Effect of Speciallly Designed Instructional Material in Improving The Reading and Writing Ability Among Slow Learners

Mareena Seema Sequeira[1]

Abstract:

Human being is the most complex and dynamic creation of God. Most of the learning in him takes place before he is an adult. An impediment to any aspect of this learning creates problems for the young human. The present study is an experimental study wherein the English Language reading and writing ability among the slow learners of Pre University Course is tested. Based on the results they are treated with the specially designed instructional material through presentation and practice. After six months continuous effort it is observed that there is an inspiring improvement in the reading and writing ability among the slow learners.

Key words: slow learners, reading and writing ability, instruction material, inspiring improvement.

I. INTRODUCTION

English language has exercised a great influence over the past two centuries in shaping the political, social, economical, intellectual and cultural life of people across the world and is still serving as a dynamic instrument in social change. Its vast literature on varied subjects like science, commerce and humanities makes it an important knowledge imparting language. It is a passport for better career and improved living. English is learnt in India because it's a door to communication with the entire world. Proficiency in English is an essential requisite for seeking any degree in India.

English being a library language has to be comprehended properly by the reader. This ability can be improved by encouraging reading habit. In the modern world, due to advancement in science and technology one can accumulate information through various modes other than reading. Yet, reading continues to provide maximum pleasure and knowledge. It is commonly observed that those who read more excel in all the areas of academic life. Reading helps us to understand the thoughts and feelings of various writers. It improves our way of expression and creativity. Reading habit, an integral part of learning process is very essential for the development of language.

Reading is about understanding the written texts. It consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. While 'word recognition' refers to the process of identifying how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language, 'comprehension' indicates the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected texts. Readers make use of the background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience with the text and other strategies to understand the written texts. An efficient reader will understand what is relevant for him in the text that he should get at and discard the rest. According to Marlow Ediger (1991) Reading – is basic in the curriculum. Well-developed reading skills are vital to success in all the fields of life. In support of this view the research evidence of

Roy (1987); Laughlin, Barry (2000) prove that the reading comprehension plays a determining role in the scholastic achievement of the students.

Written English is very essential for our daily purpose. Written expression is an art of self expression which involves the process of collecting thoughts, arranging them in rational sequence and ultimately expressing them in accordance with the recognized standards of communicable forms. The characteristics of good written expression are good handwriting, correct spellings, use of appropriate punctuation and capital letters, maintenance of style and structure, right grammatical usage and vocabulary. Majority of the students with their indomitable spirit and quest for knowledge are able to cope with the pressure of reading, preparing for the exams and writing the answers according to the requirement. But around 20% of them are rated as poor performers in spite of their hard work and having the required intelligence ability. They are either not able to read the question paper properly or are not able to write clearly. Such students can be considered as students with learning disability.

II. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The most difficult problem of class room organization is dealing with the fact that students come to classrooms with different levels of knowledge, skills, learning rate and motivation. Some students learn the material more quickly than others, whereas some are unable to cope with the work normally expected of their age group. They do not respond satisfactorily to the ordinary school curriculum and the usual methods of class room teaching. This problem requires teacher to provide appropriate levels of instruction and necessitates special instructional strategy for them.

According to the World Federation of Neurology, when there is a marked difference between the intellectual potential of a

[1]Associate Professor of English, Mahesh College of Commerce and Management, Mangalore, Karnataka, India

child and his actual academic performance in spite of equal economic, cultural and social opportunities to learn such a child is said to have learning disability or a lack in learning abilities. These children struggle to decode the words and are unable to comprehend what they read. They also have problems in organization of thought and find difficult to express their thoughts in writing. They can't distinguish the sounds of the letters properly and hence bound to make many errors in their writing. Teaching of reading being one of the earliest acts of academic instruction imparted to a child, it becomes necessary for a teacher to know the remedial techniques. Effective teaching in any subject depends largely upon the introduction of newer methods of instructions. Now-a-days teacher cannot depend on single method of teaching rather she has to try out several innovative methods to present the content to the students. When this is done students are able to understand the concept, principles and content in an effective manner. This envisages the need for research to be undertaken in this regard.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Language makes it possible for individuals to live in a society. Language is a social activity rather than a means of self expression. There is a very close connection between the two facts that man is a speaking animal and that he is the social animal par excellence. The definition of language as a means of communicating thoughts is now commonly considered to be a partial truth, more misleading than illuminating; a more fruitful definition is that language is a means of social control. Different theories have been formulated by different schools of psychology with their views about the nature of language.

