has to be purposeful.
8. Students realize with speed reading they can also enhance their ability to comprehend faster.

### **Suggestions:**

The students were given following suggestions to follow to improve the reading speed.

1. In this age of smart phones with twitters and face books Students hardly give any time for reading. They are suggested to make time for reading every day and cultivate the habit of reading newspapers, periodicals, journals and books.
2. It is very important for Students at UG level need to keep abreast of the latest information in order to be on top of new developments and opportunities. All this information is in written form and reading is only the key to access it even though television, radio and you tube provide some information but very often it is only at the superficial level. Therefore it is time to improve reading skill.
3. Emphasize on using techniques rather than trying to push up reading speed.
4. Concentrate on comprehension while practicing speed reading.
5. Avoid word by word reading as reading phrases improves their reading speed.
6. Develop Vocabulary in order to read with better comprehension.
7. Learn to read for main ideas rather than aimless reading.
8. Improve reading flexibility with concentration.
9. Discuss with friends who read the same passage for better comprehension.

10. Self check constantly the level of comprehension while reading. In case of low comprehension, slow down the speed.

### **Conclusion**

This study was taken up in order to assess and assist students to increase speed reading and reading comprehension of the students at UG level. The result show that the students who are in higher level of their formal education that is UG course, are lacking ability to comprehend and they need lot of practice in reading and make efforts to acquire vocabulary. There is also slight improvement in the comprehension level of the students between two tests administered. However there is a need for persistent practice to acquire the reading skill following the techniques to improve their reading skill. The present study demonstrates how applied research can enhance our understanding of problems faced by students in acquiring reading skill.

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