

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH READING FLUENCY AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN DISTRICT MARDAN, KPK

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ABSTRACT

Fluency is the backbone and basic component of the reading skills of any language specially a foreign language like English. Secondary level is a complete stage of education in itself as after its completion a certificate is awarded. Secondary level is also a transitional stage which leads towards higher education. The researcher focused on the evaluation of the teaching of fluency in the English reading at Secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa District Mardan. The data regarding the mentioned topic were collected with the help of class room observation. Ten classrooms of English at Secondary level were selected as sample of the study from 10 different Boys Higher Secondary Schools of Mardan. The observation checklist (sheet) covered all the aspects of the teaching of reading fluency. The collected data were tabulated and analyzed with the help of chi-square formula. The analysis of the data revealed that there is a dearth of highly trained English language teachers in District Mardan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). This research paper is very beneficial for the English teachers especially for the Secondary level English teachers to look back over their practices of teaching English language.

Key words: Fluency, Reading skills, Secondary level.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last many years, the methods of English language teaching have been going through many changes and modifications. Communicative approach to teaching and learning has been introduced and now this approach to teaching and learning is considered more important and successful than grammar based approach. Activity based approach enhances all the four basic skills of English language i.e. listening, reading, speaking and writing. Among these four skills, reading skills are considered more important than the other skills because reading skills play a pivotal role in getting higher education as English is considered the number one literary language of the world and most of research work is being published in English.

Reading has five basic components. These are Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Comprehension and Fluency.

Phonemic Awareness includes the abilities of attention and thinking. The students are in need of learning about the variation in sounds and speech. This phonemic awareness deals with the phonology of the individual sounds in words (Bowey, 2005).

Phonics deals with the two basic components of word recognition which are syllabication and sight words. Phonics deals with the connection between sound and letter. This is very much important in the embedded teaching of the reading and writing skills. Sight words help the students in recognizing the words by their shapes, lengths and other characteristics (DEST, 2005, NICHD, 2000, Rose, 2006).

Vocabulary increases the comprehension level of the students. Regular reading by itself increases the vocabulary. Vocabulary plays a significant role in the meaningful comprehension of the text (Bromely, 2007).

According to Armbruster *et.al* (2001), a proper reading rate of words in allotted time is the prerequisite for comprehension. This component deals with the understanding of the reading text.

For the proper **comprehension** of the written text, the students' prior knowledge is to be activated. Students will be made to read aloud. The headings, subheadings, content page etc are also made clear to the students. The students' faculty of extracting meaning of the difficult words must also be increased.

Similarly the students' **fluency** and increase in their vocabulary must also be ensured. But the researcher's main focus is on the reading fluency.

Fluency

Fluency means facile (easily comprehended) speech. This is a key to successful comprehension. Without fluency in speech, the readers cannot be good readers. Fluency means to be able to read a text accurately with little apprehending care to the functional details of reading such as to recognize and interpret (Singleton, 2009).

The emerging interest towards literacy was mainly due to the research works of Samules and Berge (1974). They developed and proposed a theory that the fluent readers automatically decode the reading text. During decoding, they give less attention to the text and so they have ample free time to comprehend the text properly (Samules, 1997).

According to Raisinki (2009) for many decades reading fluency could not get its due place in the components of reading skills. Teachers were only concerned with the learners' ability of decoding the text and not with the automatic ability of the students. But now fluency is one of the five components of reading and this has become a strong pillar of the reading skills (Stahl, 2005).

The Stages of Fluency

Rate, Accuracy (Precision) and Prosody are the different stages of the development of fluency. Rate deals with the reading speed. It is the reading speed of the readers. There must be a calculation between the reading words and the allocated time.

Accuracy (precision) refers to the silent reading ability of readers with the minimum level of mistakes. Decoding of words in a proper and easy way is called the reading accuracy. Reading rate and reading accuracy are interlinked and interwoven. Accuracy in reading improves the reading speed and efficiency of the reader.

Prosody is the last part of fluency. Prosody means smooth and effortless reading with correct collocation and accurate expression (Hicks, 2009/10). Prosody is the ability of dividing the reading text into meaningful phrases and units and this division of the reading text is the proven faculty of the readers' comprehension (Khun, 2003).

How to Develop and Teach Fluency

Fluency can be easily developed with the help of the following strategies. The teachers must follow and use these strategies for the development of their students' fluency in reading.