a) Piaget's theory: 'Language as Intelligence'

Piaget (1936) was the first psychologist to make a systematic study of cognitive development. According to Piaget "Languages emerge only at the end of the sensor motor period of intellectual development". By the end of that period the child has mastered the notion of objects that are independent of his body and existing in time and space. In the course of his second year of development, the child acquires symbolic function- the ability to use signs and symbols to represent an object that is not present. Through the process of imitation the child begins the transition from indexes to symbols. As he develops interiorized imitation, it becomes a source of symbols and language.

b) Naom Chomsky's theory: 'Language as innate capacity'

American born linguist Naom Chomsky (1968) believed that the child is programmed at birth with the capacity to master transformational grammar. Chomsky calls this innate language capacity as Language Acquisition Device (LAD). This device enables the child to produce transformational rules by his analysis of the language he hears and speaks. He believes that children are born with the basic rules for language intact. The characteristics of a language that help the child to utilize his innate language competence are language universals. The child's innate language competence gives him the knowledge of these language universals.

c) Kenneth Goodman: 'Miscue Theory of Reading'

This theory rejects the traditional approach to reading by declaring it unscientific as it is based more on common sense than on any experimental data. It considers reading as a psycho-linguistic game and regards comprehension as the real goal of reading. Another significant aspect of this theory is Goodman's insistence on exploiting the errors which he calls as 'Miscues', the "Windows in the reading process". We do not read what we see; we read what we want to read. The Logogen model (1969) and Tip of the Tongue (TOT) phenomenon clearly explain how we access the words stored in our mental lexicon. If we see a word on the printed page, we stimulate an individual logogen or lexical detection device for that word. Some children fail to do this due to various reasons. As teachers we should help such students to stimulate their logogens so that they can consciously activate them while reading independently.

d) The Barrett's Taxonomy and Affective dimensions chart:

On reading comprehension he makes an analysis of the mental processes from a classroom perspective. They are as follows:

- Literal Comprehension
- Reorganization
- Inferential Comprehension
- Evaluation
- Appreciation

e) John Munby's taxonomy of writing skills:

In his book 'Communicative Syllabus Design'(1981) John Munby gives the taxonomy of writing skills.

- Manipulating the script of a language by forming the shape of letters, using the spelling system and using punctuation
- Expressing information explicitly
- Expressing information implicitly through inferences and figurative languages
- Expressing the communicative value of sentences and utterances
- Expressing relations within a sentence using elements of sentence structure, modal auxiliaries and intra-sentential connections
- Expressing relation between parts of a text through lexical cohesion devices
- Expressing relation between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices
- Reducing the text through avoiding irrelevant information.

Learning of Language involves the acquisition of the skills of language namely reading, writing, speaking and listening. When reading, we are engaged in such activities as recalling word meanings, inferring, drawing conclusion and so on, but these are all aspects of the act of comprehending. In fact even the comprehension of words involves a series of skills or activities. But some students are not able to use these skills. When they encounter unfamiliar words they would rather

turn to dictionaries which in turn will hinder the improvement of both reading speed and reading comprehension. They fail to decode and encode the sounds required to make up a word using appropriate letters. Thus they are generally poor in both reading and spelling.

