



Difficulty in reading and speaking of Malayalam: a case study in Lakshadweep

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ABSTRACT

Reading is a means of fixing still firmly what a child already learnt by listening and speaking. It involves three processes that are interpreting the symbols making the correct sound and understanding the sense. So the art of reading may also be defined as a process of sight, sound and sense. Psychologists view reading as a process of reconstructing meaning from language represented by graphic symbols. Reading is not a simple mechanical skill. It is a thoughtful process. Reading difficulty is one of the major learning disabilities and it affects any part of reading process of the child. The present study is trying to identify the reading difficulty that faced by the Upper Primary students of Lakshadweep in Malayalam language. It is conducted on a sample of 591 upper primary school pupils drawn from ten Islands of Lakshadweep. The data were collected using “Test of Fundamental Reading Skills in Malayalam” it is found that 99.15% of pupils are having reading difficulty in Malayalam and only 0.84% of pupils only can read correctly. Based on gender, it shows that the difficulty in reading experienced by boys and girls in the Upper primary level is almost same.

KEY WORDS: Language, Lakshadweep, Reading, School, Upper primary.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of a nation depends on the quality of the citizens which depends on the quality of their education. Educations are an essential requirement of a good and enlighten life. According to Sapir (1921), language is purely human and non - instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. Language is the manifestation of man’s attempt of verbalise his sensations, feelings and thoughts. The important role of the language in the learning process cannot be minimised. The acquisition of language is essential for abstraction and concept formation and in fact for almost all higher learning and higher mental process such as thinking planning, reasoning, remembering and judging. The scope of language includes listening, speaking, reading and writing. As a medium of communication and a tool of learning; reading serves an in dispensable function in a society.

Reading is an important tool for school children to acquire knowledge and skill related to their subject matter. Gray (1956) suggested that there are four main components in the reading act such as word perception, comprehension of the ideas represented by the words, reaction to these ideas and assimilation or integration of the ideas with previous knowledge or experience. These four are interdependent in a meaningful use of reading as a problem solving tool. Researchers made several attempt to categorize reading difficulties. One of the important groupings are individual who have lacked normal school opportunities, individual emotionally or

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socially maladjusted, mentally retarded individuals, person who have lacked good pedagogical training and individual also have physical handicaps that interfere reading success (Bharadwaj, 1983).

In recent years, the proportion of children who face difficulty in reading has been increased. Studies indicate a number of causes and reasons for this. Researchers find out major reasons and factors like severe cognitive deficiency hearing impairment, early language impairment, attention deficit, socio-economic status of family, home environment and parents as related reasons.

In Lakshadweep, the speaking language is "Jasari" which doesn't have a script. So it is no role for educational purpose. Officially the mother tongue of Lakshadweep is Malayalam. From primary level onwards, children study Malayalam, and hence it plays a vital role in education in Lakshadweep. It is generally accepted that no one can develop precision of thought and clarity of ideas while acquiring the ability to speak effectively and to read and write correctly in ones mother tongue. So reading in mother tongue has very important role and any problem related to reading will affect not only the learning and acquisition of knowledge but also the thought process and consequently, the entire development of the child.

Moreover, the studies related to reading difficulty in Malayalam language are very few in number. Even though Malayalam is the mother tongue of Kerala and Lakshadweep, the pupil of Lakshadweep experience difficulty in reading Malayalam. It is felt that it will be useful to conduct this kind of a study in Lakshadweep to find out the percentage of difficulty in fundamental reading skills. It is a first kind of study in Lakshadweep Islands about reading difficulties as previous works in this field are limited.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Learning difficulties is an existing confusing, congressing and enigmatic field. Learning difficulties are the most frequently discussed areas of exceptionality. It is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the number of people who are defined as having learning difficulty (Mittler, 1995). The available survey on the prevalence of learning difficulties in the total population is predicted to be two percent (Lerner, 1981). Most of the children being identified as such because of difficulties in learning to read.

Approximately 85% of pupils, diagnosed with learning difficulties have primary problems with reading and related language skills (Nathan, 2002). More over when children's reading problems are identified early they are more likely to learn strategies that will raise their reading to greater levels. Hence undoubtedly this field of research deserves more attention.

In the development of reading, parents have a very important role. A number of pupils face reading difficulty but generally it is a fact that most of the parents are unaware of reading difficulty and are not giving proper attention to such children. They often label these children as backward without considering the real nature of the problem. The number of students with reading disorder can be considerably reduced by good early intervention (Fletches, 2007). So early intervention and identification of the problem in time are important factors to prevent reading difficulties. Children who get poor instruction in the primary level are more seriously harmed by the early learning experience and tend to do poorly in schooling across the year (Natriello et al., 1990; Kozol, 1991; Pianta, 1992; Pura et al., 1997). It is expected that this study will be useful to teachers to identify the reading achievement of pupils at primary level to make judgement on the level of student's achievements and to find out difficulty and to give proper instruction and strategies to overcome it in early stages.



