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Impact of speed reading training on reading speeds and comprehension skills of secondary school students

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to study the impact of speed reading training on reading speeds and comprehension skills of secondary school students. The research has been conducted on 40 students receiving education at the level of secondary school 8th grade in Trabzon province. Experimental pattern with single group pretest–posttest was applied in the study. First of all, reading speeds and comprehension levels of the students were determined during the research, and then 20 hours of speed reading training was provided to the students every other day for 5 days. Before applying the last test after the training, 2 weeks of time was given to the students in order to repeat the exercises. Reading speed and comprehension levels of the students were detected with two separate texts and reading comprehension questions related to these texts at the start and finish of the process. Data were analysed with dependent/independent groups *t*-test and Pearson correlation coefficient on SPSS 20.

Keywords: Comprehension level, reading speed, reading training, secondary school.

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1. Introduction

Today, the most frequently used language skill in reaching rapidly developing information is reading. Obtaining the information that is rapidly increasing day to day requires the speed of reading and the level of comprehension to increase as well. It can be said that the information can be reached in a short time and more effectively with an increase in this way (Durukan, 2013). On the other hand, the most effective language skill that feeds the thinking skill is reading, and it can be thought that the increase in the speed and comprehension level of reading skill will impact the thinking skill positively.

Reading is described as perception of printed or written words through sensory organs, understanding and comprehending these words; a mental and intellectual act, having a communicative activity with printed and written symbols, a process of receiving, interpreting and reacting that consists of several perceptual and cognitive processes. In this context, reading comprehension skills can be defined as all of the processes in understanding the message of the text read by subjecting the information inputs provided by the 'reading' activity to the mental processes (Saracaloglu & Karasakaloglu, 2007, p. 2).

Reading and writing training, which starts in the first year of elementary school and is the basis of education and training that the student will receive throughout their life; It is the basic element that enables students who can read fast and accurate, interpret what they read properly, make good verbal and written explanation to be successful in their whole school life (Gocer, 2000, p. 23). Reading fast and comprehensibly is a particularly critical factor that affects the success of students. Students who can read accurately and rapidly, understand what they are reading, have a wide vocabulary, can use their language well learn easier and succeed more (Celenk & Caliskan, 2004, p. 20). According to a research conducted on 1,324 Finnish 9th graders shows that the slow readers had low scores only in reading-related motivation. Poor comprehenders and poor readers reported low motivation also in math and science, as well as higher level of burnout and lower school enjoyment than typical readers. The findings were similar for boys and girls (Torppa, Vasalampi, Eklund, Sulkunen & Niemi, 2020). These studies reveal the importance of speed reading on other subjects and school motivation.

Developing world conditions has made it compulsory for people in our era to have some qualifications. Rapid and effective reading skill is one of those qualifications. According to Coskun (2002, p. 53), abundance of the works to be read and lack of time against this has led people to scientific studies in order to read faster and more effective. With these studies, fast and effective reading techniques were developed by determining the working system in the eye and brain during reading (Dedebali, 2008, p. 2). According to Gunes (2009, p. 5), speed reading is not just skimming and it is a reading that is done by understanding and structuring in the mind. Speed reading training is summarised in three concepts: Visual swiftness (reading speed), understanding and structuring in the mind.

Generally, number of words and letters read in a minute are measured to detect the reading speed. The best method to measure reading speed is to consider number of letters read in a minute as the criterion, according to Gunes (1999). That is because lengths of words can differ in different texts. For example, although they are both single words in Turkish, while the word 'at' consists of 2 letters, 'kahvaltilik' consists of 11 letters. For this reason, focusing on number of letters instead of number of words provides more realistic results in detecting reading speed.

Another important factor in the process of reading, like reading speed, is reading comprehension. Various abilities, such as relating words, sentences and paragraphs, comprehension, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and interpretation, are the subjects of reading comprehension (Coskun, 2002, p. 245). Several studies (Akcamete, 1990; Carver, 1982; Coskun, 2002; Dokmen, 1994; Durukan, 2013; Harris & Sipay, 1990; Sticht, 1984; Tazebay, 1995) have been conducted both domestically and abroad to determine whether there is a relationship between 'reading speed' and 'reading comprehension', two important factors seen as important in the reading process. Relational findings (positive and negative) in different aspects between reading speed and reading comprehension skill were obtained

in these studies. In addition to this, there are studies (Bozan, 2012; Dedebali, 2008; Ilter, 2018; Kacar, 2015; Mergen, 2019; Soysal, 2015) examining the impact of speed reading applications on reading speed and comprehension skills at different grade levels in literature. It was concluded in these aforementioned studies that speed reading applications positively impact either one or both of reading speed and comprehension skills.

