

Identifying the Reading Problem Among Rural Students of Jharkhand: A Comparison

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Abstract—*The growing need and importance of English language at the present day has made the acquisition of this language as an important requirement for today's student. As English is perceived as an indispensable tool in order to survive, the demand for English language have already grown beyond ones expectation. English plays a dominant role in every sphere of life and is considered essential. Learning any language require four skills i.e. Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. Of these four skills Reading is a major problem among rural students. Rural students in this competitive world are facing lots of difficulties in reading English. Hence, the present study identifies the reading problems among rural students of Jharkhand schools by observing the language classes, interviewing the teachers and distributing questionnaires to both the teachers and learners. Two schools from Palamau District are selected for the purpose of this study. The main aim of this study is to understand the language classes, study the prescribed syllabuses and observe how they are carried out. Based on the different problems some observations, recommendations and suggestions are made that would be useful for the teachers and the learners as well.*

Keywords: *Indispensable, dominant, reading problems.*

1. INTRODUCTION:-

Language is one of the most important tool we have as humans. Without it we could not think how thoughts expressible to others. Language is not everything in education but without language everything is nothing in education. Learning any language require four skills i.e. Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. Reading is one of the major issues with students which is still neglected in EFL/ESL classrooms throughout the rural areas of Jharkhand. One of the reasons that reading is neglected or ignored is because not many English reading teaching strategies a teacher apply or uses in his classrooms. Many teachers or students still believe that spending time on reading is useless. Reading is an integrated and integral part of language learning. It consists of elements much wider than sounds (vowels, consonants). But the question is not whether reading should be taught instead how it should be taught. If language teacher spend some time on learning and practicing on reading strategies they will not have the embarrassment anymore and students' reading ability will be effectively improved. The present paper deals with the enumerate reading difficulties among upper primary level

students to explore factors that contribute to cause of reading difficulties and also challenges that teachers' facing in teaching reading to upper primary learners in both government or private schools.

2. OBJECTIVES:-

- To identify the reading difficulty among upper primary learners.
- To identify and explore the challenges faced by teachers in teaching reading to upper primary learners.
- To find out the effects of inadequate reading habits among learners and to explore the influence of home and school environment on learners reading ability.
- To identify the effects of various teaching methods and techniques used by teachers in teaching reading to learners against reading difficulties.
- To find out teachers' perception of students reading difficulties and to draw a comparison between the reading difficulties faced by government and private school students.

3. METHODOLOGY:-

A quantitative method of research was carried out which involved sampling, questionnaires, data collection and data analysis. The study was conducted in the academic session 2016-17. At the time of study, around 60% of the total strength of the targeted students was present. The study was taken by the students individually. Two groups of students belonging to two different schools were made to participate in the study. The first group comprised of the sixth and seventh grade students of B.N.S Public School, Hariharganj whereas the other group comprised students of the sixth and seventh grade of Kasturba Gandhi High School, Hariharganj. Both the groups consisted of girl participants only. B.N.S School is an English medium, affiliated to the CBSE board. The average number of students in each section does not exceed forty. There are total of thirty faculty members out of which eight

are English teachers. Kasturba Gandhi School is a regional medium government aided school. It is affiliated to the state board of Jharkhand. The average number of students in each section is around sixty. There are a total of 12 faculty members in the school out of which only two are English teachers. The total number of students in the both the classes of the two schools was different, i.e. 40 participants in Institution 1 and 60 students in Institution 2. The study was conducted within the same week in both the school, engaging one period for class sixth and another consecutive period for class seventh. The age group to which the student participants belonged was 11 – 13 years. A total of 10 teachers from both the schools participated in the research. All the participants were English teachers and had experience of teaching at the post primary level. The age group of these teachers ranged from 35 - 55 years. All the participants were familiar with English and Hindi languages. A structured questionnaire was used as an instrument for the study. The questions in the questionnaire were then scored accordingly. Two separate questionnaires are devised one for students' responses and the other for teachers'. The questionnaire used for the study have been constructed and designed according to the need of the study. The students' questionnaire was based on an expository reading passage provided to the students without any prior teaching or explanation of it. It consisted of an unseen reading comprehension passage followed by a series of classroom activities. The participant had to read and comprehend it in order to complete the activities. The students' questionnaire comprised of five separate sections. The first section deals comprehension exercise which consisted of true and false type questions. The second section encompassed sentence correction exercise which consisted of multiple choice type questions where the students had to tick the correct answer. The third section consisted of grammar questions which was further sub-divided into three different exercises: providing synonyms, antonyms and choose a word from the passage closest in meaning to the given terms. The fourth section is of a vocabulary exercise which consisted of an activity where the students had to provide a verb form of the given words taken from the passage. The fifth section encompassed of Sentence Construction exercise where the students were asked to construct sentences from the verb forms provided by them. The language used in the questionnaire was simple. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of twenty objective type questions which had to be answered by ticking the correct option according to them. The options in the questionnaire have been marked as Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Very often and Always in the ascending order. The teachers' questions are meant to evaluate the teaching challenges faced by them. The related questions have been grouped mainly Reading difficulties, Teaching challenges, Teaching reading and Reading instruction. Some other questions are related to their own teaching experience, the techniques, methodologies and approaches used regarding various aspects of teaching reading the class and also the use of different reading strategies and skills. The procedure of the whole study can be divided into

