Does Speed Reading Improve College Student’s Retention Level and Comprehension?

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INTRODUCTION

College students may become overwhelmed with the amounts of reading required for school. Speed reading may improve retention levels and comprehension and thus help students become more organized, successful, and motivated.

Justification

Teaching students how to speed read could save time and increase comprehension and retention of the subject. When students learn how to speed read, which is focusing on important words, the fluency of their reading is developed. As this occurs, there is more comprehension, better understanding, and more enjoyment from reading. The student will have less stress and still gain the knowledge needed to be successful. There is a scaffolding effect that occurs in learning new information as the knowledge obtained by reading faster expands the student’s schema. The comprehension level should rise as only the important words are the focus. There is no time or effort spent in trying to understand inconsequential words. This makes reading new material more enjoyable, manageable, and helps with organizational skills. College students often get overwhelmed with reading assignments and study deadlines so organization and management of time are important considerations.

Background Literature

Recent research stated in the article, Speed Reading Courses and their Effect on Reading Authentic Texts: A Preliminary Investigation, indicates that improving reading skills and specifically, the speed of reading may increase retention and comprehension levels. Readers must have fluency for successful comprehension. Speed reading is considered an activity that meets fluency development conditions. Reading faster is linked to greater comprehension, better understanding, and greater enjoyment from reading (Macalister, 2010).

The article, Text skimming: The Process and Effectiveness of Foraging through Text Under Time Pressure, discusses the importance of speed reading. Speed reading occurs when the focus is on important parts of the text and readers ignore less valuable parts of the text. Today, with the rise of the
Web and the ready availability of source documents, readers need a way to cope when there is too much text to read and not enough time available. In order to be effective, readers must identify and concentrate on the most important parts of the text (Duggan, Payne, 2009).

The article, Reading Faster, points out that learners need to be able to make the best use of what they already know at every stage of their learning. It has been suggested that reading too slowly can have negative effects on comprehension. (Nation, 2009).

In conclusion, the research articles quoted above discuss the research done to show speed reading helps with fluency which in turn allows for better retention levels and comprehension. Speed reading also helps in coping with large amounts of material and improves scaffolding of information.

**Statement of the Research Hypothesis**

Does speed reading improve college student’s retention level and comprehension? Students who learn to speed read will be able to comprehend more material and retain the information better than students who do not speed read. This study is focused on whether or not the skill of speed reading improves retention levels and comprehension for college students.

**Definitions**

Speed Reading—to read faster than normal, especially by acquired techniques of skimming and controlled eye movements (Dictionary.reference, 2011).

Retention Level—the act or power of remembering things; memory (Dictionary.reference, 2011).

Comprehension—capacity of the mind to perceive and understand; power to grasp ideas; ability to know (Dictionary.reference, 2011).

**METHODS**

**Research Design**

New undergraduate college students will be asked to participate in a speed reading experiment. There will be two groups of students chosen for the experiment with 30 students in each group. One
group is the experimental group who will receive a treatment. The other group is the control group and will receive no treatment.

**Subjects**

All 500 new incoming undergraduate college students will be asked if they would like to be part of a reading study which includes compensation for participation. All those interested will be asked to supply their name for the study and will be selected randomly. All names of students who want to participate will be put into a hat and sixty names will be chosen. Sixty incoming college students ages 18-54, traditional and non-traditional students, male and female with a minimum high school level reading ability will be selected from a University campus located in Utah County. These sixty students will be divided into two groups of thirty students each. This is a representative sample of the accessible population.

**Instruments and/or Instrumentation**

The experimental group will be given two timed, reading comprehension tests with one at the beginning of the study and one at the end of the study. The control group will be given the same two timed, reading comprehension tests also at the beginning and the end of the study. The criterion-related evidence of validity will be the relationship between the scores obtained in the beginning of the study for each group and the scores at the end of the study for each group, using two different instruments. The second test is the standard criterion to check instrument validity. The correlation coefficient, also known as the validity coefficient, will be figured to indicate the relationship that exists between the scores each individual obtains on two instruments.

The reliability method used will be the test-retest method which consists of administering the same test twice to the same group after a time interval has elapsed. The errors of measurement will be addressed by figuring the reliability coefficient showing the relationship between scores of the same individual. The time interval between the two testings will be reported.
Procedures

The experimental group will be given a speed reading workshop lasting one hour with one week to study using the new techniques. They will then be given a timed, reading comprehension test. The control group will be given the same timed, reading comprehension test with no treatment. At the end of the study, each group will be given another timed, reading comprehension test. If the student completes the study, they will receive compensation of $100.00. The study will take place over an eight week period. The students who received the treatment will continue to use the speed reading techniques practicing for one hour each week. The student who did not receive the treatment will be given reading material and told to practice reading for one hour each week. There will be eight hours of participation with one hour per week.

Threats to Internal Validity

Subject characteristics. Subject characteristics that may affect this study are the post treatment reading ability of students in the two groups which is probably related to initial reading ability. This will be controlled by random selection and making sure there is no subject selection bias.

Mortality. Mortality may affect this study because those subjects who drop out may have lower scores. This will be controlled by making every effort to obtain cooperation for completion of the study.

Instrument decay and/or data collector bias. Instrument decay and/or data collector bias may affect this study but will be controlled by training implementers in administration of the tests and keeping them ignorant as to which treatment group is being tested.

Regression. Regression is unlikely to affect this study because subjects will not be selected on the basis of extreme scores. This threat will probably not affect groups differently.

Subject attitude. Subject attitude could affect scores if the subjects believe that they are receiving special attention. This positive effect, resulting from increased attention, is referred to as the Hawthorne Effect. Whether or not the treatment is a novelty should be evaluated. They may perform better because of the novelty rather than the specific treatment. The best way to control this is to keep
from emphasizing the importance of the study. Introduce it as being more about gathering information than an actual experiment.

**Implementation.** Implementation might affect the final scores due to the method of teaching used by the instructor for the experimental group. The researcher will observe and monitor the instruction to make sure the method of instruction is clear, concise and administered as intended.

**Proposed Data Analysis**

The scores will be plotted in a frequency polygon. All the scores will be listed in order of size and then tally how many students received each score. The scores will be plotted on the horizontal axis and the frequencies will be plotted on the vertical axis at equal intervals. Connecting the dots will show the line. We will figure the mean and median from the test scores. Adding all the scores together and dividing by the number of scores will give us the mean. The median is the point below and above which 50 percent of the scores fall. It is the midpoint.

We will conduct a T-test for independent means using the statistical program SPSS, which is the Data Editor, to compare the mean scores of these two different groups. SPSS reports the observed t-value, the degrees of freedom, and the two-tailed value. Also reported are the differences between the means, the standard error of the difference, and the confidence interval for the difference between means.

**Null hypothesis:** Speed reading mean method A = Speed reading mean method B

**Research hypothesis:** Speed reading mean of method A > Speed reading mean of method B.

SPSS will produce a summary table showing the results of the analysis. If there is a large number, 5.88 points or above, in the mean difference box then this means that the difference in means is statistically significant. We will figure the standard deviation with the following formula: 

\[ SD = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(X - X)^2}{n}} \]

If the scores are more spread out and the deviation scores are greater, then there is a larger standard deviation. If the scores are closer to the mean
and less spread out then there is a smaller standard deviation. Final exam is the dependent variable. Grade on the final exam is the final score.
References


http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/speed+reading

http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/retention

http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/comprehension