In addition to reaching information rapidly, necessity of students to read and answer central exam (HSEE, HES, PPSE, APPEEE etc.) questions in a short time has also led to the need for developing the skills of speed reading and accurate comprehension. Thus, the demand for speed reading training has been increasing in recent years. Eigth grade students were chosen as study group in this research. It is because that the central exam (HSEE) the students will take at the end of the 8th grade requires them to rapidly read, think and understand the questions. Therefore, it was thought that the students would be more motivated to participate in the applications and that would increase the reliability of the measurement results at the end of the application.

The answer to 'What is the impact of speed reading training on reading speeds and reading comprehension skills of the students?' problem sentence was sought in this study. The reason for this research to be conducted even though there are similar studies in previous years: increase in demand to speed reading trainings, the absence of a sample of students to take central examinations in previous research studies and to see the change in reading speeds and comprehension of the students who previously did readings mainly on printed materials but are now reading on digital media.

2. Method

In this section, information about the model of the research, study group, collection and analysis of data are provided.

2.1. Research model

Experimental pattern with single group pre-test–post-test was used in the study. After applying pre-test to the students, 20 hours of speed reading training was provided to the students every other day, 4 hours a day, for 5 days. After the training, students were given a 2 week break in order to reinforce the exercises and reinforce the speed reading skills and then post-test was applied. This way, a total of 4 weeks passed between the pre-test and post-test. During the 20 hour speed reading training, exercises to accelerate eye movements (Appendix 1), recognising and picking words in the text (Appendix 2), speed reading and comprehending the text (Appendix 3) were included. After comprehension exercises, there are questions to understand the text. Some of the applications were conducted individually while some were conducted in a group. Both informative and narrative text types were included in text interpretation exercises provided to the students. Although past researches indicates that two factors play a major role in how well the students can understand a text: adequate vocabulary and background knowledge (Mousavian & Siahpoosh, 2018, p. 95), in this study this situation was ignored. The model of the research is indicated in Table 1:

Table 1. Experimental model

Group	Pre-test	Procedure		Post-test
Experiment	1. Speed test 2. Reading comprehension test (RCT)	Speed reading and comprehension exercises	2 week break	1. Speed test 2. RCT

2.2. Study group

The study was conducted with 40 students in Trabzon province going to 8th grade. Forty students were found to be sufficient since speed reading trainings could not be done with more crowded groups. Twenty of the students are girls, 20 of them are boys. The students who participated in the study, voluntarily participated in speed reading training. The reason for this is that the students will be taking the HSEE at the end of 8th grade. This condition positively affected the student's motivation of speed reading.

2.3. Collecting of data

Two main data were collected in the study: Reading speed of the students and their reading comprehension skills. Reading speeds of the students were measured by the time they spend reading the text in seconds and their comprehension skills were measured by multiple choice questions prepared towards the texts. These two measurements were conducted both as pre-test and post-test.

Two texts (in essay and story types) and 20 multiple choice questions related to these texts were used to collect data on students' reading speeds and comprehension levels. Reading texts and questions were taken from Gunes's (2009) work called *Hizli Okuma ve Anlami Yapilandirma [Speed reading and meaning configuration].* Text called 'Dost Kazanma Sanati [The Art of Winning Friends]' consisted of 6,240 letters, 'Oglumuz [Our Son]' consisted of 4,370 letters. The length and structure of the words and sentences in the texts were mostly simple qualification and there were some elliptical structures and foreign words. Therefore, the texts were understandable in general. Multiple choice tests with 20 questions were applied after two texts. Text comprehension questions were among the steps of information, comprehension and analysis. The fact that the Gunes (2009) is an experienced person working on speed reading and understanding in Turkish and that the tool she developed has been used for many years increases the validity and reliability of the measurement tools.

Moreover, an evaluation table was provided after the text and questions in the aforementioned work (Gunes, 2009). A scoring is made with the reader's reading time of the two texts and the percentage of correct answers given to the comprehension questions via this table. According to the evaluation table, the lowest point a reader can get is 4, while the highest is 24. Those who received 6 or less points are classified as 'lower level', between 7 and 10 are 'below mean level', between 11 and 14 are 'mean level', between 15 and 18 are 'above mean level', between 19 and 22 are 'good level', and those who received 23 or higher are 'very good level' readers.

Data of the research was collected by the researcher during the training. How many seconds did the student spend reading the text after finishing it and percentage of correct answers after answering the text comprehension questions were recorded. In order to increase the reliability of the research, the researcher has paid maximum attention to avoid any errors and problems at this stage.

