



Impact of Extensive Reading Materials in Enhancing the Reading Skill of Secondary School Students with References to Arakkonam Block, Tamilnadu, India

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Abstract

ICT has brought changes in many fields of human life. Education is one among them. The use of ICT in the classroom has totally revamped the way languages are taught in the schools and colleges. Intensive reading materials have traditionally been employed to develop the reading skill of the students. Extensive reading materials, as they are easy and interesting to read and comprehend, have come into exercise to enhance the reading skill of school students. Extensive Reading materials have definitely an impact in developing the reading ability of the secondary school students as they read with the help of social networking sites, whatsapp, and so on. This paper aims to find out the impact of extensive reading materials in enhancing the reading skill of secondary school students. It further aims to identify the difference in reading comprehension between the control and experimental group. It also tries to find out the difference in reading skill among the above average, average, and below average readers in the experimental group.

Key words: Reading skill, ICT, extensive reading, experimental group, etc.

1. Introduction

With the advent of Information and Communication Technology, internet has grown to become one of the most competent channels of communication. With the increased importance of global communication, English language has been developed into a global language. Hence, it is a felt necessity that the proficiency in English language becomes an essential qualification to all the walks of human life. After Independence, English has been included in the three-language formula in Indian education system. Gradually, English has become the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and universities. Now one cannot imagine his/her higher education without English language. Even though he/she completes higher education without English, getting employment becomes a fight back one for them. The acquisition of language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking becomes the need of the hour particularly for the school going students. Among all, reading becomes important for the mind and the success of students' academic achievement (Cunningham, 1998). Education of a child is incomplete unless he is equipped with the ability to read, to decipher, to interpret and to understand properly the content of a reading material. The intellectual advancement of a child is strictly limited, if he is unable to read.

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One of the purposes of reading is comprehension. In order to read, one has to comprehend what has been read: otherwise the purpose of reading would go in vain. Comprehension refers to the understanding process whereby meaning is assigned to the text as a whole. Many readers may decode text quite readily but still have difficulty understanding what it is that they have decoded. Comprehension is one of the most important reading skills school students need to possess (Underwood, 1994). In the words of Fry (1963) "it is very difficult to define reading comprehension. Reduced to its simplest elements, we might say that comprehension is a part of communication process of getting the thoughts that were in the author's mind into the reader's mind." Students who are good at reading comprehension skills are able to succeed their academic works. As they are learning English as second language, comprehension skills are not natural to them. Though the teachers have been following effective teaching methods to develop the comprehension skills of the students, there exist the secondary school students who lack skill of reading comprehension.

Samacheer Educational System has been put into practice from Standard I to Standard VIII in the schools of Tamilnadu (Both Government and Matriculation Schools), India. The contents in the textbooks have been carefully structured by experts from schools, colleges, and universities across the state by analyzing the requirements of the students. The teachers who have been handling the *Samacheer* contents have often been given training in the teaching methods. Active Learning Methodology (ALM) and Activity Based Learning (ABL) are two interesting teaching methodologies which are quite different than traditional methods of teaching. These two methods are originated from the state of Tamilnadu, India. Active Learning Methodologies are especially found effective in the middle school level.

The secondary level students are required to read and comprehend text materials from their textbooks in the school. The reading skill of these students has not been tested particularly in any standards during evaluation. The rural secondary students face many problems than their urban counterparts. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (US), approximately 8 million students in grades 4-12 read well below grade level (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007).

The students in the secondary level should develop the language skills of English such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. *Samacheer* education system has already been in vogue. Though the contents in their textbooks were rightly selected after thorough scrutiny by the curriculum designers, these students fail to read English texts by the time they complete their secondary education. There are interesting reading activities that follow the lessons left incomplete and given least priority if they are taught. The sole purpose of English is to make the students to develop the four language skills rather textual messages given in the textbooks. Each lesson in the English textbook consists of one prose, one poem, and one supplementary reading. Intensive reading materials are purely academic oriented hence they are studied to pass the examination rather to develop their reading skill.

Extensive reading has a long history in the teaching of English as a foreign language. The use of Extensive reading as a strategy has been first introduced by Palmer (1964). The term 'supplementary Reading', which has been used in school textbooks, is first used by Michael West (1955). The trend has changed into student-centered learning from teacher-centered learning. As a result, extensive reading has gained much attention and the students in this technology driven world are able to select the reading material which they want to read. It is possible only through extensive reading where the students can select any number of text materials according to their time and interest. There is no choice for selection in intensive reading as the text materials are included in the textbooks, they need to read it whether they are interested or not.

As a result of no-retention policy in the schools, the students up to Class VIII have not shown interest in learning new subjects and gain knowledge. They come to school with the



mindset that they will pass. The instruction of intensive reading materials in no way attracts the students of this level as the learners are passive in classroom learning. Hence in addition to intensive reading (reading comprehension passage placed in the textbooks of secondary school students), the researcher attempts to make use of the extensive reading materials taken from internet for the purpose of enhancing the reading comprehension skill of the secondary level students.

2. Objectives of the Study

Extensive reading materials have been used in the high school classrooms in order to identify its' impact on improving the reading comprehension ability of the secondary level students in Arakkonam Block, Vellore District. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify whether extensive reading enhance reading comprehension among the secondary level students' reading performance in Arakkonam Block, Vellore District.
- To find the difference in reading comprehension between the control group and the experimental group.
- To find the difference in reading comprehension among the above average, average and below average readers in experimental group.

