

Reading Difficulties of Post-primary Learners and Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching Reading: A Study of Dhanbad District

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is two-fold in nature, firstly to enumerate the reading difficulties among post-primary students and secondly, to explore the challenges that the teachers face in teaching reading to these students. There were three main objectives of this study. First, to find out the factors contributing to the development of difficulties in reading among post-primary learners, second to find out teachers' perceptions of students' reading difficulties and its relationship with the actual performance of learners. Third, to draw a comparison between the reading difficulties faced by the students of two different educational Institutions: government school and private school. The study was conducted in the vicinity of Dhanbad district and specifically concentrates on the post-primary learners, that is, the students of standard 6th and 7th. Two groups of students belonging to two different schools were made to participate in the study. The first group comprised of the students of Carmel School, Dhanbad (Institution 1) an English medium convent school affiliated to the ICSE board whereas the other group comprised of the students of Millat High School, Dhanbad (Institution 2) a Hindi medium government aided minority school affiliated to Jharkhand state board.

Keywords: Reading Difficulties; Post-primary Learners; Reading Comprehension; Teaching Reading; Challenges in Teaching Reading.

Introduction

Reading is about understanding written texts. It is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text. Readers typically make use of background knowledge, vocabulary,

grammatical knowledge, experience with text and other strategies to help them understand written text. A child's ability to read is a skill that stays with him/her through life. However, this skill grows and develops with the child and is not a competence that we can give to the child as a full-blown ability.

It has been observed that students, especially ESL and EFL learners, confront a variety of difficulties while reading. These difficulties comprise inadequate vocabulary, lexical inefficiency, structural complexity, language inaccessibility, poor reading skills, lack of schemata, and so on. Students' lack of interest is another major cause of their failure in reading. Reading is, for many of them, "a passive, boring activity, performed constantly in isolation and perhaps associated with skills which they feel they do not possess" Greenwood (1998: 5). Dechant (1982: 73) has expressed the same opinion and stated that achievement in reading is dependent "upon the pupil's motivational readiness, and poor reading or reading failure may be caused by lack of interest." He (p. 79) has also mentioned 'personal maladjustment' as another cause of reading failure and explained that difficulties in adjusting to a new environment, poor parent-child relationships, lack of encouragement from home, 'negative attitudes of parents to learning in general' etc. 'may all lead to failure'.

The purpose of the study is to enumerate the reading difficulties among post-primary students, to explore factors that contribute to cause of these difficulties and also the challenges that the teachers face in teaching reading. The study is mainly concentrated within the district of Dhanbad and includes 150 participants, teachers and students combined.

The study is guided by two major objectives. First, to identify and explore the reading difficulties among post-primary learners and second to identify and explore the challenges faced by teachers in teaching reading to post-primary learners.

The present study also deals with some specific objectives. It aims to find out factors contributing to the development of difficulties in reading among post-primary learners, to find out the effects of inadequate reading habits among learners, to explore the influence of home and school environment on learners' reading ability, to identify the effects of various teaching methods, strategies and techniques used by teachers in teaching reading to learners, to investigate measures employed by teachers against reading difficulties, to find out teachers' perceptions of students' reading difficulties and its relationship with the actual performance of learners and to draw a comparison between the reading difficulties faced by government school students and private school students.

Review of Literature

For many years, three basic definitions of reading have driven literacy programs in the United States (Foertsch, 1998). According to the first definition, learning to read means learning to pronounce words. According to the second definition, learning to read means learning to identify words and get their meaning. According to the third definition, learning to read means learning to bring meaning to a places learning skills in the context of authentic reading and writing activities. It recognizes the importance of skill instruction as one piece of the reading process

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(Allington & Cunningham,1996;). Thus skilled reading is constructive, fluent, strategic, motivated and a lifelong pursuit.

Approaches to Reading

The Phonics or Bottom up Approach

Farris et al (2004:13) stated that “teaching learners how to read based on the bottom-up approach is just as it sounds”. Children begin to read at what seems like the bottom of a complex hierarchy of skills, by recognizing the letters of alphabets, learning the letter names and then understanding their corresponding sound. In this model, learning is regarded as a one-way process, from the text to the reader, and progress is made one skill at a time.

Matchet and Pretorius (2003:45) found out that the children who do not understand the letter sounds relationships have a problem with reading in the way phonics are taught.

Explaining the ideas of De Debat (2008:1-2) the bottom-up approach or phonics, is founded on behaviorist belief that learning is a kind of habit formation brought about by repetitive association with stimulus response action and so, language learning is a response acquired by automatic conditioning processes.