data collection process, which involves the procedure of collecting the data from the participant and data analysis process, which involves the procedure that was adopted in analyzing the data collected from the participants.

4. FINDINGS:-

A number of significant findings have emerged in the present study. According to the analysis of the data it is evident that students face major difficulties in the areas of sentence construction, vocabulary and grammar. In this research, the possible reason for their better performance in the area of comprehension can be attributed to the presence of multiple choice questions in the sentence correction and comprehension exercise. It is evident that students are more comfortable when they have to choose the appropriate answer from the provided option as they do not have to give an answer of their own. The emergent results clearly shows that the students of Institution 1 (B.N.S Public School) performed better than the students of Institution 2 (Kasturba Gandhi High School) in all the five categories. There are a number of possible reasons which may have led to this outcome of the present study. First, the medium of instruction of both the institutions was different. Where B.N.S Public School is an English medium private school, Kasturba Gandhi School is a regional medium government aided minority school. Thus, the students of Institution 1 have better command over English as they have a wider exposure to the language, in comparison to Institution 2 students who study English as a subject only and have been exposed to it quite late in their academic setting. Second, the students of B.N.S Public School were able to understand and comprehend the passage easily and thus could answer it without any difficulty. While the 6th and 7th grade students of Kasturba Gandhi High School were facing an unseen reading comprehension passage exercise for the first time in their academic career. They were unable to understand the instructions provided are required guidance and assistance with every exercise. Third, the researcher had to explain the contents of the passage and provide the meaning of difficult words in Hindi to the students of Institution 1 as they were unable to deduce the meaning from the context. However the students of Institution 2 employed the reading strategy of contextual guessing and overcame their difficulties. Fourth, another possible reason for the poor performance of Institution 2 can be attributed to its appalling student teacher ratio. The institution has only two English teachers, one at the primary level and the other at the post-primary and secondary level. There are more than two hundred students on an average in each section of the school amounting to a deplorable student teacher ratio. On the other hand Institution 1 has more than six English teachers and the average number of students in each class is not more than forty-five. Owing to the large number of students in each class, the teacher cannot provide individual attention to the weaker students. Use of elaborate and extended reading activities is also not feasible. Much of the classroom teaching time is devoted to maintaining discipline

and performing other administrative duties. The institution faces the problem of lack of proper funds, infrastructure is not maintained, and there is no provision for extra-curriculum activities, or other advanced teaching technologies. All these miscellaneous factors affect the difficulties faced by students in some way or the other. The lack of efficient teaching methodologies, poor learning environment, insufficient background knowledge of students, parents' illiteracy level, overcrowding classrooms, scarcity of faculty members and lack of teachers' interest in teaching contribute greatly to the inefficient reading standards of students in Institution 2. The teaching challenges faced by teachers have been evaluated using a teachers' questionnaire based on Like scale. It consists of several questions enquiring upon the various aspects of teaching reading, where the respondents had to tick mark. The questionnaire comprised of different categories, namely Reading Instruction, Teaching Reading, Reading Difficulties, Reading Assessment and Reading Measures. All these have been categorized for evaluation purposes.

	Institution 1		Institution 2	
	Group A %	Group B %	Group A %	Group B %
Comprehension	80	89	55	63
Sentence correction	84	90	65	72
Grammar	55	74	13	27
Vocabulary	45	60	25	39
Sentence construction	29	54	0	3

Table 1. Analysis of activities represented in both the schools

Sl. No	Questions	Response s	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
1	Do you divide your reading lesson into pre reading while post reading activities		20	10	30	30	10
2	Do you explain the background of the text before starting any lesson					20	80
3	Do you encourage the students to read texts					30	70
4	Do you read the text yourself and then interpret it		10		10	30	60
5	Do you emphasize language learning in a reading class			11	11	22	56
6	Do you teach the students how to use the various reading skills and strategies		24		53	12	11

