

FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' LOW COMPETENCE IN READING ENGLISH AT PRIMARY LEVEL IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Language learning has four basic skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Reading skill is the most important skill and valuable for effective learning process. Poor reading skill affects all other skills related to the process of language learning. English language has become an international language and proficiency in all the language skills has become the symbol of success. Students in Pakistan are facing many problems in reading English. The main focus of this paper is to explore the factors affecting students' low competence in reading English at primary level in Pakistan. The data were collected from government primary schools from the surrounding area of Khudian Khas Kasur. Questionnaires were used to collect data. Few subject experts English were also interviewed. On the basis of the research some recommendations have been made. The present study will help the learners to eradicate their issues in improving their reading skill.

KEYWORDS

Reading, Competence, Skill, Globalization, Language & Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The most powerful instrument to express oneself is language. Language is being used by everyone to impart his feelings and ideas to other people. English is becoming important day by day. Due to English the world is now considered a global village because English language has reached in almost every part of the world. Moreover it has become the language of media, trade, business and politics. In many countries English is being taught as a second language. In Pakistan English has become the medium of instruction. The language of science and technology, medicine and education is English. So proficiency in reading English has become the most important factor in Pakistan. Globalization needs an effective knowledge of English language to meet the present requirements of the society. A large amount of funds are being used on training but the result is still discouraging. Many students are unable to read the text book. In Pakistani government schools quantity is being stressed not the quality. Reading is the basic constituent of learning. At the end of the grade I learners must have acquired the ability to read. Learners who don't get this ability are the main cause of drop out. Pakistan has a rich treasure of literature in Urdu and other languages. The reading culture is diminishing. Many students are lagging behind in reading English as well as Urdu.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Medium of instruction in Pakistan is English but unfortunately most of the learners are not doing well in reading English. English has been adopted as a compulsory subject from primary to

graduation level in Pakistan but still people hesitate to use it because they don't have sufficient knowledge about English.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the main reasons behind low competency in reading English?
- How can English reading skill be improved in Pakistan?
- What is the impact of Literacy Numeracy Drive (LND) test on reading skills of the learners?
- The problem of low competence in English reading can be handled by providing libraries.
- Provision of proper environment and language labs can be helpful to reduce the difficulty.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a survey research. Questionnaires will be provided to the participants and after their response are collected by hand. Questionnaires have been designed on Likerts' Scales model.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

In Pakistan much focus is on English language learning. Many funds are utilized on trainings but the learners are feeling much difficulty in reading English. Flavel (1979) [1] remarks that the specialty to think about the objectivity of language and manipulate it consciously. Metacognition is thinking about your own thoughts that are necessary to read texts. Floyed (1987) [2] says that the word recognition and comprehension help in reading speed in L2. Background knowledge is also necessary to understand text. Habtamu (2016) [3] is of the opinion that reading is an important language skills among the four language skills. Having, this in mind, reading at an acceptable speed and comprehension play a great role in learning in general. Hedge (2003) [4] expresses that an extensive reading abilities based on learners' motivation and school resources. A highly motivated and well trained teacher can certainly select appropriate materials and activities for their own learner. Hong Nam (2006) [5] says that readers' language proficiency is related to the use of their reading strategies. Koda (2007) [6] expresses that there are various variables that impact learners' reading comprehension. Some of these variables involve vocabulary knowledge, prior knowledge, Meta cognitive information and reading strategies. Nergis (2013) [7] says that vocabulary, syntactic consciousness and Meta cognitive recognition are the factors that affect reading skills. Nguyen (2007) [8] observed that learners who had prior knowledge could easily understand the text. However learners feel many problems to understand unknown texts and they had to read more than once to comprehend texts. Ogunrombi (1995) [9] opines that the lack of functional libraries in most of the schools and a similar lack of trained librarians or teacher librarians. Stanovich (1986) [10] explains that the increasing effect of poor reading and vocabulary skills. Children who were poor readers did not have sufficient vocabulary. Young children struggled with reading; they read less than the competent fellow students and were exposed to fewer new words. This limitation on their vocabulary development made advancement in reading very difficult. Szilvia (2017) [11] says that reading comprehension is becoming more important because modern information based society requires excellent reading comprehension skills. Learning depends on the acquiring the information from text. Torgesen (2006) [12] examines that cognitive aspects related to memory and motivation factors and these

factors influenced the comprehension reading materials. Memory and motivation has significant role in reading comprehension. Learners who have memory difficulties have critical problems to understand texts. Yang Dai (2012) [13] opines that intensive reading is useful to develop comprehension. Yang Zhanli (2014) [14] points out that reading is about understanding written texts. But understanding is not simple looking. Understanding involves both perception and thought. It is related word recognition and comprehension. Zeilger (2005) [15] observes that reading is the process of understanding speech written down. The purpose of reading is to gain access to meaning.

6. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This is a case study of government boys/girls primary schools from the surrounding areas of Khudian Khas Kasur. Questionnaires will be made for students. Subject experts will also be interviewed in this regard.

7. DATA ANALYSIS

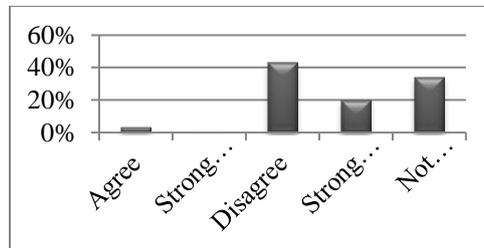


Figure 1. Separate period is there in your school to improve English reading skill.

Almost 63% learners are not agreeing with the statement. Other 34% are not deciding about this. It means no extra focus is given on reading skills.

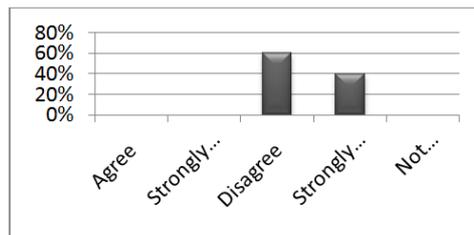


Figure 2. Library period is there in your school.

No learner is agreeing to this. 60% are disagreeing and 40% are strongly denying this statement.

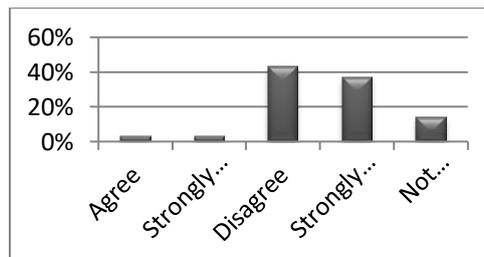


Figure 3. Your teacher has master degree in English.

Only 6% students seem to be agreeing to this. But other 80% say that their teacher does not have master degree in English. 14% are unable to decide about this.

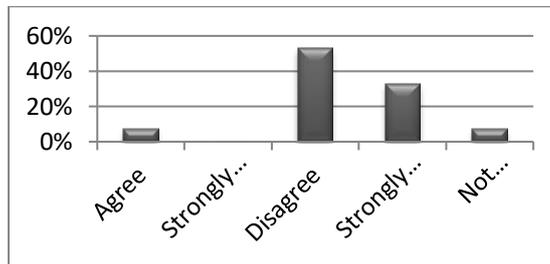


Figure 4. Electronic media is used in your school.

About 88% people are disagreeing that electronic media is used in schools. Only 7% people are agreeing that electronic media is used in schools.

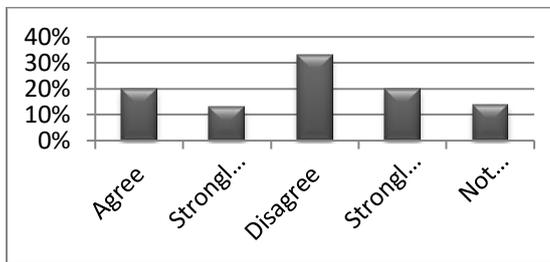


Figure 5: AV aids are used in your schools?

About 33% are agreeing that their teachers are using AV aids during their class. Other 53% learners are disagreeing to this statement.

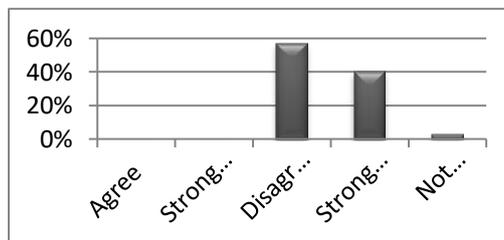


Figure 6. Language Laboratory is present in your school?

No one is agreeing to this statement. 57% students are disagreeing and 40% are strongly disagreeing that their school has a language lab.

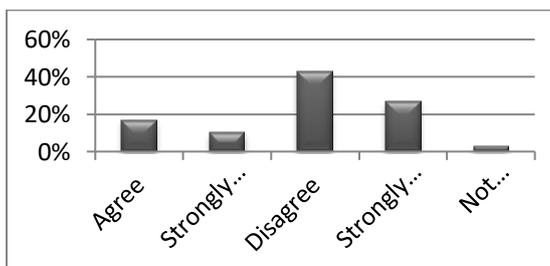


Figure 7. Teachers conduct reading competition in your class?

Only 17% are agreeing that their teachers conduct reading competitions in class. 43% are disagreeing and 27% are strongly disagreeing that reading competitions are held in classes.