The Whole Word or Top Down Approach

The whole word approach, based on the work of WikEd (2007:1) and Farris et al (2004:16) “is a method of teaching reading by way of introducing words to children as a whole unit without investigating their sub-words parts. The method involves teaching children to sight read the words so that they will be able to pronounce the whole word as a single entity. The instruction of using the whole word, involves association of word names with printed words”. By repeating an exposure to words in a meaningful context, children are expected to learn to read the words, with no conscious attention to the sub-words object. The goal of whole word instruction, is therefore, based on whole word recognition and whole word vocabulary development.

A top down approach to reading is a revolutionary approach to reading or is a more holistic approach to reading. It is not merely extracting meaning but is rather a process of connecting the information in the text, with the knowledge that the reader brings to the action. This method views reading as a dialogue between the reader and the text. It is an active cognitive process in which the reader’s background knowledge plays a role in extracting the meaning. Furthermore, it is viewed that reading is not a passive mechanical activity but purposeful rational and dependent on the prior knowledge and expectation of the learner

To Richard & Schmidt (2002:587), “Whole word is also called a word method or sight method. It is a method for teaching children to read, commonly used in teaching reading in mother tongue, in which children are taught to recognize whole words rather than letter names (as in phonics). It is usually leads to the sentence method, where whole sentence is used”

Basal Reader Approach or The Whole Language Approach

This is the most widely used approach, with estimates indicating that 75 to 85% of elementary classrooms use it daily (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2004). Also known as the skills-based or learner centered approach, the basal reader approach tends to help students move from the part to the whole by prescribing the acquisition of competencies in a systematic order.

As a method, the whole language approach as defined by Richard and Schimdt (2002:587) “is an approach to first language reading and instruction that has its roots in the elementary school level and refers to the teaching of English as a second language (ESL). This approach sees language as a whole entity. The whole language stresses learning to read and write naturally, focusing on real communication, and not to follow a piecemeal approach where grammar, vocabularies and word recognition are separated”. Furthermore, they also mentioned that in this approach the language is taught in a holistic manner rather than in an atomistic way.

In his views, Baker (2008:22-23) said that Goodman started the whole language approach, because of his beliefs that an emerging reader needs little direct instruction to decode the letters, creating sentences representing pictures and sound of the language. This is also confirmed by Farris et al (2004:42). Farris and associates further believed that learners have the ability to decode the letters, syllables, words and phrases when they read meaningful texts, therefore making inferences about the linguistic data

To Matchet and Pretorius (2003:46) this method focuses on meaning, not on sound symbols correspondence, so that children can start reading short stories immediately without resorting to phonics.

Farris et al (2004:12) pointed out that this approach to reading is a combination of the elements that are involved in the whole language and phonics approach. This is what Baker (2003:23) has mentioned in the national reading panel (2000).

The Literature-Based Approach

The literature-based approach has been defined as instructing children to read by using both fiction and nonfiction literature, written for purposes other than text use for teaching reading (Harp & Brewer, 2005). It is known as the top-down approach, going from the whole to the part.

Its advocates believe that reading materials should be unabridged pieces of literature and that instruction in strategies and skills should be presented in the context of real reading and only on an as-needed basis. There is no pre-reading vocabulary study. While the focus is on constructing meaning or understanding what is read, there are no comprehension worksheets. Children are offered choices in their literature selections, which cover a wide range of genres, including multicultural books.

The Language Experience Approach

Another method of teaching reading is one by Rasinski and Padak (2000:83-84), namely the language experience approach. This method can be used to teach reading using learners' own words, and texts they have composed as well as providing word recognition instruction to help them to read.

The language experience approach (LEA) is founded on the theory that reading and comprehending written language are extensions of listening to and understanding spoken language. The experiences of the children form the basis of reading materials because it is widely believed that everything that students read in early reading instruction should be as relevant to them as possible and certainly the children's own language is the most meaningful of all to them.

Celce-Murcia (2001:158) stated that the "language experience approach builds upon the notion that if children are given materials to read things they are already familiar with, it will help them to read. This method is based on two related ideas. Firstly, that learning should move from the familiar to the unknown. Secondly, that the readers whose world knowledge or schemata are similar to that underlying text they can read and their readings will enable them to make sense of the text

The Interactive Model

The interactive model combines the bottom-up and top-down models and views the reading process as an interaction between the readers and the text. It assumes that students are simultaneously processing information from the materials they are reading (i.e., the bottom-up model) and information from their background knowledge (i.e., top-down model).

