

**DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A
PROGRAMME FOR ENHANCING READING SKILLS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF SENIOR KINDERGARTEN
STUDENTS**

AN ABSTRACT
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INTRODUCTION

Education is an integral part of a child's holistic development. The aim of education is to develop a child's inherent capabilities, inherent potential to make her a wholesome thinking and feeling individual. It is a lifelong journey in our lives, which develops various skills. The way in which a child learns these skills, depends on the child as well as the approach taken by the teacher. So, one-size-fits-all approach can leave many young children behind. As Locke (1632-1704) had stated, we are born as blank slates(*tabula rasa*), that we have no innate knowledge but we acquire what we know after we are born, through sensation and reflection(Newman,2010).

The responsibility of education and learning is naturally the parents', in the early years. Thereafter it is with the preschool where they spend their initial time experiencing the world beyond their home. Thus, the preschool is where the growth and development of young children is facilitated in their formative years, so it is very important what they learn and how they learn. Preschool is where a variety of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes are held for the children's quality care and education between the age of two and six.

The first six to eight years of a child's life are globally acknowledged to be the most critical years for lifelong development since the pace of development in this time is extremely rapid. Recent research in neuroscience, particularly on the brain, has thrown light on the 'critical periods' located within these early years for the forming of synaptic connections in the brain and for the full development of the brain's potential. Research has also indicated that if these early years are not supported by, or embedded in, a stimulating and enriching physical and psychosocial environment, the chances of the child's brain developing its full potential are considerably, and often irreversibly, reduced. This stage in life has far-reaching repercussions for a child since it inculcates social values and personal habits, which last a lifetime. So, it is logical to invest in these early years to ensure an enabling environment for every child, which will give her a lifelong sound foundation and the quality of human capital will be affected positively. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) derives its importance from this rationale.

Language plays an important role in communication, exchange of information, development of reading skills, reading with comprehension, and, in later years, academic success. Yet, little attention is being paid to language acquisition and experiences in ECCE programmes.

There is a need to enhance children's language competency in the early years, since Foundational reading and writing skills that develop from birth to age five, have a clear and a consistently strong relationship with later conventional literacy skills (Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Also, six variables representing early literacy skills/foundational skills have medium to large predictive relationships with later measures of literacy development. These six variables correlated with later literacy as shown by data drawn from multiple studies with large number of children. These six variables are, alphabet knowledge (AK), phonological Awareness (PA), Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN) of objects or colors, Writing letters or one's own name, Phonological Memory.

Language development in the early childhood includes listening and comprehension, oral skills/speaking and communicating, vocabulary development, pre-literacy/emergent literacy skills like phonological awareness, print awareness and concepts, letter-sound correspondence, recognition of letters, building words and sentences and early writing and introduction to language of school transaction. Children will continue to use two languages if they perceive it to be valuable by doing so. Language is not linear, and formal teaching does not speed up the learning process. Language learning is dynamic – language must be meaningful and used (Collier, 1995a; Grosjean, 1982; Krashen, 1996; McLaughlin, 1984).

The way children perceive, remember, comprehend, and make sense of their world is all tied up in language. It is one of the classic human traits, since non-humans do not communicate by using language.

'Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts.' Henry Sweet, an English Phonetician and Language Scholar (Chand, 2001) Language requires coordinating and integrating a large number of diverse abilities, functions and skills. We are endowed with the innate ability/faculty for language acquisition, all humans have the capability to acquire language. Children's language development follows a predictable path, depending upon the age they reach their milestones.

Language acquisition is the process, by which we acquire the capacity to perceive and understand language, as well as produce and use words and sentences to communicate.

Acquisition depends on children receiving linguistic input during the critical period. Humans use language for social interaction, so for children to learn language, they need to interact

socially to develop it adequately. Children acquire language through interaction with parents, teachers and their peers and it happens in stages, first understanding, then one-word utterances, then two-word phrases, and so on. Exposure to language is the basic requirement for language acquisition, auditory and acoustic inputs are essential for activating the language faculty in children. Language acquisition can be categorized into two types; first language acquisition and second language acquisition. Learning a first language is something any child does successfully, without really needing formal lessons, at home. Whereas, learning a second language usually happens in a school or later. It is quite interesting to understand how children acquire language so early and rapidly. They do so through a subconscious process during which they are not really aware of any grammatical rules. Some important theories of language acquisition are, behaviourist theory, innateness theory by Noam Chomsky, cognitive theory by Jean Piaget, and social interaction theory by Vygotsky.

