

Direct Instruction Method to Enhance the English Language Learning of Tribal Children

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Abstract

The low literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes is a serious threat to Indian education. It is significant even to Kerala, the state with highest literacy rate. The intensity of the problem is reflected by the SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) examination results of March 2010 where the Palakkad district has scored the less pass percentage of 83.04. The increase in the number of failures and drop outs in the schools of Attapady is pointed out as major cause of the fall by educators and proponents of the State. A Pilot study is carried out in Attapady, the most educationally backward tribal pocket of Palakkad District. The lack of proficiency in English language is identified as a major obstacle to the education of Schedule Tribe learners. The inappropriate syllabus and teaching method of English develops a negative attitude in learners towards learning. The fear of learning a foreign language is one of the factors to stop their education because English language is a criteria rather than an option at higher level. It is clear that tribal learners are not motivated well. They have adjustment problems with school curriculum and teaching of English language. Though the Government can provide grants and scholarships for the betterment of learners, the responsibility of their educational development are ultimately in the hands of teachers. The paper is based upon the pilot study conducted to understand the educational backwardness of tribal learners with special reference to English language. It describes the language learning problems of tribal learners and analyzes the causes of backwardness.

A large number of deprived groups of population in India remain unable to participate in the process of Country's development and has affected the country's pace of socioeconomic development. It is severe in the case of Tribes, who are socially and economically marginalized. The social deprivation of group is reflected in their educational backwardness. In spite of various initiatives taken by governments to overcome educational backwardness of tribal, a vast majority of tribal population in India remain outside the education system. Though children are getting enrolled in school, less percentage of students complete their schooling. The increase in number of drop outs is a major problem prevailing in schools of tribal areas. Survey of higher education in the country, conducted by Times of India (August 2012) reveals that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of Scheduled Tribes is deplorable at 4.4 percent. The result reports that Tribals are lagging behind in higher education.

Need and Significance of the Study

The study began with the problem of educational backwardness of Palakkad district in the state of Kerala. The district wise analysis of Kerala's literacy rate (2001 census) showed that

Palakkad district has the lowest literacy in the state with 84.31 percent. The fact was acknowledged by the SSLC examination results of the past five years, where the pass percentage of district had been hovering around 85percent. The drop-out rate of ST students at high school level was found to be higher in the district. The lack of proficiency in English language was identified as a major obstacle to the education of Tribal learners.

Nearly six decades of development efforts could not yield an indelible dent in their conditions. The lack of proficiency in English language is identified as a major obstacle to education of Tribal learners. The inappropriate syllabus and teaching method of English develops a negative attitude in learners towards learning. The fear of learning a foreign language is one of the factors to stop their education because English language is a criteria rather than an option at higher level. It is clear that tribal learners are not motivated well. They have adjustment problems with school curriculum and teaching of English language. Though the Government can provide grants and scholarships for the betterment of learners, the responsibility of educational development are ultimately in the hands of experts and teachers.

Overview of Attappady

The study is carried out in Attappady, the most educationally backward tribal pocket of Palakkad District. Attappady is an extension mountain valley of seven hundred and thirty one in area square.km, lying at the Western Ghat ranges. It is located in the mid-eastern part of Kerala on the north-east of Palakkad district, adjoining Coimbatore and Nilgiri districts of Tamil Nadu. The population of Attappady consists of tribesfolk and non-tribesfolk. Attappady got its name from *atta*, the blood leach and *pad*, the habitation. The three major tribal communities of the region, namely, Irulas, Mudugas and Kurumbas, belong to the broad group of Dravidians. Though Tribesfolk constitute only 1.1 percent of the population of kerala state, 27 percent of population in Attappady is tribes. (2011 census). The people live in an egalitarian community. The tribal settlements in Attappady are known as *Ooru* (hamlet). Each *Ooru* contains, on an average of 50 houses, densely constructed in rows and protected by a ministry consisting a head, known as *Ooru Moopan*. The economy is traditional in nature, depending mainly on land and forest. In spite of several developmental programmes introduced to improve the livelihood strategies, the plight of tribesfolk continue to be steeped in the morass of ignorance, illiteracy and poverty.

English Language Teaching Situation in Attappady

In Attappady, the government schools are situated far away from tribal hamlets. Hence as an initiative, Multi Grade Learning Centers (MGLC's) are introduced in hamlets for making the primary education accessible for tribal children. It was established under the supervision of SSA (SarvaShikshaAbhiyan) of Central Government with a subunit of Block Resource Center (BRC). In MGLC's, a single volunteer teacher teaches all the subjects. The first to fourth grade learners are accommodated and trained together in one classroom. Even though children are getting enrolled in schools, only a very less percentage of them continue their education. The increase in the number of drop outs is one of the major causes of educational backwardness.