Gove (1983) states that recognition and comprehension of printed words and ideas result from using both types of information. The interactive model is based on the schema theory (Rumelhart, 1984), which explains how readers receive, store, and use knowledge in the form of schemata. The objective of this approach is to teach students, strategies that will help them develop into independent readers who can monitor their own thinking while reading and link prior knowledge to the new material in their text

According to Richard and Rodger (2002:21) the interactive model is defined as "the process by which learners achieve the ability to use a language when their attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic messages". This thinking of interactivity has been linked to the teaching of reading, writing, as well as listening and speaking skills. But, to other authors such as Farris et al (2004:17-18) the idea of the interactive model referred to the simultaneous use by readers of both the top down and bottom up processing reading comprehension.

The Balanced Approach

According to Wren (2003:4-5) a balanced approach could be generically described as "mixing some phonics with whole language. To others they call it "eclectic approach". Wren explained

that educators describe their teaching as ‘balanced’, which on the surface has a great deal appeal. Wren further stressed that educators all over the world are promoting a ‘balanced’ approach to reading instruction.

A balanced approach combines skills development with literature and language arts activities. The program strikes a balance between the bottom-up (or skills based) approach and the top-down (or literature-based) view, a balance between explicit teacher-directed instruction and student-centered discovery learning, and a balance between authentic forms of assessment and standardized norm-referenced assessment (Harp & Brewer, 2005).

The goal of the balanced approach is to develop life-long readers and writers (Fitzgerald, 1999; Weaver, 1998).

The balanced approach is supported by the International Reading Association (1999) that believes teachers must know a variety of teaching methods as well as ways of combining them successfully. Furthermore, in 2002 in its concern for diverse classrooms, the IRA stated that teachers must be capable of making decisions about how to provide that balance of reading instruction

Theoretical Development in Reading Pedagogy

The teaching of reading has undergone significant changes in the 20th century as a result of experiments with new approaches to education in general. In the beginning of the 20th century, the personal interest and needs in reading were ignored. Experts mused over it, and during the late 1920s and 1930s there was a push for emphasizing individual needs in instruction. It was not until 1960s and 1970s when some fruitful thesis came into light. Goodman (1977) and others posited a psycholinguistic view of reading in which reading is viewed as an interactive process between language and thought.

We are now in the midst of a paradigm shifting towards an emphasis on language as communication (Raimes, 1983: 546), and modern world has adopted communicative approach of teaching language where students have more participation in the classroom activities than teachers have. But earlier, students had little or no participation in learning; they were mostly passive in the class. The class was dominated by the teacher and they used the approach and style they liked. Their rule was the rule, and students were to obey them. The teacher taught the learners according to his/her own way of understanding, and after the lesson he/she asked the students questions the answer of which he himself knew. But the situation has changed largely, and classroom approaches have been changed significantly. Now students are considered active participants in the classroom activities. They are learning actively asking relevant questions, sharing knowledge and schemata among themselves. Reading approaches and reading pedagogy, being important areas of EFL and ESL, have also been subjected to change—change in attitude, outlet, and, overall teaching method.

Problems Students often encounter with Reading

Teachers and students face many problems while teaching and learning English as a second language, in particular reading. A recent survey conducted by Dr. Pinki Malik (January, 2002) titled “Difficulties Faced by the Teachers in English Language at Elementary School Level in Haryana State” showed that the main area of difficulty faced by the teachers was teaching reading ability which was followed by poetry and prose comprehension and composition.

Carter and Nunan (2002:22) raised the question whether problems with reading is a reading problem or a language problem. Not surprisingly, they concluded that it involved both. But to other critics they differ from each other. Francis (2000:1) explained that “reading problem is the presence of more errors in a brain’s neurological network that clearly direct the interactive, predictive, integrative or mental processes known as “reading” which may be worsen by witness in the reader’s desire to read”.

Brist (2002) explains that reading problem can be identified by several symptoms like reversing letters or words on writing letters, losing ones’ place, reading unfluently or inaccurately, remembering little of one has read or reading with poor comprehension”.

Reading difficulty refers to an unexpected failure in learning to read, write or spell in spite of normal senses, normal intelligence and adequate opportunity and motivation (Peyrard- Janvid, et al, 2004). For purposes of this study, reading difficulty is the failure to read fluently and this includes mispronouncing, omitting, substituting as well as adding words. Lack of understanding at the level of words and sentences and lack of comprehension also contribute to reading difficulties.

Students have problems reading because they lack specific skills necessary for proficient reading. When a student has reading problems, there is a need to identify where specific deficiencies exist. Some scholars relate reading difficulties to neurological factors while others relate them to environmental factors. Discussions have been held in the United States of America and Scandinavian countries to find out whether reading difficulties are caused by psychological or neurological factors (Maruyama, 2007). Reading difficulties are complex and the causes are difficult to pin point.