2.4. Analysis of the data

Reading speed of the students with second unit (second), reading comprehension levels with the percentage of correct answers (%), evaluation of reading speed-comprehension level relationship was analysed with point unit. Students' reading time of two texts and number of correct answers were taken as total. Difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of students' was analysed with dependent groups *t*-test, difference according to the gender was analysed with independent groups *t*-test. Furthermore, the relationship between the reading speed and reading comprehension level of the students' was evaluated with Pearson correlation coefficient. Level of significance was taken as 0.05 in the statistics.

3. Findings

Pre-test reading speeds, comprehension levels, evaluation score average and independent groups *t*-test results of the students' according to gender variable are indicated in Table 2:

Table 2. Pre-test comparison according to gender variable

	Girl (*n*: 20)	Boy (*n*: 20)	Average	Significant difference (*p*)
Reading Speed (second)	314	326	320	0.256
Comprehension level (%)	68	66.5	67.25	0.560
Evaluation Score	12.2	11.7	12	0.484

The average reading time of a text with 10,610 letters is 314 seconds for the girl students, while it is 326 seconds for the boy students according to pre-test results. The average level of comprehension of the texts of girl students was 68%; the average level of comprehension of boy students was 66.5%. The average of girl students was 12.2; boy students' was 11.7 in the evaluation score (between Min.: 4, Max.: 24 points) calculated based on the relationship between reading speed and comprehension level.

As can be observed in Table 2, there is no statistically significant difference in terms of reading speed ($p > 0.05$), comprehension level ($p > 0.05$) and evaluation scores ($p > 0.05$) of the students in the pre-test based on gender variable. Average reading speed of the students was detected as 320 seconds (5 minutes 20 seconds); average comprehension level as 67.25% and average evaluation score as 12 (between Min.: 4, Max.: 24 points) in the pre-test. It can be said that the students are 'mean level' readers in the pre-test according to the average evaluation score.

Post-test reading speeds, comprehension levels, evaluation score average and independent groups *t*-test results of the students' according to gender variable are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Post-test comparison according to gender variable

	Girl (*n*: 20)	Boy (*n*: 20)	Average	Significant difference (*p*)
Reading Speed (second)	164	182	173	0.197
Comprehension level (%)	87.5	85	86.25	0.450
Evaluation Score	21.8	21.1	21.5	0.378

The average reading time of a text with 10,610 letters is 164 seconds for the girl students while it is 182 seconds for the boy students according to post-test results. The average level of comprehension of the texts of girl students was 87.5%; The average level of comprehension of boy students was 85%. The average of girl students was 21.8; boy students' was 21.1 in the evaluation score (between Min.: 4, Max.: 24 points) calculated based on the relationship between reading speed and comprehension level.

As can be observed in Table 3, there is no statistically significant difference in terms of reading speed ($p > 0.05$), comprehension level ($p > 0.05$) and evaluation scores ($p > 0.05$) of the students in the post-test based on gender variable. Average reading speed of the students was detected as 173 seconds (2 minutes 53 seconds); average comprehension level as 86.25% and average evaluation score as 21.5 (between Min.: 4, Max.: 24 points) in the post-test. It can be said that the students are 'good level' readers in the post-test according to average evaluation score.

Pre-test – post-test reading speeds, comprehension levels, evaluation score average and dependent groups *t*-test results of the students' are indicated in Table 4:

Table 4. Pre-test – post-test comparison

	Pre-test average (*n*: 40)	**Post-test average (*n*: 40)**	**Significant difference (*p*)**
Reading speed (second)	320	173	0.000
Comprehension level (%)	67.25	86.25	0.000
Evaluation score	12	21.5	0.000

As you can see in Table 4, that while reading speed of the students was 320 in the pre-test, this fell down to 173 in the post-test. It is observed that the reading speed of the students increased 85% after speed reading training. While the average comprehension level of the students was 67.25% in the pre-test, this rate increased to 86.25% in the post-test. It is observed that the comprehension level of the students increased 19% after speed reading training.

While the evaluation scores of the students were 12 in the pre-test, this value increased to 21.5 in the post-test. Students climbed to the level of 'good level' reader from 'mean level' reader after speed reading training. Subject findings show that there is a significant improvement in students' reading speeds and comprehension levels after speed reading training.

The relationship between the reading speed and comprehension level of the students' after receiving speed reading training was evaluated with Pearson correlation coefficient. The relationship between the reading speed and comprehension level of the students in the post-test is indicated in Table 5.