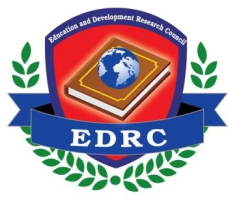
3. Review of Literature

In this study, literature review provides the background knowledge of reading and its sub-skill extensive reading. It further explores the studies conducted on extensive reading for the development of reading comprehension at various levels. Reading is a process of constructing meaning in which the reader connects information in the text to what he or she knows. It is a means of language acquisition. It is not a simple process but a complex interaction process between the readers, writers, and the text as defined by Smith (1994: 171-182). The previous knowledge, attitude, and experience of the reader pave the ways to comprehend the meaning which is possible only if it is done continuously.

Thorndike (1917: 323-332) defines reading as reasoning related to problem solving. The common view of reading consists of decoding/word recognition and general comprehension or problem-solving skills (Alderson, 2005). There are two major approaches used in developing reading skills, known as intensive and extensive reading. Intensive reading is related to further progress in language learning under the teacher's guidance. It deals with comprehension mostly at lexical and syntactic level. Reading comprehension is defined as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Reading comprehension is the construction of the meaning of a written or spoken communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message ... the presumption her is that meaning resides in the intentional problem-solving, thinking processes of the interpreter... that the content of the meaning is influenced by that person's prior knowledge and experience. (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p.39)

4. Methodology

The participants of the study have been selected from the selected schools of Arakkonam Block of Vellore District, Tamilnadu, India. They were divided into control and experimental groups. This research work is broadly divided into two parts: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative part deals with the impact of extensive reading materials on students'



reading comprehension and a reading comprehension test. The qualitative part deals with the study of students' attitudes towards reading comprehension. A research instrument has been administered to collect the responses. A reading comprehension test has been conducted in order to evaluate students' reading comprehension. The test material has been framed using ten reading comprehension passages selected from a website www.ereadingworksheets.com.

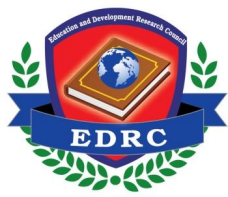
In the Quantitative analysis, the data obtained from the pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation, *t*-test, and Repeated Measures ANOVA test. In the Qualitative analysis, the responses collected from the students were analyzed using Factor Analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

The first objective of the study was to find the difference in reading comprehension between the control group and the experimental group. Pretest was conducted on reading comprehension passages. After ten weeks of extensive reading materials instruction to experimental group, posttest was conducted. There was a significant difference between control and experimental groups in posttest scores. Paired *t*-test was conducted to find out the difference between control groups and experimental groups in reading skill achievement. The significant difference was due to the impact of the extensive reading materials because the experimental group students were given more reading practice for a period of ten continuous weeks while the other group i.e. the control group received the normal lessons. The students in the experiment group were exposed to simple and comprehensible reading materials. As a result, their reading ability was improved which was reflected in the findings of the study. In support of the findings of the present study, Hafiz & Tudor (1990) reported the result of the application of an extensive reading with the learners of English in Pakistan.

The second objective of the study was to find the difference in reading comprehension among the above average, average and below average readers in experimental group. Repeated Measures ANOVA was deployed to find out the difference in reading comprehension among these three categories of readers in experimental group. The mean score of the below average was 26.58 and the average was 36.31. The difference between the below average and average readers was 9.93. The mean score of the above average readers was 42.88. The difference between the average and above average readers was 6.57. There was considerable difference in between these two groups in reading comprehension. The difference between the below average readers and the above average readers was found to be 16.30. It could be understood from the difference that there were significant improvement in the posttest on extensive reading materials in the experiment group.

The third objective of the study was to identify whether extensive reading enhances reading comprehension among the secondary level students' reading performance in Arakkonam Block, Vellore District. The responses to statements 1-5 in the questionnaire indicated that the secondary level students take pleasure in reading extensive materials as it helps to develop their vocabulary, imaginative power, and creativity of them. Factors such as reading newspapers, reading English novels, reading for competitive exams, reading to get higher education, etc. have significant roles to play in developing the reading skills of the secondary level students.



6. Recommendations and Conclusion

It is recommended that the teachers handling English language to secondary level students can follow the following activities to improve the reading comprehension ability of their students in the classroom.

- Extensive reading as a learning activity
- Begin with intensive reading
- Self-selection of reading materials
- Extensive Reading as a supplementary reading activity
- Underline the keywords/rereading
- Reading inductively/deductively
- Special reading place/material
- Loud reading / silent reading
- Role model reading
- Use of easy and simple vocabularies
- Reading games on various items

This study has been conducted to identify the impact of extensive reading materials in enhancing the reading comprehension ability of the secondary level students of Arakkonam Block, Vellore District. Similar studies can be conducted with higher secondary level students to find out the study yield similar or different results. This study is limited in identifying the impact of ER materials in enhancing reading skills. So, studies enhancing other language skills such as listening, speaking, and writing can be conducted. It is limited in taking the students from Arakkonam Block, Vellore District. Hence, schools in the other blocks of the same District or other districts may be taken for further research. Studies of this kind can also be conducted to decide the module of extensive reading materials for various levels of students.

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