

SIGNIFICANCE OF PRINT MEDIA: A STUDY OF READING SKILLS AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

Regardless of the fact, Pakistan is a developing country that is in need of English language; the irony of situation is that, as the role of English is increasing, the standard of teaching and learning English is declining at the secondary level. There are two broad categories of schools at secondary level in Pakistan: English medium schools and Urdu medium. However, English is taught as a compulsory subject in all schools. The teaching and learning situation in English medium schools is considered comparatively better but in Urdu medium schools, it presents entirely an unhappy state. A single prescribed textbook is taught for the entire year with Urdu language as the medium of instruction. Despite the fact that reading of textbook is a starting point, the emphasis is immediately shifted to improving writing skills to such an extent that students should be able to pass the examination. However, listening and speaking skills are not practised at large. Moreover, motivation level of students is also very low. Although the textbook contains limited material and is translated into Urdu, still it is difficult for the students to understand. Besides, it is without colourful pictures and illustrations. The teachers follow the activities given at the end of each lesson as directed, so there is no room left for them to generate variety of other interesting activities. Consequently, reading skills are not developed and a language-learning programme remains unsuccessful. The present study is an attempt to highlight the effectiveness of reading material from print media related to newspapers and magazines that can be used for developing reading skills. The Quasi-experimental design was selected for the secondary level (9th class) in one of the Government High Schools, Rawalpindi. One experimental group, comprising of fifteen students, was selected from ninth class on the basis of random sampling. Two lessons were selected from the prescribed textbook. They were taught along with the supporting reading material selected from the print media for improving reading skills. After that, findings were presented on the basis of analysis of the tests: placement test and performance test.

Literature Review

Reading is receptive in nature but active when functions because it is an ability to derive meaning from a written text that begins from recognition of single word to a whole book and which is the outcome of communication between the reader and the writer through written words. Davison & Dowson (1998:98) defines that “through reading, we are able to interpret, comprehend and respond critically to the ideas of others.”

The mass media are divided in two broad categories: electronic media and print media. Though the role of electronic media is increasing, the role of print media is persistent since long. Print media have been serving many important responsibilities in all fields of learning especially in education for the last five hundred years. They are providing abundant reading material in the form of newspapers and magazines. A wide variety of English newspapers is also available in the world today. Also, they provide current reading material. In this way, they expand educational opportunities and foster literacy to a significant extent, which ultimately improve knowledge of the target language. Moreover, they also improve language skills in general and reading skills in particular.

In Pakistani situation, teaching of grammar is the main objective yet students’ knowledge about English grammar is very limited. The rate of failure remains very high and pass percentage is generally below 50%. Students’ expectations are also very low; consequently, due to fear of failure, many students leave their school without completing their scholastic education. “Most developing countries today are concerned about the low quality of their secondary education which is marked by the high percentage of failures, repeaters and drop-outs.” (Singhal, et al 1995:178) A successful reading programme demands that first of all we should consider the needs of the students for the sake of developing their reading skills.

i. Purpose of Print Media Coincides With Purpose of Reading Skills

Cunnings Worth (1984:5) writes, “Our teaching must have its base a consideration of what our students need to learn, that is, what they will do with English on completing their course. This involves the teacher in looking beyond the confines of the classroom into the outside world...” If we look into the outside world, we find that readers develop their reading skills in order to get enjoyment and information from written texts.

On the other hand, the main objectives of print media are also to inform and entertain the readers e.g. news reports about current affairs, articles and columns provide information, whereas funny stories, riddles, jokes, comic strips, cartoons and sports news provide entertainment. Now, considering the common objectives of reading and the print media, it is quite useful to bring interesting and informative reading material of newspapers and magazines in an EFL classroom. Sports magazines, children magazines and sports pages of newspapers are even better for getting entertaining and informative reading material for the students at secondary level. Hence students will find good opportunities to learn how to read inside the classrooms using print media materials.

ii. Impact of Print Media on Students' Reading Skills

Print media develop curiosity and love for reading amongst the students of secondary level. Newspapers and magazines are useful not only for the purpose to satisfy the needs of the readers but also to keep their interest intact in reading. Thus, due to the overwhelming impact of print media, readers become more informative and mature as print media create reading culture, broaden the horizon of mind and lead us to achieve the true objectives of teaching reading i.e. to read the texts available in real life. Dominick (1993:80) comments, "As more books went into print, more people were encouraged to learn how to read. As literacy grew, more people turned to education, and universities expanded." Moreover, students are less motivated to read their course books and this situation brings many challenges for English language teachers to train students how to read. Therefore, print media can be an effective source of motivation because they mostly depict real life situation. Wharton & Race (1999:45) further substantiate that "successful reading of texts from the world outside the classroom is very motivating, and exposure to such sources can provide language development opportunities on conscious and unconscious levels..."