The revised curriculum and syllabus is based on the newly introduced Constructivist pedagogy of language learning. It suggests that language learning is similar to the process of mother tongue acquisition. Noam Chomsky in his 'Criticism of Behaviorism' in 1957 stated that 'children must have an inborn faculty for language acquisition' In 1998, the Second Language Acquisition Programme (SLAP) was initiated by in Kerala. The theoretical origin of SLAP is derived from the Cognitive Theory of Language Acquisition based on Chomskyan School of Linguistics. According to the theory, a child is genetically endowed with the language system, known as Universal Grammar. Language acquisition is the unfolding of inner system. It is a non-conscious and non-voluntary process.

The possibilities of new teaching pedagogy and syllabus seem to have helped the above average pupils to work on their own and attain achievement, where as it is not effective to favour the learning needs of backward students. The introduction of uncontrolled vocabulary and structures in an unsystematic method of teaching leaves the weaker ones in a state of confusion and disorder. In notebooks, learners write medley of words that do not even communicate. Ensuring the achievement of lofty objectives is difficult in a curriculum where learners themselves constructing the learning components with proper guidance from teacher. The evidence suggests that students of high school do not even have any command of structures which a learner of 5th grade should have obtained. It is found that problem cannot be treated by normal pattern of teaching and it requires special approaches.

The tribes live in a community where they have a mother tongue of their own, apart from the regional language of the state. The mother tongue of tribes is known as 'adhivasi basha' and it has no script. The children of non-tribal parents who are familiar to scripts and texts from their very young age through their family and culture have greater possibilities of acquiring a new language. The tribal learners who are less exposed to scripts and readings find it difficult. The problem becomes crucial when they enters into the primary education, where initial training is given on words and sentences through contexts rather than teaching through the set of sounds and symbols.

English is the language with more number of sounds than its symbols. Hence each symbol is used to denote more than one sound. The inability to read the texts is identified as a serious problem of tribal learners. The learners of 8th grade are not able to identify the alphabets and perceive the texts. The lack of training in 'phonemic awareness' and 'phonics' methods in reading are identified as the root cause of learning deficiency. According to the Report review research of 'National Reading Panel' on 'Teaching Children to Read', 'phonemic awareness', 'phonics', 'vocabulary', 'fluency' and comprehension' are identified as the five building blocks of any effective reading instruction. It helps learners' word reading and reading comprehension, as well as helping children to spell. Phonemic awareness is the basis for learning phonics.

At the juncture Direct Instruction approach developed particularly for the disadvantaged group of learners is found to be adaptable for teaching tribal students. The major goal of the Direct Instruction (DI) Model is to improve the basic education of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and thus increase their life options. It utilizes a tightly controlled

instructional methodology and highly structured teaching materials. The model emphasizes small-group, face-to-face instruction by a teacher using carefully sequenced, daily lessons in Reading, Arithmetic and Language. Despite of twenty five years of research evidences, Direct Instruction method has not practiced anywhere in India. A careful review of early studies revealed that study had not been undertaken by any mainstream researcher in Attappady for a doctoral research. For above reasons, there researcher has undertaken study with an inspiration towards service and social commitment.

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the educational backwardness of tribal children with reference to English language
- To understand the English language teaching and learning situation prevailing in Attappady
- To understand the English language learning problems of Tribal learners, with reference to reading achievement

Methodology in Brief

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for the collection of data. The pilot study was conducted to gather preliminary data by using qualitative methods. A small-scale study was conducted among the tribal settlement at Anakkal, a rural-urban region situated nearby South Malmpuzha in Palakkad district. The tribal children had to face a lot of difficulties in education during the early years. They had to travel a long distance by boat and bus to reach the schools and colleges, situated in town. With the advent of new routes and transportation facilities, the access to education has become easier and available. From the interaction held with college students of hamlet, it was determined that learners had a positive awareness towards English language. The learners lived in a background that was favorable enough to adapt and nurture the language learning needs. From the inquiry, researcher concluded that tribal settlements of Anakkal are on the verge of modernization and language learning problems experienced by learners were limited.

The pilot study had been carried out in Attappady from October 2009 to August 2010. The objectives were framed in foreshadowing the research problem and generating the hypotheses. Field work is conducted during the course of pilot study by adopting a number of methods consisting of, 1) in-depth interviews, 2) expert interviews, 3) participant observation, 4) focus group, 6) training programs, 7) visual methods and 6) field diary.