LANGUAGE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE)

The main four skills of language are -Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). These skills are the main skills in language learning-teaching. Listening and reading are receptive skills whereas speaking and writing are productive /expressive skills. It is easy for a teacher to spot a child who is not speaking and writing, while a child who cannot listen well and read well, comes under a teacher's radar a bit late. Listening and speaking are auditory skills; reading and writing are visual skills. All four of these skills are interconnected and are required to learn a language.

The research in neuroscience confirms the importance of early years in a child's life, particularly since 90% of brain development has already taken place by the time the child is six years of age. So, whatever experiences are gained during this period, has a massive impact on the child's future learning. Here is where the basis of language is laid. The rate of development particularly, intellectual development is most rapid in the early years of life and that during this period of the most active growth of an organism, the environmental enrichment or deprivation makes its maximum impact.

Piaget's cognitive development theory stresses upon seizing the pre-operational stage in a child from 2 years to 7 years for maximum learning. Children try to represent the world through words, images, and drawing in this golden period. Due to evolutionary acceleration of various skills like motor, cognitive, affective, etc. in the young (4+) learners, the children

are learning faster than expected out of them. Having worked with children for over thirty years, the researcher feels that children, who are the first- generation English learners, and whose mother tongue is not English, come to school with hardly any print exposure in English at home. They cannot complete their schoolwork successfully because of their low reading levels. There is a huge difference between schooling and learning. Little do the adults realize that children who just even pretend to read at home are more likely to read better later in their lives. The books could be in their native language or English, but the habits and attitudes are very important to develop when they are young. Reading ability has not much to do with age, but more to do with child's linguistic competencies, how much he was read to, how much he has been playing with words and books, how much he pretended to be a reader when he played with the language. Through the act of reading, a child makes contact with the outside world, which is a thrilling feat for someone so young. (NIPUN, 2021).

ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

English is an international language and one of the five most spoken in the world today (Mckay,2002) Approximately 427 million are considered as native speakers of this language (Crystal, 1997). Around two billion people speak English as a first, second and foreign language (Crystal, 2008). So, almost 30% of the world speaks English and the number is on the rise. As a vehicular language, it is used for communication, commerce, education, and exchanging ideas and culture across the globe. Interestingly, about 80% of English speakers are non - native speakers (Crystal, 2003).

UIS data shows that two-thirds (68%) of the children – 262 million out of 387 million are in school and will reach the last grade of primary but will not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading. These findings show the extent to which education systems around the world are failing to provide quality education and decent classroom conditions in which children can learn. Analysis of the PISA (2015) stated that mathematics results show that a ‘middle or a high performing’ country has significantly a smaller number of students in the bottom percentile compared to a ‘low performing’ country. Thus, to move from low to middle performance, it is crucial to “lift the tail”, or ensure that the weakest students at the bottom percentile achieve foundational learning and move towards average performance. While high-income countries are on the pathway to achieve this goal, a recent report by the World Bank highlights that currently, 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries suffer from learning poverty; explained by the inability to read and

understand a simple text by age 10. 55% of children in late primary age in India are suffering from it currently.

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH IN INDIA

India has significantly progressed to achieve universal access up to elementary level¹ with one of the largest schooling systems in the world with almost 250 million school-going children and 9.2 million teachers². However, studies have shown that ensuring that students are in school does not naturally lead to an increase in their learning. There is a strong national concern today regarding the poor learning levels of children at various stages of school education. Research has shown conclusively that once students fall behind on foundational literacy and numeracy, they tend to maintain flat learning curves for years, perpetually unable to catch up. This is because until grade 3, children are expected to ‘learn to read’ and acquire basic skills. After grade 3 children are expected to be able to ‘read to learn’. If this does not happen, the learning gap continues to widen from that point, as the texts in the language textbooks and mathematical concepts become more complex and abstract in later grades. The damage is even greater for children who are forced to study in a language that they do not speak or understand.