Maruyama (2007) cites three considerations which support the view that reading difficulties are caused by neurological factors. These are disorientation and disorganization in the recognition of visual patterns due to brain damages, hereditary relationship of reading disability and the interrelationship between visual, auditory, temporal and kinesthetic disorientation and disorganization.

Mando (2008) indicates that reading failure is mainly caused by failure to acquire phonological awareness and skills in alphabetical coding.

Ojanen (2007) says reading difficulty can be a result of inadequate teaching. Teachers have a lot of work in teaching literacy skills so that a lot of children would become fluent readers.

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Environmental factors also contribute to the development of reading difficulties. Lack of motivation, inappropriate reading environment and conditions at home and in school hinders a child's interest in reading.

According to Paananen, et. al.(2009), the home environment plays a crucial role in students reading ability and effects it both positively and negatively.

Mother tongue interference, lack of motivation, lack of textbooks and appropriate reading materials, parents literary level, effects of poverty, lack of support by guardians and parents and the community at large influences a child's reading abilities adversely.

In India, English being the second language, students encounter a number of difficulties while reading and understanding a text. All current available data on student achievement suggest children are performing far below the level that is expected of them. The estimates from the oft quoted Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2012 suggest that of all rural children enrolled in standard five, only half can fluently read text from a standard two textbook.

During the last school year, in two districts in Bihar (Jehanabad and east Champaran) and another two districts in Haryana (Kurukshetra and Mahendragarh), a similar survey was carried out by the district administrations. In August 2012, of the 16,000 children who were assessed, only 30% of standards three, four and five could read simple paragraphs or short stories.

The education chapter in the 12th Five-Year Plan document places children's learning outcomes at the centre of the stage. The spirit of the Right to Education (RTE) Act also is to "guarantee" that by the time children complete eight years of schooling, they are capable of dealing with whatever lies ahead for them. But using ASER figures, we estimate that over 100 million children in India are two or more years below their grade level. Under the current circumstances, such children are very unlikely to reach the levels of capability expected of children after eight years of schooling, as mandated by the RTE Act.

The most prevalent causes of students' poor reading are the lack of vocabulary, Long and complex structure of sentences, words having multiple meanings, idiomatic and figurative meanings of words, Words having different syntactical functions, lack of concentration, lack of effective classroom activities, deficiency in associating phoneme and grapheme, incomplete knowledge of language, mother tongue interference, lack of graded materials, inept reading in mother tongue and cultural difference.

Reading Difficulties at Post – Primary Level

Middle school students are immensely diversified, and they need educators who are sensitive to their special patterns of growth and development (Preisser, Anders, and Glider 1990). Not surprisingly, such students benefit from teachers who are responsive to their social needs and high energy levels and who provide them with a range of options to meet their many interests.

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Successful middle school teachers understand the dynamic and diverse nature of these early adolescents and connect curricular offerings to their lives.

Many researchers mystified as to where and why the reading process breaks down. Although, problems may occur in any area, decoding, comprehension, or retention, the root of most reading problems, in the view of many experts, is decoding. Roughly 85% of children diagnosed with learning difficulties have a primary problem with reading and related language skills.

Decoding is the process by which a word is broken into individual phonemes and recognized based on those phonemes. The various signs of decoding difficulty are trouble sounding out words and recognizing words out of context, confusion between letters and the sounds they represent, slow oral reading rate (reading word-by-word), reading without expression and ignoring punctuation while reading comprehension relies on mastery of decoding; children who struggle to decode find it difficult to understand and remember what has been read. Because their efforts to grasp individual words are so exhausting, they have no resources left for understanding. The various signs of comprehension difficulty are confusion about the meaning of words and sentences, inability to connect ideas in a passage, omission or glossing over detail, difficulty distinguishing significant information from minor details and lack of concentration during reading.

Retention requires both decoding and comprehending what is written. This task relies on high level cognitive skills, including memory and the ability to group and retrieve related ideas. As students progress through grade levels, they are expected to retain more and more of what they read. From third grade on, reading to learn is central to classroom work and by high school it is an essential task. The various signs of retention difficulty are trouble remembering or summarizing what is read, difficulty connecting what is read to prior knowledge and difficulty applying content of a text to personal experiences.

Most students learn to decode by middle school, but they read slowly, which slows down homework efficiency and impacts their performance on tests. Slow reading is also a formula for eroding interest in reading.

Slow reading can be caused by two different issues; a deliberate decoding approach that requires too much concentration — thinking about anything while you do it slows you down, and/or a constant need to re-read pages because nothing is retained on the first time through — indicates weak reading comprehension skills or an attention deficit while reading, often related to an over-taxing reading approach.

Reading stamina is an important reading skill. Many children with reading problems can only read for a few minutes at a time, making it difficult to get through assigned material and the shortened periods cut down on reading practice.

