

Improving the Reading Achievement of Tribal Learners Through Direction Instruction Method

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Introduction

A large number of deprived groups of population in India remains 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 groups, a vast majority of tribal population in India remains 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. A survey of higher education in the country, conducted by *Times of India* (August 2012) reveals that the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of Scheduled Tribes is deplorable at 4.4 percent. The result reports that the Tribal groups are falling behind in higher education.

Education as an Instrument for Social Development

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Education is the instrument of social development, economic growth and equality. The development of a country is determined by the quality education it prevails. It is the process that fits an individual for social living and it helps to transmit customs, beliefs, language and the heritage of the society. Any effort of education should aim at equipping the people to meaningfully participate in various modern activities and institutions of power in the society. If development is seen as socio-cultural, economic and technological transformation of society, then language becomes an important variable in the development discourse.

Role of Language in Development

One of the most important elements of nature of language as suggested by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure is the sense of looking at it as a system for encoding meaning and realities of world. Language is identified as a medium which enables one for fullest participation in the national and international life.

English in India

With respect to multilingual Indian context, the language which provides fullest participation for individual is a major topic of discussion and debate within the country. The position paper of National Focus Group on Teaching of English for NCF – 2005 makes it clear while addressing the ‘language question’ - “English in India today is a symbol of people’s aspiration for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. The colonial origins are now irrelevant. The initial role in independence India is tailored to higher education. English became inclusive socially and linguistically. The current state of English stems from its overwhelming presence on world stage and its reflection in national arena”

Language as Cause of Dropout

Increase in rate of dropout is a major problem prevailing in the schools of Tribal areas. Language is one of barriers faced by the tribal children in their education. The difference between mother tongue and medium of instruction makes learning difficult. According to Shukla (1994), the achievements of tribal students are lower than non-tribal students in primary levels. The curriculum, medium of instruction and school system contribute to the low level of achievement. Due to the non-availability and non-accessibility

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of emerging facilities of modern world, the tribal people are backward socially, economically and educationally.

English language is one of the nourishments, not supplied to them at sufficient levels. The English language situation of tribal areas presents an appalling picture. According to the government norms at the provincial level, English may be introduced as a first language in tribal areas, but the quality of English language instruction is a matter of concern. The problem is compounded by large strength in class, unqualified teachers, uncoordinated and irrelevant revision of curriculum and liberal modes of evaluation.

Need and Significance of the Study

The study began with the problem of educational backwardness of Palakkad district in the state of Kerala. The districtwise 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 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 critical requirement rather than an option at the 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 rests 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 square km. in area, 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 tribals and non-tribals.

Attappady got its name from *atta*, the blood leech 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 Tribals constitute only 1.1 percent of the population of Kerala state, they constitute 27 percent of the population in Attappady (2011 Census). The tribal settlements in Attappady are known as *Ooru* (hamlet). Each *Ooru* has, on an average, 50 houses, densely constructed in rows and protected by a ministry consisting of 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 the tribals continues 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 to 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 continues their education. The increase in the number of drop outs is one of the major causes of educational backwardness.

According to many child psychologists, children reach an important developmental stage at the age of ten (Lambert, & Klineberg, 1967). Studies show the direct correlation between amount of time devoted to language study and the language proficiency students attain. The children who begin English language learning in elementary school and continue for a number of years have better chance of attaining a high level of proficiency than students whose language instruction begins in the post-elementary school years. While educationalists and language experts all over the world insist on the importance of effective language instruction from the grassroots level, English is trained merely as one among the many subjects in MGLC's. Though students are retained in centers, they are not properly trained.

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Though MGLC can be appreciated as an expansion of the Indian educational system, the concern of quality of education still remains as a question to be addressed.

This study reveals that English language teaching and learning situation of MGLCs is not carried out appropriately to suit the needs and achievement level of tribal children in the pedagogy of language acquisition. After acquiring the basic education from Multi Grade Learning Center, the learners are shifted to Government schools. The problem becomes more severe, when they are trained along with non-tribal learners using the same curriculum and syllabus.

English Curriculum and Pedagogy

In 1998, the Second Language Acquisition Programme (SLAP) was initiated 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 current approach advocated in the curriculum is based on Chomsky's concept of innate language system even as it acknowledge that the environmental factors contribute to the process of language learning. The natural atmosphere for learning has to be made inside the classroom with less cause of fear and anxiety among learners. It works on the principle of 'Learning without Burden'. The concept suggests that learning has to happen without force or compulsion as a natural process.

The learning is considered as a cognitive process that can be facilitated by the teacher and developed by peer interaction. It claims that a language system can be acquired through recurrence and not by repetition. The system has no concept of 'failure'. The errors are considered as an essential aspect of learning and therefore risk taking is encouraged. The role of teaching materials is minimal. The textbook is flexible and designed in such a way that it can be used in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. The language learning is extended to the range of application and experience from the set of rules and practice. The focus is given to creativity and thinking skills with due importance to LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) skills.