- a. Re-reading of the reading text several times
- b. Motivating the students for reading activity
- c. Availability of the variety of reading materials
- d. Motivating the students for additional reading
- e. Developing the habit of silent reading
- f. Arranging the activities for silent reading in the classroom.

The text books of other subjects can also be used for silent reading (Armbruster *et.al*. 2001).

Researches have suggested that 25% of teaching duration must be allocated to the teaching of reading fluency (Anderson, 2003). Fluency training should focus on the following:

- a. Practice and comprehension questions must be allocated equal time
- b. Scanning and Skimming must be given top priority while planning a lesson for the teaching of reading skills.
- c. Extensive reading opportunities must be provided to the students .

After going through the above mentioned strategies, the ability of students' reading is enhanced without any hindrance and the readers become fluent readers (Raisinki, 2003).

The following were the main objectives of this research paper :

- a. To evaluate the process of the teaching of reading skills at Secondary level especially in the area of fluency.
- b. To suggest useful suggestion for the improvement of the process of the teaching of fluency in reading of English at Secondary level in District Mardan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

Ten classrooms of English subject (language) at Secondary level were observed by the researcher with the help of observation sheet. The data were analyzed with the help of chi-square statistical tool i.e.

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 1. Classroom observation of boys higher secondary schools of Mardan

S.No	Questions	Yes	No	X ²
1.	Does the teacher perform model reading with correct pronunciation?	4	6	0.4
2.	Does the teacher teach the students how to extract meaning from the text?	6	4	0.4
3.	Does the teacher teach how to divide sentence into meaningful phrases?	5	5	0.00
4.	Does the teacher teach the students how to speak about the specific text in a given time period?	4	6	0.4
5.	Does the teacher teach the students how to pickup meaning from the unknown words?	3	7	0.16
6.	Does the teacher correct the errors	4	6	0.4
7.	Does the teacher check the expression, phrasing and inflection of students during their loud reading?	4	6	0.4
8.	Does the teacher assign orthographic activity to students?	3	7	0.16
9.	Does the teacher ask for the re-reading?	7	3	0.16
10.	Does the teacher motivate the students for reading activity?	6	4	0.4
11.	Does the teacher motivate the students for additional reading?	3	7	0.16
12.	Does the teacher develop the habit of silent reading?	3	7	0.16
13.	Does the teacher allocate equal time for comprehension questions and practice?	3	7	0.16
14.	Does the teacher develop the scanning technique of the students?	3	7	0.16
15.	Does the teacher develop the skimming technique of the students?	4	6	0.4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The findings of the study indicated that most of the teachers did not perform model reading and they did not teach the students how to extract meaning from the text.
2. The findings of the study revealed that teachers did not teach how to speak about a specific text in a given time and of picking up the meaning from the unknown words was also ignored by teachers.
3. The findings of the study showed that teachers did not correct and check the students' mistakes during their loud reading and orthographic activities were also not arranged by them.
4. The findings of the study indicated that students were not asked for additional reading and their silent reading ability was also not developed.
5. The findings of the study revealed that teachers ignored and did not teach about scanning and skimming techniques and they also gave no importance to comprehension questions and practice.

DISCUSSION

The teachers' teaching methods of English were fully exposed as observation gets direct data and the careful observation helps in the collection of exact data. This study indicated that there is a dearth of highly trained and dedicated English teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially in District Mardan. The applications of this study in other provinces may be considered after conducting similar studies there. In other research instruments bias may be possible on the part of the respondents but observation minimizes the chances of biased attitude and deliberate falsification on the part of the respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

English is a compulsory subject in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in the rest of Pakistan up to graduate level but it is taught as a subject not as a language. This is the reason that after the completion of 14 years education, most of our students cannot utter or write a correct sentence in English. Secondary level is a transitional level and it opens the door of higher education. This stage needs a very great care and dedication on the part of teachers. This is the dire need of the hour to teach English as a language not as a subject, as the prevailing teaching pedagogy of English at Secondary level does not accomplish the purpose.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the study are;

1. The English curriculum of teachers' education must be based on English language rather than literature.
2. English language may be given the top most priority at secondary level.
3. The teachers need to be trained on regular basis and these training sessions may be conducted on weekends.
4. The teachers training and training contents may be applied and practical.
5. The character of teachers may be improved and enhanced through motivational steps that are seminars, symposia and debates.

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