Supporting reading materials can be selected from newspapers and magazines according to the needs of the course books, the demands of reading lessons and the role of interest. Text books alone are considered insufficient for organizing successful developmental reading programme. Therefore, plenty of supporting reading material from print media can be used to achieve the true objectives of teaching reading skills. As the reading of magazines and newspapers goes on, the reading skills, reading comprehension abilities and vocabulary are developed that can also make learners independent readers with the passage of time. In this way, two main objectives will be achieved. Firstly, students will be able to read unfamiliar authentic texts that are not written only for teaching purposes. Secondly, the reading abilities, which are developed through print media, can also be used for reading of textbooks of higher classes as well. "In fact, the critical thinking and reading strategies that you develop for reading newspapers can be applied to all of your college reading materials" (Skidell & Becker 1996:186). Secondly, print media provide supporting reading material because a reading lesson is different from a language lesson. The main concern in a language lesson is to teach language structures and grammar whereas in a reading lesson, the main interest of a teacher is to help students improve their reading skills and as a result language itself is also improved. On the other hand, the prescribed textbook contains exercises only useful for language lesson as grammar is mostly taught at secondary level. "Giving a lesson based on a text is not the same thing as giving a reading lesson: most of the skills practised are probably not reading skills at all" (Nuttall 1982:20). Therefore, magazines and newspapers can be an effective source of reading material in order to achieve the true objectives of reading lesson when reading will be carried out for getting information and entertainment. This will pave the way towards developing reading skills.

Furthermore, print media create interest among readers. The factor of interest becomes very important because reading skills can be improved if students take interest in reading. That is why interest is the starting point of a successful reading programme. On the other hand, a textbook alone is insufficient to create interest among students for reading as it consists of fixed and monotonous reading material. Due to this reason, students are less interested to read their textbook. However, the reading material of magazines and newspapers can fill the gap to overcome this problem because they contain a lot of interesting and entertaining reading material. Magazines are particularly useful for getting interesting reading material. Dubin & Olshtain (1981:36) opine, "Popular magazine writers use various devices: clever titles to catch your attention; short paragraphs to hold your attention..." Therefore, with the help of newspapers and magazines, the interests of students towards wide reading can be expanded.

Similarly, being a rich source of enjoyment, print media can remove boredom and monotony from the classroom. Such an enjoyment raises interest and brings motivation among students. Dechant (1970:95) writes, "Recommend the sports page, magazines, or even the comics to children who do not read." Subsequently, they get sufficient training to use variety of reading skills. In this way students can utilize reading as a source of input.

Reading is both a matter of quality and of quantity. Students need to learn the skills of target language reading, and they also need exposure to a rich variety of written texts. Such exposure will contribute to general language improvement as well as fostering reading competence itself. (Wharton & Race 1999:45)

Furthermore, a single textbook provides limited reading material because it is mainly designed keeping in view the academic needs of the learners. On the other hand, availability of wide variety of reading material and various presentations of print media make the job quite easy to select appropriate reading material. In addition to it, print media presents editions with colourful pictures. Also, the excitement of pictures and aptness of illustrations raise interest and motivation among students towards reading. These pictures are lavishly presented in newspapers and magazines to fascinate the human eyes so that readers may take interest to read further. Adams & Stratton (1963:331) mention, "Magazines make extensive use of pictures, and some pictorial magazines tell their stories almost entirely with photos." These magazines with the coloured additions can be very effective to captivate the students and as a result they will take interest in reading. On the contrary, the textbooks at secondary level (class 9th) do not contain any colourful picture or illustration. Thus, print media can provide pictures as a source of visual aid along with the textbook for developing reading skills.

Research studies also indicate that reading comprehension is developed through pictures and illustrations. Likewise, synonyms and antonyms can be taught through pictures. In addition, through discussing the pictures, children can develop their prediction and anticipation skills in order to disclose the stories behind these pictures. Grellet (1981:67) suggests, "Give four photographs— corresponding to four different moments in the

passage— to four groups and ask them to reord them and invent a story illustrated by the pictures.”

Statement of the Problem

Reading skills are not developed among students at secondary level (in Urdu medium school) because they are given limited reading material from the prescribed textbook for the entire year. For the purpose of investigating this problem, the researchers formulated the following hypothesis:

Print Media can be used for developing reading skills among students at secondary level.