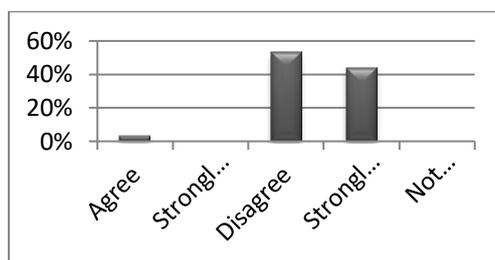


Figure 8. English newspaper is read in your home?

97% are disagreeing that English newspaper is read in their homes.

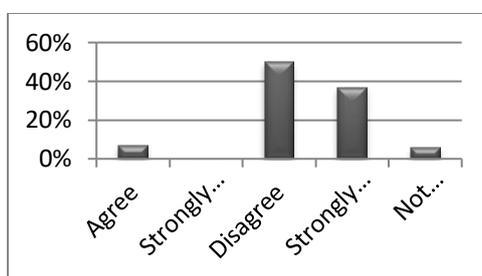


Figure 9. Electronic dictionaries are used by your teachers?

Only 7% learners are agreeing that their teachers are using electronic dictionaries during their class. 87% students are disagreeing that their teachers use electronic dictionaries.

8. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

5 subject experts were interviewed and were asked these three questions mainly.

1. What are the main reasons behind low competency in English reading skill?
2. What is the impact of LND test on reading English skill?
3. How can English reading skill be improved?

In response to the first question the subject experts opine that in our schools less trained teachers are teaching. Reading competitions are not conducted at any level. A comprehensive and well designed training is required to train those teachers who are teaching English in schools.

In response to the second question mostly the subject experts are of the opinion that LND test is totally a failure. It is only the wastage of the time as the teachers focus only on is, am ,are, has and have and nothing else to meet the result. Text books are totally ignored. LND kitabcha is given to the teachers to teach. Students are taught different short cuts to meet the result in the LND test. Due to this test reading as well as writing ability is being ignored.

While responding the question 3 the subject experts opined that language labs must be there in schools. Teachers who have master degree in English language must be recruited. Library is necessary at every level.

9. DISCUSSION

English is being used as a language of media, press, education and science. Due to the English language the whole world has become a global village. Normally people try to acquire it to have a better interaction with other people. Expanding business needs English language of high level. Competent readers can do good business.

In Pakistan it has been observed that reading English skill is not focused. Only to pass the examination is the top priority. Much focus is quantity not on quality. 100% participants of this research say that there are no functional libraries in schools. So the interest of reading is lagging behind. 80% learners say that their teachers do not have master degree in English. What will be the results where only 6% teachers have master degree in English?

Electronic media is an important thing in education system. But unfortunately 88% teachers do not get any benefit from it. Moreover electronic dictionaries have not been used by English teachers. Language labs are not present in schools. 53% participants say that their teachers do not use AV aids during their lesson. Reading competitions are not conducted by the teachers. Subject experts opine that much time is being wasted on LND test in class three. Reading text book is totally ignored at this stage. Even writing is not focused. Teacher only focuses on test not on improving reading as well as writing abilities of the learners.

10. CONCLUSION

In Pakistan, unfortunately there is not any strong policy in education department. Different experiments are going on. Sometimes the medium of instructions is English the next it becomes Urdu. And now Literacy numeracy drive (LND) test that is totally based on guess work is playing with future of the learners. Quality and not the quantity must be focused in policies.

Libraries are not properly functional and even not available in almost all schools at primary level. So the provision of libraries is necessary. Electronic media must be properly used in schools. Textbook is a rich source of reading. So textbook reading must not be ignored.

Environment is also a crucial element for improving reading English. Even educated parents don't read English news paper in their homes. Mostly students speak Punjabi in their homes. And they study English only in schools for only one hour daily. So their environment needs change.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- English teachers having master degree in English must be appointed.
- Separate training is required for English teachers.
- Textbooks must be read in classes.
- Teachers must have knowledge of new technologies.
- Libraries must be established in every school.

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APPENDIX A

Statements	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Decided
Separate period is there in your school to improve English reading skill.					
Library period is there in your school					
Your teacher has master degree in English					
Electronic media is used in your school.					
AV aids are used in your schools?					
Language Laboratory is present in your school?					
Teachers conduct reading competition in your class?					
English newspaper is read in your home?					
Electronic dictionaries are used by your teachers?					

AUTHOR

The author is an English teacher in the PSED (Punjab School Education Department), Pakistan. He has been serving as a teacher since 2009. He earned his Master of English in Literature and English. He also has done his M.Phil English in Applied Linguistics, Master of History and Master of Education as well. He belongs to a village that is 100 kilometers away from the city of Lahore. He has been the part of trainers' team and worked as Cluster Subject Expert English at District level. He has a keen interest in early childhood education.