The possibilities of new teaching pedagogy and syllabus seem to have helped the above-average pupils to work on their own and attain achievement, whereas 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 a medley of words that do not even communicate. Ensuring the achievement of lofty objectives is difficult in a curriculum where learners themselves construct the learning components with guidance from the 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 the problem faced by children from tribal communities cannot be treated by the 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 the tribal people has no script. The children of non-tribal parents who are acquainted with the script 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 to learn any language and written material. The problem is usually more acute at the primary level, where words and sentences are introduced through contexts. Teaching through the set of sounds and symbols seems to be out of question here because of the age of children.

In English a letter may be 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 of the 'National Reading Panel' (2000) on 'Teaching Children to Read', 'phonemic awareness', 'phonics', 'vocabulary', 'fluency' and 'comprehension' are identified as the five building blocks of any effective reading instruction. These elements help learners' spelling, word reading and reading comprehension. Phonemic awareness is the basis for learning phonics.

Direct Instruction Approach

The Direct Instruction approach is suitable particularly for the disadvantaged group of learners. This is found to be adaptable for teaching tribal students. The major goal of the **Language in India** www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:5 May 2013
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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.

Although DI Model is available for the last twenty five years with research evidence in its favour, Direct Instruction method is not practiced anywhere in India. A careful review of the early studies reveals that no study has been undertaken by any mainstream researcher in Attappady for doctoral research. For above reasons, the researcher (the first author of this paper) has undertaken the present study as part of her 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 Attappaddy
- 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. A 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. From the interaction held with college students of hamlet, it was determined that the 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 in number and variety.

The pilot study was 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 8) field diary.

The Findings

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.

Constructivist pedagogy is used to teach English language in classrooms. The pedagogy emphasizes the learning through construction of knowledge. According to curriculum designers, students acquire language from surroundings by situational approach. On the contrary, students from backward castes and tribal families never had any facilities in their environment for the acquisition of language and for communicating via English.

They have poor reading skills and they were not provided with any explicit instruction relating to language texts including acquisition of words, phrases, sentences and conventions

of using English. 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.

Tools Used

To draw conclusions and validate the data gathered through pilot study, various quantitative tools were used. The tools used in the study were 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, and 7) Questionnaire for students. The primary data collected on the factors affecting the educational backwardness of tribal children were used to design and formulate the questionnaires. The institutions and individuals were visited in person by researcher to administer the tools. To prove the formulated hypothesis, an experimental intervention was designed for tribal students.

Based on the theory and review of direct instruction programs, a self-designed Direct Instruction Reading Intervention was prepared by the researcher to improve the reading achievement of tribal students. The format features of Direct Instruction approach was used to prepare the design. The intervention was 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 were selected for the experimental intervention. The Direct Instruction Reading Intervention was designed with the aim of improving the reading achievement of sample group. The focus was to improve the beginning reading skills of group, who were lagging behind their peers in English classroom. The direct instruction approach of reading was 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 were designed by researcher. The instructional materials were 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.

Before conducting the Direct Instruction Reading Intervention, two case studies were undertaken by the researcher in GVHSS Agali to validate the instructional materials and experimental design. Direct Instruction approach of reading was employed in intervention to improve the five reading components, namely Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension. Long-term goal of intervention was to increase the level of student achievement. Based on the Direct Instruction programs as Reading Mastery, Horizons and Corrective Reading, the teaching and learning materials were designed by researcher. Instructional materials were prepared according to the format features of Direct Instruction method and included teacher's presentation book, student's book and a story reader.

A series of five tests were framed for learners during the experiment. 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 the second checkout in the sixth month of the study respectively. Post-test was held during the ninth month of the study. After the intervention, post-intervention test was carried out in an interval of one month time-period to analyze the sustainability of improvement.

The tenth month Reading Intervention of the study was divided into three different phases. Each phase had discrete objectives. First is the Firming Phase, conducted from June to August 2010. The objective of this phase was to firm the skills the children learnt in early classes. The procedures for rereading vocabulary words were applied in lessons. The second phase, Vowel Mechanics, was held from September to November 2010. The aim of phase was 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 was introduced to learners during the phase with an objective to expand learners' comprehension tasks.

A series of five tests were framed for learners during the experiment. 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 the study

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respectively. Post-test was held during ninth month of the study, which culminated in 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 tools were statistically tested and data was elicited. Independent T-test and percentage analysis were used for the analysis. The analysis and interpretation of data was carried out in two different phases. The first phase was the analysis of data collected through pilot study and the second phase involved the analysis of data gathered during the experiment. 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 face extensive home-school dissonance. The possibilities of new teaching pedagogy and syllabus seem to have helped the above-average pupils to work on their own and attain achievement, whereas it is not effective to meet 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 literacy development. Reading deficiency is identified as another cause of problem. Learners are unfamiliar with text and symbols because of lack of script in the tribal mother-tongue. Unlike non-tribal peers, who may receive some prior instruction through their parents in 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.

Consequently, the learners face difficulty in reading and understanding texts. The lack of training in spelling, basic structures and early reading skills result in the problem. Evaluation of their performance is not frequently conducted. Evaluation conducted twice in a year demands only rote memory. Though pupils are promoted to higher class by liberal

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evaluation, they lack basic competencies. 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. The problem cannot be treated by normal pattern of teaching. It requires special approaches.

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 that the 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 learners as well as the tribal students.

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