In this globalized world, India has been largely influenced by English. Also, the colonial era has left its mark on the way our country uses language. Hoping their children be prepared for the changing world, many parents seek to raise their children to be multilingual. The parents’ aspirations for their children for a better life and a better job, drive them to opt for English medium education. With the globalization process kicking in the business scenario, English began to be seen as an important vehicle for success and made an entry into our classrooms.

Research shows that multilingual persons have higher levels of cognitive brain function and are more adept at solving problems, planning, and other mentally demanding tasks (Amanda Chatel, 2014). Jayasundara (2015) and Ramirez &Kuhl (2016) revealed that starting to use second or third language since the baby begins to acquire his/her language is the best method in raising bilingual/multilingual children. Ramirez &Kuhl (2016) showed that optimal learning is achieved when children started learning two languages at an early age through high-quality interactions with live human beings, and both languages were supported throughout the toddler, preschool, and school years. The school choices and multilingualism make our education system quite complicated, hence it is of grave importance that non–

native speakers of English are taught with a thorough understanding of their cultural differences and English language deficits. English is not just about grammar or new words; it is mainly about communicative competence.

Macaulay's minutes February 2, 1835 paved the way for English in India officially. The Governor-General Bentick issued the necessary order on March 7, 1835 to make English the medium of instruction in all the institutions of learning. The first important commission after Independence, The University Grants Commission, 1948 under the chairmanship of Dr S. Radhakrishnan clearly said, 'Our students who are undergoing training at schools which will admit them either to university or to a vocation must acquire sufficient mastery of English to give them success to the treasures of knowledge.' The Official Language Commission (1955) said, 'English has to be taught hereafter principally as a "Language of Comprehension" rather than as a "Literary Language", to develop in the students learning it a faculty for comprehending writings in English language.' The Kothari commission (1964) went further and stated, 'As English will, for a long time to come, continue to be needed as a "library language" in the field of higher education, a strong foundation in the language will have to be laid at the school stage.'

NCF (2005) states that, in the context of teaching a language, it is important to recognize the inbuilt linguistic potential of children as well as to remember that languages get socio-culturally constructed and change in our day-to-day interactions. The liberalization of our economy led to the entry of multinationals resulting in huge job opportunities that required a good command over English. Students started learning English to meet the practical needs, relating to job research. Spoken English institutes and English medium schools all over the country started mushrooming. This scenario made the academicians and policymakers take another good look at the syllabus and pedagogies. Exam-oriented teachings, rote method, no individual attention, were some of the reasons why it was difficult to pick up English by the students.

According to report of National Knowledge Commission (2007), there is an irony in the situation. English has been a part of our education for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, barely more than one percent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language.... But NKC believes that the time has come for us to teach our young

people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society.

NCERT (2007). stated that there was an interesting finding on how English medium schools are multiplying in the All-India School Education Survey. The percentage of schools teaching English as a ‘first language’ doubled between 1993 and 2002 from 5% to 10% in primary schools and from 7 % to 13% in upper primary schools. English is offered as a second language by more states than any other language. 33 to 35 states claim to offer English as a medium of instruction; this is more than any other language. Hence, on the basis of above-mentioned facts, we can see a major shift from regional to English language as a medium of instruction in India. Today, all over the world, more non-native speakers use English than the native English speakers. English as medium of instruction is used in 15.49% schools at the primary stage, 21.08% schools at the upper primary stage, 28.73% schools at the secondary stage and 33.06% schools at the higher secondary stage. The corresponding figures in the 7th survey were 12.98%, 18.25%, and 25.84% and 33.59%, respectively. (7th survey NCERT).

Literacy rates are exceedingly low in many parts of India. Children’s reading levels did not improve significantly between 2012 and 2013 (ASER, 2013). In fact, in many cases, the ability to read has decreased over time to the point where students cannot read even at levels substantially lower than their grade level. For example, the proportion of children in Standard 5 who could read a Standard 2-level text has decreased each year since 2009 to only 47% in

2013. The proportion drops even lower, to 41.1%, in government schools.³ For example, in Standard 3 in Andhra Pradesh, about 31% of children cannot read a single word and 48% cannot read a Standard 1-level text. In Standard 3 in Karnataka, about 37% of children cannot read a single word and 62% cannot read a Standard 1-level text.