A lack of reading stamina indicates reading inefficiency and/or poor reading comprehension. Inefficient decoding that takes effort and forces multi-tasking — decoding and deriving meaning

— while reading is exhausting. Flawed reading comprehension makes text uninteresting or worse, unintelligible, either of which create the groundwork for a curtailed reading session.

Another common reading problem is poor comprehension. We often see this when phonics are taught without intimately pairing comprehension with word decoding from the very beginning. It is not uncommon to see a student who reads aloud beautifully, but can't remember what he/she's read. They are doing great "word calling" but that isn't reading. Many reading problems only surface in middle school, when more complicated content is more challenging to grasp when reading is flawed.

Reading comprehension requires automaticity in decoding, so that the mind is completely available for comprehension. In later grades, comprehension requires an interactive, meta-cognitive reading approach, where a student is able to define main ideas and think critically about text. These skills do not develop in students with reading problems.

Deficits in language ability, particularly receptive language, can significantly compound students' reading comprehension problems. These are the students who on testing don't present with language disorder but have *low* abilities in key language areas, such as grammar, syntax and, perhaps most importantly, vocabulary knowledge.

Challenges faced by teachers in teaching reading

In virtually every class, there could be a learner with a reading difficulty. As such, during their career, every teacher meets several learners for whom reading is laborious, and even learners who think that they cannot read. Teaching these learners is a challenge for the teachers and the entire school (Paananen, et. al., 2009). Classroom effectiveness of teachers heavily depends on their knowledge of the subject matter and their pedagogical skills.

Unfortunately, most teachers are not oriented towards helping poor readers in their classes. In their training, they were not adequately prepared to teach all children according to their needs. Therefore, even in cases where reading materials are adequate, reading skills of poor readers are not improved the most important person, who is the teacher in this case does not know how to help the poor readers (Kalindi, 2005).

It is also important to bear in mind that, teachers have been working under difficult circumstances such as, too many pupils in classes, erratic pupil attendance and others (MoE, 1992). When there are too many pupils in a classroom, it becomes difficult for the teacher to give individual attention especially to those who may be lagging behind in reading. Furthermore, serious shortages of teaching and learning materials, as well as poor staffing especially in remote areas also make it a challenge for teachers in teaching reading (MoE, 2008). A teacher may have the required skills in teaching reading, but it becomes difficult for him/her to teach effectively if the necessary teaching and learning materials are not in place. Poor staffing levels means teachers have to attend to more than one class hence being overburdened. In turn, they will not be able to pay particular attention to those learners who have difficulties in reading.

The Challenge of Behavior Management is one of the most significant challenges teachers face in the beginning. It is a constant challenge as they get to know the intricacies of each child and work towards bringing out their best. The Challenge of Planning and Programming is one of the most important parts of teaching.

Creating new learning experiences, outlining a plan and designing the course of study are pivotal aspects of planning. Wherein some aspects are planned out to the letter and others are fluid and generally flexible. There are many factors to consider when programming a unit of work and it helps to start out with some sort of template to guide the planning.

The Challenge of Assessment relates to the planning and programming phase, but takes it a step further. Teachers are constantly storing away information about the children they teach in order to improve learning opportunities for their classes. Assessment helps teachers to give a more accurate overview of students' performance. The challenge is in selecting assessment tools which allow students to best present what they know and teachers to best access this data.

Another challenge faced by teachers is that of differentiation, as classes are made up of students with differing interests, abilities, skills and knowledge. For this reason, a single standard method cannot be applicable to all. Teachers face the challenge of meeting the variety of needs they are confronted with.

The Challenge of technology varies from teacher to teacher, school to school. In some schools the challenge is learning how to use the technologies available. In others it may be learning how to teach using minimal technologies.

The numerous gaps in the system is another challenge for improving learning outcomes that teachers point to. Some schools continue to lack adequate infrastructure; several states still face a severe shortage of teachers. Many will complain about the poor quality of institutional support for teachers' professional development. These commonly identified challenges related to inputs and institutions are visible.

The Challenge of Overcrowding Classrooms is yet another challenge where large numbers of students in the classroom make it difficult for the teachers to assign their attention to each student individually. Moreover the teachers find it really difficult to introduce language games, classroom activities, reading instructions in the classroom.

The Challenge of Time Management requires the teacher has to accomplish a variety of tasks within the stipulated time span of a class. In a typical class the teacher has to fulfill a number of duties simultaneously teaching the class as a whole, working with individual students who are weak, maintaining discipline and accomplishing other administrative duties. Thus a teacher has to manage all of these as well as complete his syllabus on time which leaves very little room for elaborate classroom activities and the focus is on wrapping the syllabus within the stipulated time.