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of the present research are: -

- To determine the effectiveness of supporting reading material from print media for developing reading skills.
- To develop students’ motivation and interest in reading skills while using print media.
- To analyse whether print media is helpful in improving reading skills among students at secondary level or not.

Gaining Access to the Research Venue

The researchers did Quasi-experimental study in one of the Government Schools, Rawalpindi. Since the students of 9th class were not going to appear in the final examination from the board and there was less pressure upon them, they were selected for the research. On their first visit to the school, the researchers explained the purpose of conducting research at secondary level to the Headmaster of the school in order to get approval. At the beginning, the Headmaster showed some reservations about this study but the researchers assured him that the study would help the students improve reading skills. The researchers also informed that they would teach some lessons from the textbook with the help of supporting reading material selected from print media for improving reading skills. Eventually, the headmaster very kindly permitted to do the research work. The teachers were very cooperative and the students also showed great interest in the activities.

Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to secondary level (9th class) in one of the Government Schools, Rawalpindi. One classroom at secondary level (9th class) was taken as population that consisted of 15 students. Gay (1996:112) says, “The population is the group of interest to the researcher, the group to which she or he would like the results of the study to be generalizable.” Fifteen students were selected as a sample for the study from class (9th B)

through random sampling. Bell (1999:126) opines, “A random sample will give each of the individuals concerned an equal chance of being selected.” Separate slips of paper were prepared, students’ names and their roll numbers were written on them, which were then placed in a plastic bin. It was shaken beforehand and the desired number of slips was picked up from the bin. In this way, 15 students were selected. The selection of 15 subjects was determined in accordance with Gay’s view: “Experimental studies with tight experimental control, however, may be valid with as few as 15 subjects per group.” (Gay 1996:124)

Research Design of the Study

The Quasi-experimental design was selected for the secondary level (9th class) in the Government High School, Rawalpindi. One Quasi-experimental group, consisted of fifteen students, was selected from ninth class on the basis of random sampling. Two lessons were selected from the prescribed textbook, which were taught along with the supporting reading material selected from print media for improving reading skills. Placement tests were taken before, and achievement tests were taken after reading the selected lessons. Then, the performance of students was compared and findings were drawn. The experimental teaching continued approximately for seven weeks and the researchers took one period of 45 minutes daily. This means that the researchers taught the students for 31 hours and 30 minutes approximately.

Data Collection

The data were collected in the light of Quasi-experimental research study. The placement test and achievement test were used in order to measure the role of print media for improving reading skills amongst the students at secondary level in Urdu medium schools in Pakistan.

Data Analysis

The tests results were analysed in detail with the help of statistical tables. The performance of students has been shown in percentage. The pie charts have been used to show the average performance of students. With the help of data analysis, the researchers have tried to find out the effectiveness of reading material through newspapers and magazines for developing reading skills among students at secondary level. In this way, the analysis helped the researchers to generalize the findings of the research study.

The Performance of Students in Placement and Achievement Tests

The performance of students in placement and achievement tests in both the selected lessons is analyzed separately. The analysis reveals the effectiveness of exploiting print

media for developing reading skills among students at secondary level in Urdu medium schools in Pakistan.

Marks Obtained by Students in Lesson No.1

TABLE 1

S.NO	NAME CODES	TOTAL MARKS	MARKS OBTAINED			
			PLACEMENT TEST		ACHIEVEMENT TEST	
			MARKS	%	MARKS	%
1	B-401	25	5	20%	18	72%
2	B-402	25	2	8%	13	52%
3	B-403	25	9	36%	21	84%
4	B-404	25	4	16%	17	68%
5	B-405	25	0	0%	16	64%
6	B-406	25	0	0%	11	44%
7	B-407	25	4	16%	16	64%
8	B-408	25	4	16%	11	44%
9	B-409	25	1	4%	7	28%
10	B-410	25	2	8%	19	76%
11	B-411	25	0	0%	12	48%
12	B-412	25	1	4%	18	72%
13	B-413	25	4	16%	17	68%
14	B-414	25	4	16%	11	44%
15	B-415	25	4	16%	11	44%
Sum of Marks Obtained by All Students			44	11.80 %	218	58.13%

All students showed good result in the achievement test as compared to the placement test.