India is home to approximately 447 languages, 75 of which are institutional,⁴ and 22 of which are officially used by different states (Paul, Simons, & Fennig, 2013). Reflecting this multilingualism, the nation’s language-of-education policy is known as the Three Language Formula. This policy states that all school-going children must learn three languages—one as a medium of instruction, one as a second language (L2), and one as a third language (L3)—by the end of secondary school (Department of Elementary Education and Literacy & Department of Secondary and Higher Education, 2013).

The order in which the languages are taught depends on the school. Private schools are more likely than other types of schools to use English as the medium of instruction, followed by Hindi and a regional language. Government schools are more likely to use the state's official language (such as Kannada in Karnataka or Telugu in Andhra Pradesh) as the medium of instruction, followed by English and Hindi. Additionally, the prospect of socioeconomic mobility that comes with English language and literacy skills has led to a surge in parental and community demand for schools that use English as the medium of instruction (Azam, Chin, & Prakash, 2010; Coleman, 2011). However, evidence does not show that children attending these schools in low-resource settings acquire English any better or faster than those going to schools that use a regional language as the medium of instruction (Mohanty & Mishra, 2000). Furthermore, no empirical guidelines are available to show when and how to introduce English to promote outcomes in both regional languages and English.

Given these prevailing environments of multilingualism, non-alphabetic writing systems, and limited resources, there is critical need for reading research to uncover the process of learning acquisition specific to these environments. Such formative, pre-intervention research is extremely important to increase the quality of rigorous impact evaluations, particularly the quality of the theory of change on which these evaluations are based (White, 2014). Furthermore, such a science-based learning framework is also highly likely to increase the quality of learning outcomes in children, by providing a theory of change that is relevant for educational contexts of the developing world, and for supporting the development of effective reading programs and policy decision making.

In the last few years, several states, like Assam (Reading Improvement Programme), Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and West Bengal (Early Grades Reading and Numeracy), have implemented learning improvement programmes targeting children in Classes 1 and 2. Most of these programmes have been around improving early reading/literacy, following varied approaches and methodologies. A few states, such as Punjab and Meghalaya have experimented with implementing programmes to improve learning levels of children in mathematics.

READING SKILLS

Reading compared to the spoken word is very new, just around 6000 years old, while speech dates back to six million years ago. Also, it is worth remembering that until about a hundred years ago very few people were able to read. It is only in the last century reading has become

so widespread, and a prerequisite to many day-to-day activities. Reading is a complex skill that requires reading words and comprehending text simultaneously (NIFL, 2001).

Stanford University Psychologist Brian Wandell says, 'Reading is probably the hardest thing we teach people to do in the education system. There are some kids, who are just going to have a hard time.' Humans appear to be the only species that can record their communication- and this is a very powerful ability. Also, we seem to be the only species, which can translate their communication into another medium. Thus, reading is a very special ability that we have articulated. Our brains are naturally programmed to master spoken language; but learning to read is another story. No one is born how to read. Reading is basically a visual task. It is also learning to identify the sounds of letters into words and to associate the printed word with its meaning. It involves understanding the meaning behind a passage, which may involve various degrees of thinking.

When we read, our brains have to do a lot of things at once; it has to connect letters to sound and put those sounds together in the right order. Learning to read is a complete learnt skill and very crucial for a child's development. Through the act of reading we connect with the mind and the world of another, which is a very unusual feat. It is an enjoyable and a rewarding practice, which enables us with a lifelong exploration and discovery. Reading is receiving ideas, feelings, emotions, experiences and concepts.

During a child's schooling, reading is the most important study tool, almost like a magic wand, with which a child can gain knowledge and explore the wonderland of books and in turn become self-sufficient and confident. It is undoubtedly the best way to absorb new experiences for a young child. Policy makers and educational professionals recognize that the ability to read is critical to a child's success and to the health of our society. Reading is the main path to knowledge. If children do not become proficient readers, they will drag a country down from the road of progress and bring poverty as a grave consequence.