Another challenge faced by teachers is to meet the overburdening demands of the curriculum. The curriculum encompasses a variety of tasks, activities, presentations, project work, syllabus and other such things which the teacher needs to facilitate, guide and monitor. The teacher has to meet the requirements of the curriculum within the given time period which poses as a great challenge in turn.

Although these definitions reflect long-standing views of reading, current literacy research supports a more comprehensive definition of reading. This new definition includes all of the above definitions and

Methodology of the study

A quantitative method of research was carried out which involved sampling, survey and questionnaire, data collection and data analysis and participants i.e. students and teachers.

The study was conducted towards the end of the academic session 2014-15 in the month of January 2015. At the time of study, around 80% 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 Carmel School, Dhanbad whereas the other group comprised students of the sixth and seventh grade of Millat High School, Dhanbad. Both the groups consisted of girl participants only.

Carmel school is an English medium, convent school affiliated to the ICSE board. The average number of students in each section does not exceed sixty. There a total of fifty faculty members out of which fifteen are English teachers.

Millat High School is a regional medium government aided minority school. It is affiliated to the state board of Jharkhand. The average number of students in each section is around two hundred. 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. 90 participants in Institution 1 and 120 students in Institution2. The study was conducted within the same week in both the school, engaging one period (i.e. 40 minutes) 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 25 - 55 years.

All the participants were Indian and a majority of these participants were familiar with English and Hindi languages. Some participants even had command over Bengali, Urdu and Sanskrit. The researcher participated in the study as the instructor, guide and facilitator.

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' responses.

The questionnaire used for the study have been constructed and designed according to the necessity and purpose of the study. While constructing the questionnaire, its applicability and adaptability have been considered. Respondents' intelligibility and their level of language vocabulary and grammar have been considered while designing questions for the questionnaire.

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 with Sentence Correction exercise which consisted of true and false type questions. The second section encompassed Comprehension exercise which consisted of multiple choice type questions (MCQ) where the students had to tick the correct answer. The third section consisted of Vocabulary questions which was further sub-divided into three different exercises: providing synonyms, providing antonyms and choosing a word from the passage closest in meaning to the given terms. The fourth section comprised of a Grammar 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 and clear instructions were provided to the participants.

The teachers' questionnaire consisted of thirty-one objective type questions which had to be answered by ticking the correct option according to them. The options in the questionnaire have been marked on a scale of 0 – 4, Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Very often and Always in the ascending order.

The teachers' questionnaire consists of two sections. The first section is meant for collecting personal details of the respondents. It includes name, age, gender, educational qualification, teaching experience and employment status. The second section consists of questions which are meant to evaluate the teaching challenges faced by them. The related questions have been grouped under various broad headings 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 two processes: 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.

All the sections in the students' questionnaire were scored separately. There were a total seven exercises and the students were marked out of a maximum of 5 marks in each section as each section consisted of five items. 1 point was given for each correct response and zero point for every incorrect response. The maximum total of marks was thirty-five. The total marks gained by the participants in each section were calculated and analyzed thereafter.

Results and Analysis

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 researcher with various observations. The overall performance of both the schools, Institution 1, i.e., Carmel School and Institution 2, i.e., Millat 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.

Table 1: The descriptive data of the analysis of all the activities is represented in the table below.

	INSTITUTION 1		INSTITUTION 2	
	GROUP A (%)	GROUP B (%)	GROUP A (%)	GROUP B (%)
COMPREHENSION	88	89	53	64
SENTENCE CORRECTION	91	92	69	83
GRAMMAR	55	84	1	21
VOCABULARY	49	60	25	37

SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION	29	59	0	0
OVERALL PERFORMANCE	56	72	28	41

Table 1 is a comprehensive data representation of the research findings. A number of significant findings have emerged in the present study. It is evident from the results and analysis that the students of Institution1 (Carmel School) performed better than the students of Institution 2 (Millat High School) in all the five categories.

Discussion

A number of significant findings have emerged in the present study. According to the analysis of the data in Table 1, it is evident that students face major difficulties in the areas of sentence construction, vocabulary and grammar. In the present 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 in Table 1 clearly shows that the students of Institution1 (Carmel School) performed better than the students of Institution 2 (Millat 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 Carmel School is an English medium private convent school, Millat High 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 Carmel 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 Millat High 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 fifteen English teachers and the average number of students in each class is not more than fifty-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, language laboratories or other advanced teaching technologies. There are irregularities in the payment of salaries, thus lack of incentives result in low motivation level and interest in the teachers as well. 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 second objective of this study was to find out the challenges faced by teachers while teaching reading to the post-primary students.