Table 5. Relationship between reading speed and comprehension level

Reading speed/comprehension level	
Pearson correlation	0.626
Ins. (2-tailed)	0.000
N	40

As can be seen in Table 5, it is concluded that there is a positive correlation between reading speeds and comprehension levels of students. (*r*: 0.626). The correlation coefficient reached was found to be statistically significant at 0.05 significance level ($p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that, as the speed of reading increases, the level of comprehension increases as well with speed reading training.

4. Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

Impact of speed reading training on the reading speed and comprehension skills of 8th grade students was studied in this research. Findings obtained were interpreted by comparing the results of the similar studies in the literature. These interpretations were submitted in the following paragraphs.

In the study, both in pre-test and in post-test, it was observed that the girl students read faster than boy students but this difference was not statistically significant. This finding of the study complies with the view that girl students read faster than boy students (Gunes, 1997) but this difference between is not significant in the literature.

In the study, both in pre-test and in post-test, it was observed that the reading comprehension of girl students was higher than boy students but this difference was not statistically significant. It can be

thought that this differentiation in terms of gender originates from the fact that reading habit of the girl students' is higher. Research findings in literature (Balci, 2009; Can, Turkyilmaz & Karadeniz, 2010; Ceran, Yildiz & Ozdemir, 2015) support the fact that reading habit and attitude of girl students' are higher. Contrary to these findings, according to the results of the research (Gao et al., 2020) conducted on 108 Chinese primary school students, it is seen that the reading speed of male students has increased more but there is no significant difference between the genders in their reading comprehension skills.

On the other hand, average comprehension level of the students was detected as 67.25% in pre-test and 86.25% in post-test. In a study conducted on high school students by Coskun (2002), it was detected that the comprehension level of students' when they read a text on a newspaper was 77.5%, scientific text was 63.9% and literate text was 65.5%. Carver (1982) states in his study that university students could reach 80%–90% comprehension level when they read 250 words in a minute and their comprehension level fell to 40% when they read 500 words in a minute and to 15%–20% when they read 1,000 words in a minute. It can be said that the average level of comprehension detected in the studies is similar to the average level of comprehension found in our study.

It was observed in the study that the reading speed and comprehension levels of the students increased significantly after speed reading training. This finding indicates that the training provided increased the reading speed of the students approximately two times and their level of comprehension increased with this. This finding shows similarities with the results of some studies (Bozan, 2012; Dedebali, 2008; Ilter, 2018; Kacar, 2015; Mergen, 2019; Soysal, 2015) conducted at the level of different grades in the literature. While it was stated in aforementioned studies that the differentiation was more significant in some text types, the speed and comprehension level of both text types increased in this research. The fact that the students were provided with examples from both informative and narrative various type texts during the training can be shown as the reason for this result.

A positive and significant relationship was found between reading speed and comprehension level as a result of the analysis conducted. Similar to this finding, the study conducted by Akcamete (1990) on university students revealed positive but low level (r: 0.20) relationship between reading speed and comprehension level. A similar result between the reading speeds and comprehension levels of the students (r: 0.36) was reached in a study conducted by Dokmen (1994). Dedebali and Saracaloglu (2010) had also found a positive but low level relationship between reading speed and comprehension level (r: 0.453). It is thought that thinking skills start to develop and comprehension skill is impacted positively with the increase in reading speed and this habit having a place for the student. Contrary to the finding of our study, a reverse relationship was detected between reading speed and comprehension level in studies conducted by Tazebay (1995) on elementary school students and by Durukan (2013) on university students. The fact that the students in our study group will take an exam at the end of the year and they are motivated because of that and they participated in the training voluntarily can be shown as the reason of this result.

These recommendations can be made based on the results of the study as follows:

- Speed reading trainings should be included in the courses at elementary school level in order to enable students to gain speed reading habits at earlier grade levels.
- The students should be enabled to speed read and comprehend in every type of text by using various type of texts as much as possible in speed reading trainings.
- The order of eye exercises, word recognition and picking, text interpretation should be followed in speed reading trainings.
- Similar studies should be conducted on 12th grade students who will take the higher education institution entrance exam, one of the central exams and usefulness of speed reading should be researched in higher grade levels.