Marks obtained by Students in Lesson No.2

TABLE 2

S.NO	NAME CODES	TOTAL MARKS	MARKS OBTAINED			
			PLACEMENT TEST		ACHIEVEMENT TEST	
			MARKS	%	MARKS	%
1	B-401	25	3	12%	17	68%
2	B-402	25	1	4%	12	48%
3	B-403	25	8	32%	20	80%
4	B-404	25	5	20%	20	80%
5	B-405	25	6	24%	14	56%
6	B-406	25	3	12%	11	44%
7	B-407	25	2	8%	18	72%
8	B-408	25	3	12%	15	60%
9	B-409	25	4	16%	15	60%
10	B-410	25	6	24%	17	68%
11	B-411	25	1	4%	14	56%
12	B-412	25	2	8%	19	76%
13	B-413	25	9	36%	20	80%
14	B-414	25	4	16%	14	56%
15	B-415	25	2	8%	12	48%
Sum of Marks Obtained by All Students			59	15.73%	238	63.47%

The performance of students remained very low in the placement test. However, they obtained good marks in the achievement test.

Comparative Analysis of Tests' Result

15 students were selected, however, the analysis of the performance of first 10 students is submitted below separately in the form of percentage after arranging their names in alphabetical order. The result of the achievement tests indicates that the student name code B-401 improved his reading skills. He scored 20% marks in the first placement test and 12% marks in the second placement test but in the achievement tests, he got good marks by scoring 72% and 68% marks respectively. The student name code B-402 scored 8% and 4% marks in the placement tests respectively. He also demonstrated an average performance in the achievement tests after getting 52% and 48% marks respectively. The student name code B-403 showed an outstanding performance in the achievement tests. He scored 84% and 80% marks respectively, although he also got considerable marks in the placement tests. In the first placement test, he got 36% and in the second placement test, he obtained 32% marks. The student name code B-404 showed an excellent performance in the achievement tests by scoring 68% and 80% marks respectively. However, he also obtained 16% marks in the first placement test and 20% marks in the second placement test. The student name code B-405 showed better performance. In the first achievement test, he achieved 64% marks but in the second achievement test, he got comparatively less marks as he scored 56% marks. On the other hand, he failed to get any marks in the first placement test though he got 24% marks in the second placement test. Though the student name code B-406 could not get any marks in the first placement test, he scored 12% marks in the second placement test. On the other hand, he showed ordinary performance in the achievement tests as he scored 44% marks each in the achievement tests. The higher percentage in the achievement tests highlights the improvement made by the student name code B-407. He got 64% marks in the first achievement test and 72% marks in the second achievement test. On the other hand, he scored just 16% and 8% marks in the placement tests respectively. The student name code B-408 showed normal performance in his first achievement test and achieved only 44% marks. But in the second achievement test, he showed good result by scoring 60% marks. It is a considerable improvement if we compare it to his performance in the placement tests because he scored only 16% and 12% marks respectively. The student name code B-409 got only 4% marks in the first placement test, but in the second placement test he got 16% marks which are obviously better than the first one. The result indicates that his reading skills were not developed satisfactorily at the beginning. He scored only 28% marks in the first achievement test. However, with the passage of time, his reading skills were improved as he scored 60% marks in the second achievement test. The student name code B-410 got only 8% marks in the first placement test but in the achievement test, he performed quite well and scored 76% marks. He also got 68% marks in the second achievement test, though he succeeded to get 24% marks in the second placement test as well.

Summary of Tests' Result

TABLE 3

S.N O	NAME CODE	LESSON NO.1				LESSON NO.2			
		PLACEMENT TEST		ACHIEVEMEN T TEST		PLACEMEN T TEST		ACHIEVEMEN T TEST	
		MARKS	%	MARK S	%	MAR KS	%	MARK S	%
1	B-401	5/25	20%	18/25	72%	3/25	12%	17/25	68%
2	B-402	2/25	8%	13/25	52%	1/25	4%	12/25	48%
3	B-403	9/25	36%	21/25	84%	8/25	32%	20/25	80%
4	B-404	4/25	16%	17/25	68%	5/25	20%	20/25	80%
5	B-405	0/25	0%	16/25	64%	6/25	24%	14/25	56%
6	B-406	0/25	0%	11/25	44%	3/25	12%	11/25	44%
7	B-407	4/25	16%	16/25	64%	2/25	8%	18/25	72%
8	B-408	4/25	16%	11/25	44%	3/25	12%	15/25	60%
9	B-409	1/25	4%	7/25	28%	4/25	16%	15/25	60%
10	B-410	2/25	8%	19/25	76%	6/25	24%	17/25	68%
11	B-411	0/25	0%	12/25	48%	1/25	4%	14/25	56%
12	B-412	1/25	4%	18/25	72%	2/25	8%	19/25	76%
13	B-413	4/25	16%	17/25	68%	9/25	36%	20/25	80%
14	B-414	4/25	16%	11/25	44%	4/25	16%	14/25	56%
15	B-415	4/25	16%	11/25	44%	2/25	8%	12/25	48%
Sum of Marks Obtained by All Students		44	11.80 %	218	58.13 %	59	15.7 3%	238	63.47%