National Policy for Elementary Education (1986) stated that, 'A warm welcoming and encouraging approach in which all concerned share a solicitude for the needs of the child, is the best motivation for the child to attend school and learn. A child-centered and activity-based process of learning should be adopted at the primary stage. First generation learners should be allowed to set their own pace and be given supplementary remedial instruction. The availability of books at low prices is indispensable for people's education. Measures will

be taken to improve the quality of books, promote the reading habit and encourage creative writing.’

A number of children do manage to teach themselves how to read, many others are taught before they start formal schooling; by a family member or a preschool teacher. Teaching reading is a difficult task; books do not do it, not by materials, and not by writing inspiring reports and policies, only teachers who interact with children and help them take it up as a lifelong activity do it. It also requires children listening to correct pronunciations and making use of learned words meaningfully in interaction. Many long-term studies on reading achievement show that children who don’t get off a good start with literacy (reading and writing)., tend not to catch up. Though reading happens to be one of the most studied aspects in education, the way it is, being taught does not really reflect the scientific view on what works the best.

Sinha (2003) opines that achieving mass literacy is an important goal in India. However, the gap between what is desirable and what is achieved in terms of mass literacy is a cause of great concern. Although the percentage of literate people in the population has increased, the absolute number of illiterates also continues to increase. A large number of those who are considered literate are, in fact, incapable of comprehending what they read. Given this situation, it is very important to discuss what goes on in the primary years of schooling because this is where most Indian children make their first contact with literacy and, hence, depend on schools to become literate. This explains very well that for literacy (reading and writing). schools are the only choice for a majority of our future literate citizens. So, we need to pay a lot of attention and care and to see to it that this happens in a proper-guided way at the entry level itself. Research also shows that children who fail in reading and do not improve by the end of their first grade is at high risk of failure in other academics throughout school (McIntosh, Horner, Boland, and Good, 2006).

THE COMPONENTS OF READING SKILLS

There are five cornerstones of reading,

- Phonological awareness/Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

Phonological awareness: It can be explained as the awareness that the sounds of the spoken language can be put together to make words.

Phonemic awareness: It is basically the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in words. It is the best predictor of reading success; it helps students understand letter (grapheme) - sound(phoneme) relationship to become good readers.

Phonics: It is a method of learning to read and write English that concentrates on the sounds the letters make. Here, the alphabet is used as the cornerstone. It emphasizes reading as the decoding of graphemes (letters) into phonemes(sounds).

Vocabulary: It refers to the words we must understand to communicate effectively. There are four types of vocabulary: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Vocabulary plays a huge role in the reading process and contributes greatly to a reader's comprehension.

Fluency: It can be defined as the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Students must be able to read fluently in order to understand what they read, whether silently or aloud.

Comprehension: It is the understanding and interpretation of what is read. to be able to accurately understand written material, students need to be able (1) decode what they read; (2) to make connections between what they read and what they already know; and (3) think deeply about what they have read.

READING PROBLEMS IN ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS

It is observed that children start to learn language from birth. During early speech and language development, they learn to read and write. So, this emergent literacy stage begins at birth and continues to their preschool years. If children are to read and write in English, they need to have words, which, in the early years come from their home environment. Children learn differently due to their behaviour, motivation, achievement, personality, self-esteem and last but not the least, the teaching method. Now children whose parents don't read, write, converse in English, will be at a disadvantage over the ones who come from literate homes.

It is easier to prevent reading difficulties in the early grades before they emerge than to try and remediate after they have become entrenched and intractable. (Coyne, 2006). Children attempt reading in English in a more formal and rigid environment-the classroom, which is

not always conducive to learning. The researcher feels a lot of efforts and strategies on the teacher's part are required to initiate reading with comprehension for our Sr.KG graders.

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

When it comes to teaching children to read, phonological/phonemic awareness instruction is considered one of the most effective ways by most educators. phonological awareness refers to the ability of a reader to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words. The tasks used to assess/improve children's phonological awareness are; phoneme isolation, phoneme identity, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, and phoneme deletion. Precisely, phonological awareness instruction is not synonymous with phonics instruction that entails teaching students how to use grapheme-phoneme correspondences to decode or spell words. phonological awareness instruction does not qualify as phonics instruction when it teaches children to manipulate phonemes in speech, but it does qualify when it teaches children to segment or blend phonemes with letters.