Table 2. Teaching reading with students

Sl. No	Questions	Response s	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
1	How often do you assess students' performance in reading by using						
	Written method			40	40	20	
	Oral method				69	31	
2	Do you think there is a relationship between a students' reading proficiency and class work score			10	73	13	
3	Students' overall performance in						
	English Comprehension				54	46	
	Written comprehension			10	10	80	
	Spoken		20		10	50	30
	Listening Ability				62	38	
	Vocabulary			21	35	22	22
	Understanding the meaning of the text				35	54	11

Table 3. Reading assessment with the students

Sl. No	Questions	Response s	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
1	Do the students need remedial instruction in reading				70	15	10
2	How often do you provide remedial classes to the students			80	20		
3	How often you use these measures against reading difficulty						
	Reading work		20	40	40		
	Reading circle		30	20	30	20	
	Reading activities			50	40	10	

Table 4. Reading measures taken with the students

5. ANALYSIS:-

A number of significant findings have emerged in the present study. The data analysis of the results obtained projects a number of similarities between the perception of the teachers of the reading difficulties faced by students and the actual difficulties which the students are facing.

5.1 The data analysis confirm that teachers consider mother tongue interference and inability to communicate in English as the most frequent causes of reading difficulties in students. The effect of mother tongue interference was noticeable while conducting the students' classroom activities especially in Institution 2. We had to explain the contents of the passage in Hindi and also provided the students with the meaning of difficult words in form of their Hindi counterpart. A majority of the students in Institution 2 answered the vocabulary items in their mother tongue, i.e. provided the antonyms and synonyms of the words in Hindi.

5.2 The research findings depict that the areas of sentence construction, grammar and vocabulary pose as major reading difficulties of post primary students. The responses of the teachers clearly show that teachers believe the inability to read impacts the students' performance in written composition the most. Spoken competence and vocabulary gain are also equally hampered due to reading difficulties.

5.3 Teachers regard teaching pronunciation as one of the basic challenges faced by them in teaching reading to the upper primary learner which is congruent to the fact that inability to read impacts spoken competence greatly and mispronouncing words is a major reading difficulty found in students.

5.4 The teachers' responses represents that students are least comfortable reading at the paragraph level which assures the difficulty faced by the student participants in reading and comprehending the unseen passage.

5.5 It can also be assumed that the growing level of reading difficulties among upper primary students could be as a result of malpractices in teaching reading. The teachers rarely make use of reading series, magazines, newspapers and such other extensive reading resources. This affects the development of students' reading skills negatively and can lead to limited growth in reading.

Majority of the teachers believe that their students need remedial classes for overcoming reading problems but there is no provision of remedial classes. Teachers rarely provide remedial work to the students, nor do they make use of reading measures like extensive reading sessions with students to overcome their reading problems. According to the participant responses, teachers use the same reading instructional materials for students at different reading levels and do not change texts according to the purpose of reading in a class. These teaching practices contributes to the development of reading difficulties among students.

According to the analysis of teachers' responses, the most frequent way of assessing students' performance in reading is by using oral or methods. However the present study employed the written method of testing and evaluating reading ability in the participants. This may be assumed as another cause of difficulty faced by the students.

6. RESULTS:-

The reading difficulties in learners were evaluated using a students' questionnaire consisting of various classroom activities based on a reading comprehension passage. The activities have been classified into five sections for evaluation purposes. While the first and second sections focused on the general comprehension of the passage, the third section emphasized the knowledge of vocabulary among the participants. The fourth section estimated their level of grammatical competence while the last section estimated their sentence construction ability. Although all the participants participated actively and responded to the questions, few of them preferred not to respond to some. The percentage of the non-respondents has been mentioned in the analysis. The analysis of the questionnaire provided the various observations. The overall performance of both the schools, Institution 1, i.e., B.N.S Public School and Institution 2, i.e. Kasturba Gandhi High School were average. Institution 1 performed better with an average of 56% for Group A (Class 6th) and 72% for Group B (Class 7th). Whereas Institution 2 scored an average of 28% for Group A and 41% for Group B as average class performance.

7. CONCLUSION:-

As in any other research, certain limitations also exist in this study. First the study covers only a limited and particular group of participants i.e. participants belonged to only one particular school but were used as a representative sample of all the government and private schools in Palamau district. Second, the study was conducted on two classes, grade 6 and 7 of the respective schools but the results were generalized on all sixth and seventh graders, i.e. post primary students of Hariharganj. Third, though the study is reliable because of the use of objective type questionnaire but the elements of validity can be doubted. The study rests on an assumption that the responses made by the participants are authentic. Other extraneous factors and distractions also play a vital role in the study.

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