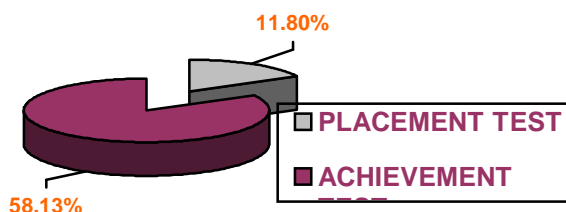
The summary of tests' result indicates that all students showed better performance in achievement tests as compared to the placement tests.

Comparison of Students' Average Performance in Tests

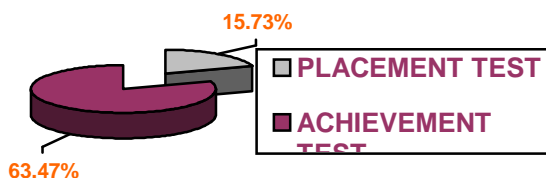
Formula for Average Percentage in one Test

$$\left[\left\{ \frac{\text{Sum of total marks scored by all students in a test}}{\text{Total number of students}} \div \text{Total marks of a test} \right\} \times 100 \right]$$

(a) Lesson No.1



(b) Lesson No.2



The average performance of students indicates that they got low marks and scored only 11.80% and 15.73% marks in placement tests of Lesson No.1 and Lesson No.2 respectively. On the other hand, they showed good result in achievement tests of both the lessons by scoring 58.13% and 63.47% marks respectively.

Conclusion

The present research study provided an excellent opportunity for getting an interesting and a useful teaching and learning experience. It confirms that variety of reading material along with colourful pictures is very effective for developing reading skills. All educationists and researchers are unanimous about the effective role of print media for improving reading skills and the same is proven in this study as well. Moreover, the data

during the analysis reflected that teachers and students recognized the significance of print media for improving reading skills. Especially, when students were given selected texts from print media, they showed great interest and willingness to participate in reading activities. The performance of students in achievement tests reveals that newspapers and magazines are quite useful means of getting supplementary reading material for improving reading skills. EFL learners entering Urdu medium schools at secondary level need to develop their reading skills because after leaving secondary school, either they have to join colleges or begin practical work in life. In both the cases, they need competency in reading English texts. Therefore, a successful reading programme is essential for improving reading skills. On the other hand, reading consists of variety of skills like skimming, scanning, prediction and anticipation. These skills become the tools of human brain to understand written texts. "Reading on the secondary level makes specific demands upon the reader. He must be skilled in locating information...having located the material and decided on the approach, he needs many comprehension skills to enable him to master the meaning" (Strang & Bracken 1957:112). We use different reading skills e.g. we scan an advertisement in case of finding a company's name, but in case of getting main information of a news report, we skim through its headline and lead paragraph. Thus, developing reading skills is a key to make learners competent readers. As a result, a love for reading can be developed among them that can instil reading habits and eventually students can get pleasure and enjoyment from reading. Further research may be carried out for comparative analysis of reading materials presented by print media in the light of readability criteria mentioned by Nuttall (1982:25-26) i.e. assessing the students level, proportion of new vocabulary.

Findings

Print media related to newspapers and magazines provide variety of interesting reading material that creates opportunities to develop reading skills. Sports magazines, children magazines and sports pages of newspapers are particularly very effective source for selecting easy, attractive and enjoyable reading material.

Fixed limited reading material of prescribed textbook is one of the main causes of reading deficiencies, and it is also difficult for students to understand. Learners are not exposed to English language apart from the textbook material in the classrooms at large. Textbook does not contain reading material for extensive reading. Reading activities are very limited and many pages of textbook are also left unread. AV aids and pictures are not used. Students do not find any source of enjoyment in reading. Time period is very limited for developing reading skills.

Recommendations

- Variety of interesting and entertaining reading material should be selected from newspapers and magazines. And, these topics should be added in the textbook to provide supporting reading material and pictures.

- Reading texts like advertisements, team records and train schedule should be selected for improving scanning skills.
- Longer texts like news reports about popular sports should be selected for improving skimming skills.
- Headline lines from newspapers and magazines can be effective source of improving anticipation skills.
- Reading material for both extensive and intensive reading can encourage learners to develop their reading skills.
- While selecting reading material, the background knowledge and previous experience of learners should be considered. However, over-familiar topics should not be included in the textbook.

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