The present study, as implied in the title, is an attempt to find out the reading difficulty in Malayalam among upper primary school pupils of Lakshadweep Islands. It feels that the outcome of the study is highly useful to the Education Department of Lakshadweep and administrators, primary school teachers, parents and all those who linked with primary education. The result of this study may probe their minds for a solution to this problem.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study was conducted on a sample of 591 upper primary school pupils drawn from ten Islands of Lakshadweep namely Kadmat, Kavaratti, Kalpeni, Agatti, Androth, Chethlat, Minicoy, Kilttan, Bithra and Amini during the period of June 2010 to March 2011 by using random sampling Technique for ensuring representation of population. Gender and Locale of the school were considered in the selection of the sample. The data were collected using "Test of Fundamental Reading Skills in Malayalam". The present study mainly focused on the following aspects of reading difficulties such as visual letter differentiation, letter sound recognition, distinguishing letter sound 'j and i', visual word recognition, word identification, oral word recognition, identifying correct/incorrect spelling, comprehending relation among a set of words, concluding from passage, comprehending a heard passage, reproducing from a passage, comprehension of a passage, letter pronunciation, selected words pronunciation and mechanics of reading.

RESULTS

In the present study, it is found that 99.15% of pupils are having reading difficulty in Malayalam and only 0.84% of pupils only can read correctly. 89.09% pupils experience reading difficulty and they scored below 90%, and only 10.91% pupils scored 90-99% marks. Specifically focused in selected areas of reading among upper primary school pupils of Lakshadweep. Fifteen areas of reading are selected to know the details of reading difficulty in selected area of reading which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage of Reading difficulty in select areas of Reading among upper primary school pupils of Lakshadweep

| SI.No | Area | Percentage of difficulty |
|-------|--|--------------------------|
| 1 | Select word pronunciation | 91.0222 |
| 2 | Reproducing from a passage | 88.80987 |
| 3 | Oral word recognition | 86.88194 |
| 4 | Letter pronunciation | 86.14447 |
| 5 | Comprehending a heard passage | 85.06637 |
| 6 | Word identification | 81.6477 |
| 7 | Concluding from a passage | 80.11659 |
| 8 | Identifying correct/incorrect spelling | 71.92724 |



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|----|---|-----------|
| 9 | Distinguishing letter sound j and i | 71.77974 |
| 10 | Mechanics of reading | 60.37415 |
| 11 | Comprehension of a passage | 54.153495 |
| 12 | Letter sound recognition | 43.45238 |
| 13 | Visual word recognition | 39.9266 |
| 14 | Comprehending relation among a set of words | 35.39472 |
| 15 | Visual letter differentiation | 25.91305 |

Table 1 shows that there are fifteen selected areas of reading in which percentage of reading difficulty were found out of the area of reading. The decreasing percentage of difficulty among upper primary school pupils are Select word pronunciation (91.02%), Reproducing from a passage (88.81%), Oral word recognition (86.88%), Letter pronunciation (86.14%), Comprehending a heard passage (85.07%), Word identification (81.65%), Concluding from passage (80.12%), Identifying correct/incorrect spelling (71.93%), Distinguishing letter sound 'j' and 'i' (71.78%), Mechanics of reading (60.37%), Comprehension of a passage (54.15%), Letter sound recognition (43.45%), Visual word recognition (39.93%), Comprehending relation among a set of words (35.39%) and Visual letter differentiation (25.91%).

Table 1 show that only three areas such as Visual word recognition (39.93%), Comprehending relation among a set of words (35.39%) and Visual letter differentiation (25.91%) have relatively less difficulty for the pupils. Remaining 12 areas such as, Select word pronunciation (91.02%), Reproducing from a passage (88.81%), Oral word recognition (86.88%), Letter pronunciation (86.14%), Comprehending a heard passage (85.07%), Word identification (81.65%), Concluding from passage (80.12%), Identifying correct/incorrect spelling (71.93%), Distinguishing letter sound 'j and i' (71.78%), Mechanics of reading (60.37%), Comprehension of a passage (54.15%) and Letter sound recognition (43.45%) have shown very high percentage of reading difficulty in upper primary school pupils.

The present study has also analysed 252 boys and 339 girls, to find out difference in the percentage of school pupils on gender basis. It is found that 98.81% boys and 99.41% girls have reading difficulty. It means a micro difference in the percentage of reading difficulty among upper primary school pupils on gender basis. It shows that the difficulty in reading experienced by upper primary boys and girls are almost same.