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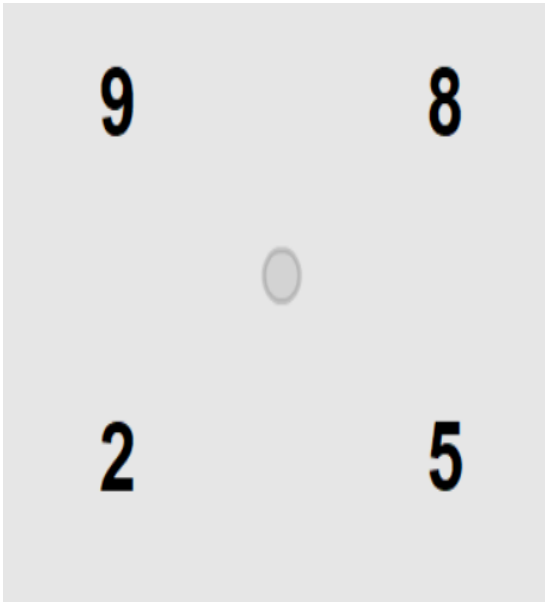
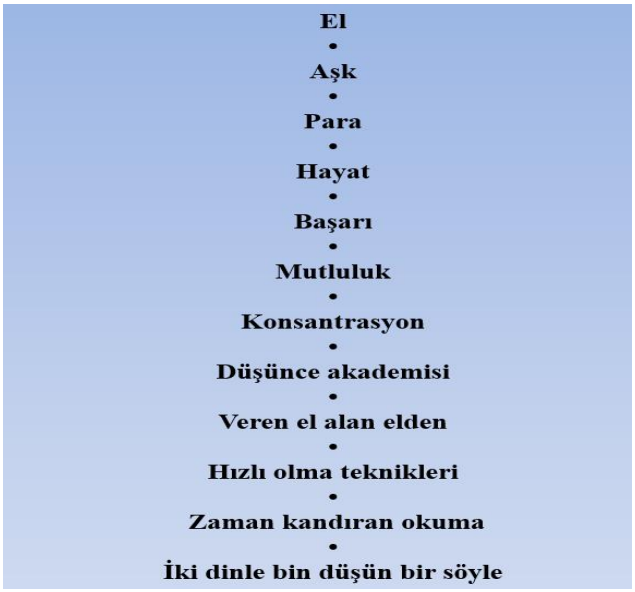
Appendixes

Appendix 1. Example of eye acceleration exercise.





Appendix 2. Example of word selection and recognition exercise.

Appendix 3. Example of speed reading and comprehension exercise.

Vanda North

Dünyada şu anda üçüncü olan Vanda North, hızlı okumayla Uluslararası Hızlandırılmış Öğrenme Organizasyonu başkanı iken ilgilenmeye başlamıştır. Böyle bir organizasyonun başkanının okuma hızını artırmaktan daha iyi yapabileceği bir şey olabilir mi?

Vanda çalışırken bu kitapta anlatılan tüm teknikleri uyguladı. Çok kısa bir süre içerisinde dakikada 3000 kelimeyi rahatlıkla okumaya başlamıştı. Vanda, yıllarca 'normal', doğal ve değiştirilemez sandığı bir hızda okumuştu. Hızını artırabileceğini öğrendiği zaman aşırı heyecanlanmıştı. Tekrar okuma ve gerilemeyi azaltarak, göz hareketlerini hızlandırarak ve her bir duraklamada algılanan kelime sayısını artırarak işe başlamıştır.

Yedi dakika sonra okuma hızını dakikada 200'den 400'e çıkarmıştır. Performansına şaşıran Vanda mutlulukla karışık derin bir öfke duymuştur. Çünkü 21 yıl boyunca şu ana kadar okuduğu kitap sayısının iki katını okuyabilir ya da yine aynı miktarda kitap okuyup artan bir yılını arkadaşlarıyla geçirebilir, seyahat edebilir ve daha çok eğlenebilirdi.

John Stuart Mill

Tüm zamanların en büyük 90. dâhisi olarak gösterilen pragmatist İngiliz filozof John Stuart Mill'in kitap okurken tüm sayfayı "bir bakışta yuttuğu" söylenir.

Mill'in durumu motivasyonun ve teşviğin önemini gösteriyor. Gençlik yıllarında kolej profesörü olan babası genç oğluna bir kitap verir ve ondan kısa bir süre için diğer odaya gitmesini, kitabı okumasını ve ne öğrendiğini gelip kendisiyle tartışmasını ister.

Delikanlının konsantre olması ve verilen materyali hızla okuması için üzerinde kurulan bu olumlu ve yüksek baskı çok hızlı bir kuyucu olmasını teşvik etmiştir.

Kendi motivasyonunuzu ve becerinizi artırmanın iyi bir yolu da, John Stuart Mill'in babasının yaptırdığı alıştırmayı kendinize uygulamaktır. Okuduğunuzdan neler öğrendiğinizi bir arkadaşınıza anlatabilirsiniz.