In a meta-analysis by NRP (National reading Panel, 2000) comprised 96 studies, it was found that phonological awareness instruction produced positive effects on both word reading and pseudo word reading, indicating that it helps children decode novel words as well as remember how to read familiar words. Phonological awareness training was effective in boosting reading comprehension, although the effect size was smaller than for word reading. Other capabilities influence reading comprehension as well, such as children's vocabulary, their world knowledge, and their memory for text. Phonological awareness instruction helped all types of children improve their reading, including normally developing readers, children at risk for future reading problems, disabled readers, pre-schoolers, kindergartners, 1st graders, children in 2nd through 6th grades (most of whom were disabled readers), children across various SES levels, and children learning to read in English as well as in other languages.

Teaching with letters is important because this helps children apply their phonological awareness skills to reading and writing. Teaching children to blend phonemes with letters helps them decode. Teaching children phonemic segmentation with letters helps them spell. If children have not yet learned letters, it is important to teach them letter shapes, names, and sounds so that they can use letters to acquire phonological awareness. Phonological awareness instruction is more effective when it makes explicit how children are to apply phonological awareness skills in reading and writing tasks. phonological awareness instruction does not

need to consume long periods of time to be effective. In these analyses, programs lasting less than 20 hours were more effective than longer programs. In kindergarten, most children will be non-readers and will have little phonemic awareness, so phonological awareness instruction should benefit everyone. It helps children grasp how the alphabetic system works in their language and helps children read and spell words in various ways. Phonological awareness is thought to contribute in helping children learn to read because the structure of the English writing system is alphabetic. It helps children grasp how the alphabetic system works in their language and helps children read and spell words in various ways.

DYNAMIC INDICATORS OF BASIC EARLY LITERACY SKILLS (DIBELS) SCALE

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is a set of measures used to assess early literacy and reading skills for students from kindergarten through sixth grade. DIBELS Next represents a breakthrough revision, based on new research conducted over 4 years on over 25,000 students in 90 schools throughout the United States, as well as consumer feedback. DIBELS Next retains the best of DIBELS, but has been updated to increase ease of use and accuracy of results. Assessing student performance on the basic early literacy skills, which are also known as core components or foundational skills, can help distinguish children who are on track to become successful readers from children who are likely to struggle. Evidence shows that these skills are the basic building blocks that every child must master in order to become a proficient reader (Adams, 1990; National Reading Panel, 2000; National Research Council, 1998). Evidence also shows that these skills can be improved with instruction (Kame'enui, Carnine, Dixon, Simmons, & Coyne, 2002; Simmons & Kame'enui, 1998; Torgesen, et al., 1999).

The DIBELS measures are designed to be indicators of the basic early literacy skills. An indicator is a brief, efficient index that provides a fair degree of certainty about a larger, more complex system or process. For example, a paediatrician measures a child's height and weight as a quick and efficient indicator of that child's physical development. Similarly, each DIBELS measure is a quick and efficient indicator of how well a child is doing in learning a particular basic early literacy skill. The DIBELS is designed to be an efficient, cost-effective tool used to help make decisions about reading instruction, to help the teacher provide support early and prevent the occurrence of later reading difficulties. The DIBELS assesses

basic early literacy skills, or the essential skills that every child must master to become a proficient reader (National Reading Panel, 2000; National Research Council, 1998).

DIBELS Next comprises four measures for young children in senior kindergarten.

- First Sound Fluency (FSF): The assessor says words, and the student says the first sound for each word.
- Letter Naming Fluency (LNF): The student is presented with a sheet of letters and asked to name the letters.
- Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF): The assessor says words, and the student says the individual sounds for each word.
- Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF): The student is presented with a list of VC and CVC nonsense words (e.g., SIG, RAV, OV) and asked to read the words.