In the present study is to find out whether there is any difference in the percentage of reading difficulty in each of select area of reading among upper primary school pupils of Lakshadweep based on gender. The objective was materialized by calculating the percentage of difficulty on each of fifteen areas based on gender. The detail of analysis is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Gender wise comparison of percentage of reading difficulty in each of selected areas of reading

| Sl. No. | Areas | Percentage of difficulty in Boys | Percentage of difficulty in Girls | Percentage Difference |
|---------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Visual letter differentiation | 34.13 | 17.70 | 16.43 |
| 2 | Letter sound recognition | 53.57 | 33.33 | 20.24 |
| 3 | Distinguishing letter sound j and i | 77.78 | 65.79 | 11.99 |
| 4 | Visual word recognition | 45.63 | 34.22 | 11.41 |
| 5 | Word identification | 85.71 | 77.58 | 8.13 |
| 6 | Oral word recognition | 90.87 | 82.89 | 7.98 |
| 7 | Identifying correct/incorrect spelling | 77.78 | 66.08 | 11.7 |
| 8 | Comprehending relation among a set of words | 43.65 | 27.14 | 16.51 |
| 9 | Concluding from a passage | 84.13 | 76.11 | 8.02 |
| 10 | Comprehending a heard passage | 91.67 | 78.47 | 13.2 |
| 11 | Reproducing from a passage | 93.25 | 84.37 | 8.88 |
| 12 | Comprehension of a passage | 55.36 | 52.95 | 2.41 |
| 13 | Letter pronunciation | 90.87 | 81.42 | 9.45 |
| 14 | Select word pronunciation | 93.25 | 88.79 | 4.46 |
| 15 | Mechanics of reading | 90.48 | 84.07 | 6.41 |

Table 2 shows that there is high gender difference in the percentage of reading difficulty in thirteen areas of reading like Visual letter differentiation, Letter sound recognition, Distinguishing letter sound 'j and i', Visual word recognition, Visual word recognition, Word identification, Oral word recognition, Identifying correct/incorrect spelling, Comprehending relation among a set of words, Concluding from a passage, Comprehending a heard passage, Reproducing from a passage, Letter pronunciation and Mechanics of reading. Two areas showed low gender difference in percentage of reading difficulty, namely Comprehension of a passage (2.41% difference) and Select word pronunciation (4.46% difference)



CONCLUSION

As a medium of communication and a tool of learning, reading serves an indispensable function in society. Reading is very important in all walks of the life of a child. Schools strive to help pupils to read. But there are a good proportion of pupil who fail to read, and one of the most fundamental characteristics of such pupils is significant discrepancy between expected and actual performance in at least one academic content area, and for this reason there is every possibility to lag behind in all academic subjects.

This study was to find out the reading difficulty in Malayalam among upper primary pupil of Lakshadweep. The present study has thrown light to the fact that more than 90% of upper primary school pupils of Lakshadweep face difficult to read Malayalam correctly. Percentage of difficulty in selected fifteen areas of reading revealed that more than 90% pupils have difficulty to pronounce words correctly. For better reading, correct pronunciation of words is essential. So teachers should give proper instruction and give proper direction to pupils to pronounce the words correctly. Based on gender in selected areas, girl's performance is higher than boys. It revealed that reading habit is better in girls compared to that of boys. Teachers can play a vital role in the development of reading so in the primary level teachers should demonstrate the correct pronunciation of the words. They must take necessary steps to develop reading habits among student and ensure its practicability.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The most important findings of the research indicate that pupils experience high reading difficulty in Malayalam. Here are some suggestions to overcome these difficulties or for improving reading skills among children. Some of the instructional recommendations are listed below, which are largely based on provisions of facilities and opportunities for identifications, remediation and prevention of reading difficulties

1. In the primary level, language education should be given prime importance.
2. Opportunities to grasp and master the use of the alphabetic principle for the reading and writing have to be given.
3. There would be plenty of listening contexts in class such as make use of children's conversation, newspaper, books, children's magazine, letters, descriptions, questions, teachers talk etc which may be interesting to the pupil.
4. Provide different learning experiences to comment, describe, add and arrange what is read and to transform them in to story, drama, descriptions, news bulletins, commentary etc in the class.
5. Library facilities should invariably be provided and utilised for reading that in turn will help in developing reading skill.
6. To improve reading skill in Malayalam, practice of repeated reading should be used. For this, a passage of 50 to 150 words that is easily read by all pupils is given to pupils and the pupils read the passage orally three or four times.
7. By using look and say method, teacher can develop the reading capacity of pupils.
8. Opportunities should be given to read and to express differences and opinions.
9. By thorough reauditorisation, teacher can develop correct pronunciation.
10. For developing reading skill, repeated reading (Esnor et al., 1997), voluntary summary reading intervention (Kim et al., 2007), teacher read-aloud (Kaplan et al., 2007) and vocabulary games (Elredge et al., 1990) methods can be used.



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