Naom Chomsky's theory says that children are born with full linguistic competence. Assuming this fact to be true, if the parents and the teachers focus and facilitate the development of strengths in children rather than mange their weaknesses, if they follow a reasonably structured method to reading and spellings, slow learners too can read and write like any other Gifted Children.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) To identify the slow learners among first year pre-university students of Mangalore Taluk by administering 'Raven's Progressive Matrices Test'

2) To evaluate the level of English language reading and writing proficiency among the selected slow learners through a pre-test.

3) To prepare an instructional material to develop the English language reading and writing proficiency and administer it to the selected slow learners.

4) To find out the effectiveness of using specially designed instructional material in developing English language reading and writing proficiency among the slow learners through a post-test.

V. HYPOTHESIS

There is a significant difference between the means of scores of the pre-test and post test in English language proficiency in terms of reading comprehension and mechanics of writing which mainly includes spellings and corrections.

VI. VARIABLES

Specially designed instructional material prepared to improve the English language reading and writing proficiency of the slow learners is treated as the independent variable.The English language reading and writing proficiency of the slow learners is the dependent variable.

VII. METHODOLOGY

Sample:

The sample of 10 students was chosen on the basis of the Raven's Progressive Matrices Test conducted on a population of 120 First Year Pre- University students of the age group 16 to 17 years from one of the Pre University Colleges in Mangalore.

Tools used for the study:

1) Raven's Progressive Matrices Test for the Pre-University students – a standardized tool to identify the slow learners. 2) A Pre-test tool to assess the present level of English language proficiency of the slow learners. 3) A treatment tool of Specially Designed Instructional material to develop the reading and writing skills.4) A Post test tool to evaluate the improvement in the level of proficiency of the slow learners.

Procedure of the study:

The sample of the study was chosen on the basis of Raven's Progressive Matrices Test that was administered to 120 first year Pre- University students of a College in Mangalore. A book of Standard Progressive Matrices with sets A, B, C, D and E designed by J.C. Raven was given to each student. The scale consisting of 60 problems divided into five sets of 12 each was intended to cover the whole range of intellectual development from the time a child is able to grasp the idea of finding a missing piece to complete the pattern. It was sufficiently long to assess a person's maximum capacity to form comparison and reason by analogy without being unduly exhaustive. After evaluating the answer sheets raw scores and percentile scores were recorded. Students who scored below 28 or below 10th percentile point were classified as slow learners. It was very clear by referring to their previous performances that the selected sample had difficulty with higher order thinking and reasoning skills.

Table No. 1: Results of the Raven's Progressive Matrices test to identify the slow learners

Stream	No. of students who scored above 10 percentile points	No. of students who scored below 10 percentile points	Total number of students
Arts	53	07	60
Commerce	27	03	30
Science	30	00	30
Total	110	10	120

Source: Survey data

At the beginning of the data collection, a pre-test was conducted to evaluate the English language reading and writing proficiency of the 10 slow learners by using a questionnaire. The test consisted of the components such as oral reading, reading comprehension, identification and correction of spelling errors in the sentences and expansion. Two hours were allotted to answer the questions.

Table No. 2: The Mean Score, Standard deviation and Percentage mean score of the Pre-test to evaluate the English Language Reading and Writing Proficiency among the Slow Learners

Components	No. of Students	Max. Score	Lowest Score	Highest Score	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Score (Percentage)
Reading	10	10	2	5	3.5	2.588	35
Reading Comprehension	10	20	4	8	5.6	1.673	28
Identification of Errors	10	20	3	7	5.2	2.167	26
Correction of Errors	10	30	5	12	8.8	2.588	29.33
Expansion	10	20	4	7	5.6	1.14	28
Overall	10	100	18	36	28.7	5.078	28.7

Source: Survey Data

Now the treatment was given for one hour duration per day after the regular class hours. With the help of the real life experience of the investigator with her son who is a slow learner and the other experiences referred by Ms. Bela Raja, a specialist in Learning Diffculties, the self esteem of the students was boosted in the beginning. Then the phonemic awareness that included the consonant sounds, vowel sounds and consonant blends along with the reading of sight words was delivered to them. After this motor control exercises, visual perceptual exercises, multi sensory exercises, spelling games, dictation, exercises on adding prefixes and suffixes were administered in order to familiarize these students with commonly used words. Then the students were encouraged to read short stories, simple paragraphs from the news papers and narrate them to others. Language exercises like small paragraphs to fill up the blanks, expand the outline into a short story or an incident by filling the gap etc. were given to them so that they feel confident to organize ideas that come to their mind.