The teaching challenges faced by teachers have been evaluated using a teachers' questionnaire based on Likert scale. It consists of several questions enquiring upon the various aspects of teaching reading, where the respondents had to tick mark the most appropriate frequency (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Very Often and Always) according to them. The questionnaire comprised of thirty-one items grouped under six different categories, namely Reading Instruction, Teaching Reading, Reading Difficulties, Reading Assessment and Reading Measures. All these thirty-one items have been categorized for evaluation purposes.

Table No 2: Shows the Frequency of Teaching Reading with the students

Sl. No.	Questions	Frequency Of Responses (%)				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
1.	Do you divide your reading lesson into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities?	10	20	30	30	10
2.	Do you explain the background of the text before you start a reading lesson?				10	90
3.	Do you co-operate / guide the students to read texts in the class?				20	80

4.	Are you an active partner of the students to read texts in the class?				70	30
5.	Do you read the text yourself and then explain and interpret it to your students?	11		11	33	45
6.	Do you read out the text first and then let your students read and explain/interpret it?	11		56	33	
7.	Do you ask the students comprehension check questions after each reading?	11		22	34	33
8.	Do you emphasize language learning (i.e. grammar, vocabulary, style, sentence structure) in a reading class?		11	11	22	56
9.	Do you teach the students how to use the various reading skills and strategies like skimming, scanning, predicting, inferencing etc.	22		55	12	11
10.	How often do you use the following methods of teaching reading in your class?					
	• Phonic Method		29	29	42	
	• Alphabetic Method		16	50	17	17
	• Whole-word Method		17	33	50	

Table No 3: Shows the Frequency of Reading Difficulties with the students

Sl. No.	Questions	Frequency of Responses (%)				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
1.	Do you point out students' problem regarding reading?		12		13	75
2.	Do the students in your class face difficulty in reading at class level?		22	67	11	
3.	Do the students in your class read comfortably at:					
	• Word level			14	57	29
	• Sentence level	11			89	

	• Paragraph level		13	50	37	
4.	According to you what is the frequency of these difficulties noticed in most post-primary students who are unable to read					
	• Omission (omits a letter, word or sentence while reading)	10		80	10	
	• Addition (adds letters or words)	22	44	34		
	• Substitution (substitutes a word/ letter for another)	22	45	33		
	• Mispronounces words	11		45	33	11
5.	According to you, how often do the following causes of reading difficulty have an impact on post-primary (6-7 grade) students?					
	• Child cannot communicate in English		11	11	66	12
	• Mother tongue interference		10	10	80	
	• Lack of motivation		11	67	22	
	• Laziness		11	67		22
	• Chronic diseases	11	33	45	11	
	• Lack of textbooks and reading materials	11	33	34		22
	• Past continuous failure in school work		11	78	11	
	• Lack of support by parents		10	30	30	30
	• Effects of poverty		23	33	33	11
	• Genetic problems	11	33	34	22	
	• Parents illiteracy level		11	44	45	
	• Overloading of curriculum		10	50	10	30
	• Poor teaching		12	66	22	
	• Poor learning environment			78	22	

Table No 4: Shows the Frequency of Reading Assessment with the students

Sl. No.	Questions	Frequency of Responses (%)				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
1.	How often do you assess students' performance in reading by using					
	• Written methods		43	43	14	
	• Oral/spoken methods				71	29
2.	Do you think there is a relationship between a student's reading proficiency and class work scores?		12	75	13	
3.	Does inability to read impact the students overall performance in					
	• English comprehension			56	44	
	• Written composition		11	11	78	
	• Spoken competence	10		10	40	40
	• Listening ability			62	38	
	• Vocabulary gain		11	45	22	22
	• Understanding meaning of the text			33	56	11

Table No 5: Shows the Frequency of Reading Measures taken with the students

Sl. No.	Questions	Frequency of Responses (%)				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
1.	Do the students need remedial instruction in reading?			70	20	10
2.	How often do you provide remedial classes to the students?		78	22		
3.	How often do you make use of the following measures against reading difficulty?					
	• Remedial work	10	40	50		

	• Reading circle	30	10	40	20	
	• Extensive reading	11	11	45	33	
	• Including more reading activities in the syllabus		50	38	12	

Table No 6: Shows the Frequency of Reading Challenges faced by teachers

Sl. No.	Questions	Frequency of Responses (%)				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
1.	How often do you face the following challenges while teaching reading in your class?					
	• Lack of effective teaching material	22	22	45	11	
	• Large number of students in a class		20	10	40	30
	• Student's poor background knowledge			22	45	33
	• Teaching pronunciation			70	20	10

Discussion

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 as concluded by the research findings.