From the findings of pilot study, it was found that English is the toughest subject for tribal learners. The learners had a fear and negative attitude towards English language. The unhealthy classroom climate and lack of motivation prevented the students from acquiring English language skills. Even though language plays a crucial role in child's development, the environment at home and hostels cause language deprivation in learners. The constructivist pedagogy is used to teach English language in classrooms. The pedagogy emphasized the learning

through construction of knowledge. They have poor reading skills without explicit instruction. The low beginning reading achievement is identified as cause of language delay. The problem compounds itself as students find themselves increasingly behind their non-tribal peers in reading achievement. It was found that a remedial reading intervention is required to accelerate the learning of tribal students

To draw conclusions and validate the data gathered through pilot study, various quantitative tools are used. The tools used in the study are 1) Learners Achievement Test, 2) Questionnaire for Teacher, 3) Questionnaire for Parent 4) Questionnaire for Trainer, 5) Questionnaire for Administrator, 6) Questionnaire for Social Worker, 7) Questionnaire for Student. Based on the theory and review of direct instruction programs, a self-designed Direct Instruction Reading Intervention is prepared by the researcher to improve the reading achievement of tribal students. The format features of Direct Instruction approach is used to prepare the design. The intervention is planned for a time period of ten months. The intervention is designed to bring the at-risk tribal students to grade-level performance.

A group of thirty, tribal learners from GVHSS Agali, are selected for the experimental intervention. The Direct Instruction Reading Intervention is designed with an aim of improving the reading achievement of sample group. The focus is to improve the beginning reading skills of group, who are lagging behind their peers in English classroom. The direct instruction approach of reading is employed in intervention to improve the five reading components, namely Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension.

Based on the Direct Instruction programs as Reading Mastery, Horizons and Corrective Reading, the teaching and learning materials are designed by researcher. The instructional materials are prepared according to the format features of Direct Instruction method. The long-term goal of the intervention is to increase the level of student achievement in reading rate and comprehension through increased reading practice. The instructional materials included teacher's presentation book, student's book and a story reader.

A series of five tests were framed for learners during the experimentation. The tests included pre-test, two checkouts, post-test and post-intervention test. Pre-test was conducted during the beginning of intervention. In order to verify learners' level of progress, first checkout was administered in the third month and second checkout in the six month of study respectively. Post-test was held during ninth month of study, while culminating the intervention. After the intervention, post-intervention test was carried out in an interval of one month time-period to analyze the sustainability of improvement. The ten month Reading Intervention of study is divided into three different phases. Each phase have discrete objectives. First is the Firming Phase, conducted from June to August 2010. The objective of phase is to firm the skills the children learnt in early classes. The procedures for rereading vocabulary words are applied in lessons. The second phase, Vowel Mechanics is held from September to November 2010. The aim of phase is to firm all sound combinations by teaching letter names and vowel rules. The final phase of Textbook Preparation took place from December 2010 to February 2011. The

traditional textbook print is introduced to learners during the phase with an objective to expand learners comprehension tasks.

The tools are statistically tested and data was elicited. Independent T-test and percentage analysis were used for the analysis. The analysis and interpretation of data is carried out in two different phases. The first phase is the analysis of data collected through pilot study and the second phase involved analysis of data gathered during experimentation. Independent t-test and percentage analysis were used for the analysis.

Major Conclusions of the Study

English is the 'toughest' subject for tribal students who belong to economically deprived and backward families. Difficulty can be attributed to the heavy contrast between learners' mother-tongue and English language. Home and local environment cannot help to build a linguistic bridge in the inter-language phenomenon. The pedagogy followed is not feasible for learners, who have large extent of home-school dissonance. The possibilities of new teaching pedagogy and syllabus seem to have helped above average pupils to work on their own and attain achievement, where as it is not effective to favour the learning needs of backward students. The pedagogy is application oriented. It emphasizes the natural use of language inside classrooms without a structured teaching framework. Unsystematic method of teaching leaves the weaker ones in a state of confusion and disorder. The learners are highly behind their peers in literary development. Reading deficiency is identified as another cause of problem. Lack of script in tribal mother-tongue brings in learners unfamiliarity with text and symbols. Unlike non-tribal peers, who obtain the prior instruction of parents at early childhood, tribal learners start learning without any basic knowledge of English language structures. The learners are introduced to texts without the teaching of sounds and symbols. Problem occurs when the learning is continued without basic knowledge of language.

The structured pedagogy and systematic instruction helps to improve basic language skills of learners that are essential for higher achievement. It implies the teaching of basic reading skills and prepares learners for higher order skills. The key characteristic of reading instruction in Direct Instruction model is elaborate system of introducing skills and guides students in the application of skills to a variety of words. The words encountered in connected text are decodable through application of rules, learners have learnt. The Direct Instruction reading also includes a strong phonological component, closely integrated with explicit instruction on phonic strategies.

The three-phase Reading Intervention of research was conducted for ten months. A structured teaching pattern and continuous process of evaluation was incorporated in the intervention. The results of analysis prove, Direct Instruction method of reading can help learners to attain mastery by systematized training of five components namely phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The word identification and vocabulary accuracy are necessary for learners to read and comprehend text in a high speed

fluency rate. The method is appropriate for accelerating the language learning of slow and backward learners.

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