The treatment lasted for 140 working days at the end of which a post test was administered to measure the effect of the specially designed instructional material. The analysis and interpretation of the data were done using descriptive statistics. This included mean, standard deviation, mean score percentage which is presented in the form of tables and figures.

Table No. 3: The Mean Score, Standard deviation and Percentage mean score of the Post-test to evaluate the English Language Reading and Writing Proficiency among the Slow learners

| Components	No. of Students	Max. Score	Lowest Score	Highest Score	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Score (Percentage)
Reading	10	10	4	8	5.7	1.159	57
Reading Comprehension	10	20	7	14	9.9	2.378	49.5
Identification of Errors	10	20	8	13	10.7	1.766	53.5
Correction of Errors	10	30	10	22	17.2	3.91	57.33
Expansion	10	20	9	16	13.6	2.412	68
Overall	10	100	38	73	57.1	5.812	57.1

Source: Survey data

Table No. 4: Comparison of Mean Score, Standard deviation, Percentage mean score, Mean of paired differences and Percentage gain of the pre-test and post-test on English language reading and writing proficiency among the slow learners

Components	Mean		Std. deviation		Mean score (%)		Mean of paired differences	Gain (%)
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post		
Reading	3.5	5.7	2.588	1.159	35	57	2.2	22
Reading Comprehension	5.6	9.9	1.673	2.378	28	49.5	4.3	21.5
Identification of Errors	5.2	10.7	2.167	1.766	26	53.5	5.5	27.5
Correction of Errors	8.8	17.2	2.588	3.91	29.33	57.33	8.4	28.0
Expansion	5.6	13.6	1.14	2.412	28	68	8.0	40.0
Overall	28.7	57.1	5.078	5.812	28.7	57.1	23.0	28.4

Source: Survey data

Fig. No. 1.

Cylindrical diagram showing the difference in the percentage mean scores in overall performance of the pre test and post test in English language proficiency.
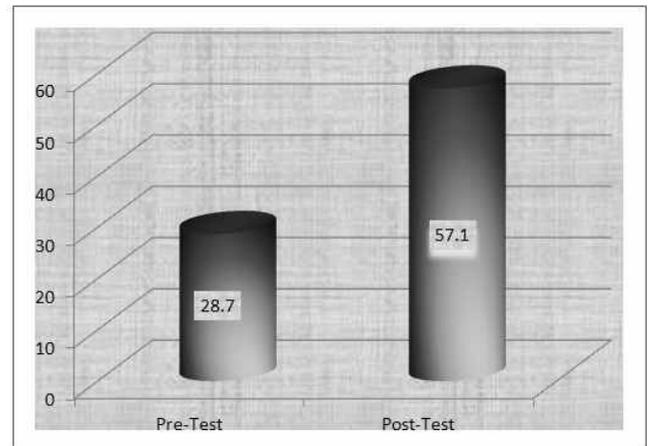
VIII. CONCLUSION

The present study shows that the experimental treatment through specially designed instructional material has significantly improved the English language proficiency of the slow learners. This is clearly evident through the large difference in the scores obtained by the slow learners in the pre-test and the post-test. Thus based on the above result it can be concluded that the teachers have to play a pivotal role in preparing the slow learners to fit into the normal crowd in the class room. Instead of sticking onto same method for all students in the classroom, they should be trained well and adequately equipped to identify the slow learners. Then they should treat them by using specially designed instructional material and thus help them not only to develop English language proficiency but also empower them to emerge as confident self assured human beings.

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