First, 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 to the researcher while conducting the students' classroom activities especially in Institution 2. The researcher 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.

Second, 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.

Third, teachers regard teaching pronunciation as one of the basic challenges faced by them in teaching reading to post-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.

Fourth, the teachers' responses in Item no.3 of Table 10 represent 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.

Fifth, it can be assumed that the growing level of reading difficulties among post-primary students could be as a result of malpractices in teaching reading. The research findings depict that teachers rarely make use of reading series, novels, magazines, newspapers, computer software and other such extensive reading resources. This in return affects the development of students' reading skills negatively and can lead to limited growth in reading.

Another considerable finding is that 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 reading circles and extensive reading sessions with students to overcome their reading problems.

The research findings project another inadequate teaching practice of the teachers. 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.

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 Dhanbad district. Second, the study was conducted on only one class, grade 6 of the respective schools but the results were generalized on all sixth graders, i.e. post primary students of Dhanbad. Third, though the study is reliable because of the use of objective type questionnaire but the elements of validity can be doubted. Last, 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 limiting the study.

Reading Difficulties of Post-primary Learners and Challenges Faced by Teachers in Teaching Reading: A Study of Dhanbad District

Shafaque Zaheer, Md. Mojibur Rahman, Associate

Despite all possible negative points the research tends to be reliable and of value. The researcher has some suggestions for further research that would take the shortcomings into account.

First of all, the researchers wish to apply the study in more than one educational context, i.e, the survey should be conducted in more than one private and government school of Dhanbad district. This will surely include more participants which will not only increase the validity but will inspect the topic from different angles.

Second, the present study mainly concentrated on reading difficulties. Sometimes reading difficulties may occur along side written and spoken difficulties while at times, they may occur independently. Therefore, the researcher recommends further studies to be conducted covering the other language skills as well in order to cite the correlation between the various skills.

Third, the researchers also wish to apply the spoken method of assessing reading along with the written method as used in the present study. This will surely provide more insight into the research work and allow the researcher to study the difficulties from two different angles.

Finally, the researchers suggest that future research should be done using a detailed subjective and objective survey spread across a longer period of time.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been suggested by the researcher and may be utilized by relevant institutions such as the Ministry of Education in an effort to alleviate reading difficulties among school learners in general and post-primary learners in particular. The recommendations and suggestions is a valuable effort made by the researcher to the Jharkhand Education Board, its teachers, teacher educators, advisory teacher services and school managers in order to advise them on how to develop and improve the teaching of English reading skills to post-primary learners with English as a second language.

First, the teacher- student ratio must be reduced so as to enable individual attention especially when it comes to assisting pupils with reading difficulties. In this regard, government has to employ more teachers and build more schools.

Second, teachers should make use additional reading instruction materials and elaborate reading activities in the classrooms to enhance learners reading ability. Efforts should be made to employ the use of authentic texts, computer software and other such useful techniques.

Third, teachers should lay equal emphasis on language learning while teaching. Teaching a text should not just focus on understanding and comprehending it, language activities like vocabulary gain exercise, grammar activities should also be associated with it. Use of dictionaries, language games, contextual guessing of word meaning and other such strategies should also be employed.

Fourth, proper measures should be taken for overcoming reading difficulties in students. Teachers must receive training on methods of conducting diagnostic assessments in reading so that they are able to identify the reading difficulties in students. Remedial classes should be

conducted regularly for the weaker students. Reading circles and extensive reading must be used as measures.

Fifth, set up and use of language laboratories should be made a vital part of the teaching curriculum. As the teaching of pronunciation is viewed as a major challenge faced by teachers, the use of audio tapes, CALL programmer, and other computer software can be frequently used. The students should be introduced to phonetics in order to understand letter sound correspondence. Role plays, extempore, telephonic conversations, are of the activities which can be used in the classroom to enhance students speaking skills.

Sixth, teachers should resort to material adaptation techniques while teaching reading. Texts should be changed and adapted according to the level of the students and the purpose of the study. This in turn will help students to overcome reading difficulties.

Seventh, there should be regular teacher training sessions to introduce new methods and techniques of teaching from time to time keeping in mind the needs of the learner and the curriculum.

Lastly, the government, state educational board and other stakeholders must provide more teaching and learning materials in schools where these items are lacking. Overburdening of the curriculum is yet another challenge faced by teachers and the authorities should work towards reducing it.

It is hoped that the findings of this research would lead to a better understanding of the notion of reading difficulties and teaching challenges with reference to post-primary learners and teachers. The finding of this study may shed light on our understanding of the reading difficulties of post-primary learners and the challenges faced by teachers in teaching these students, its significance in language pedagogy and spark more interest in this issue.

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