This model emphasizes that phonemic awareness skills can be developed very early and can provide a foundation for successful phonics instruction, in a prevention-oriented framework. Phonemic awareness and phonics skills, might be taught and practiced in isolation in a designed curriculum, but instruction is not complete until the skills are integrated. A complete understanding of how words are portrayed in written English requires the integration of all core components into a coherent whole. Second, the role of systematic and explicit instruction is critical throughout this model. Acquisition and mastery of an earlier skill by itself is unlikely to result in achievement of the subsequent skill. However, a foundation of an earlier-developed skill, combined with systematic and explicit instruction in the subsequent skill, is likely to result in successful achievement.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This is by far the most important aspect of research-a summary of relevant research papers, theses done previously in the topic selected by the researcher. It throws light on what is known and what is not known- not tested as yet. It also helps point out how the undertaken research stands out from the other research done before and its significance in the present day. This chapter has the reviews of the related aspects of the research topic. The literature review supports the rationale of this research and helps throw light on the unique aspects of the topic. The researcher has reviewed studies conducted in India, as well as abroad, from various sources (Indian Educational journals, policies, surveys, doctoral theses, books, international dissertations, Shodhganga, etc.).

The undertaken study encompasses many areas like the importance of preschool education, the importance of reading skills, the importance of learning Phonological Awareness in kindergarten, the importance of using the tool-DIBELS Next, etc. The availed reviews are classified broadly into the below categories.

- Studies related to preschool education
- Studies related to reading skills
- Studies related to phonological awareness
- Studies related to DIBELS

The study conducted by Rajawat (2015) emphasized that pre-school children are able to learn at their best through play way and art-based activities. Sharma (2006) also speculated based on the qualitative data of 12 schools (Private and Government) that learning through rote method has been reduced in pre-school education and alternative teacher learning methodologies are found very effective in teaching especially language. Significant findings found by Di Santo and Aurelia (2006) that children's emotional maturity is highly important for successful transition to school. Teachers and parents play the most important role to cultivate social competence and wellbeing of pre-schoolers.

Research studies related to reading skills development, practices and teaching to pre-schoolers-19 relevant studies were found relevant and reviewed by the researcher. Out of 19 studies, 9 studies explain various interventions executed on pre-school children for the reading skills enhancement, development of phonemic awareness and English language teaching, 1 study is about the development of mobile application for the English language to enhance literacy skills. 5 studies about various teaching methods, 8 studies talk about psychometric assessment and 3 studies talks about the challenges faced by students and challenges during the teaching – learning of English language. The researcher found the quasi-experimental study conducted by Karimkhanlooei&Sefiniya (2005) effective to inculcate reading skills in pre-school children. 40 students (Experimental Group – 20 & Control Group – 20) were selected and effects of phonics program were assessed on teaching alphabet, reading and writing English as a second language. Yeung (2012) utilized 12-week long language enriched phonological awareness instruction program on young Chinese ESL learners in Hong Kong. Children's learning was measured through receptive and expressive vocabulary, phonological awareness skills at the syllable, rhyme and phoneme levels, reading

and spelling in English through quasi-experimental method. These activities have been very helpful for the researcher to develop the intervention program.

Two studies explain interventions to enhance phonological awareness, two studies explain the relationship between English oral language and early literacy skills. Phonological awareness is a significant aspect to inculcate the reading skills in pre-schoolers. The researcher found the DIBELS program very effective to measure the improvement in reading skills of pre-schoolers. No studies or interventions of DIBELS assessment found in India till now. So, the researcher sees the opportunity to implement the tool for pre-schoolers in India. Jalaluddin and Hasim (2019) discuss the importance of early reading skills development among pre-schoolers and also understand the effect of synthetic phonics instruction for the young children. Wyse and Goswami (2008) also mentioned that synthetic phonics needs to be recommended to teach to young English learners. The researcher found this approach effective and planned to add activities related to synthetic phonics in the intervention.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of the study is to enhance reading skills of pre-schoolers through intervention program. Various interventions, assessments to measure the improvement in reading skills and teaching methodologies have been discussed. The researcher gained the insight of probable research design and tools to measure the reading skills as well activities which can be inculcated during the intervention. Phonological awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Fluency and Comprehension were found to be the significant components to enhance reading skills. Phonological Awareness training was found to be very effective in teaching phonemic awareness to students. It succeeded in teaching children's various ways to manipulate phonemes, including segmentation, blending, and deletion. The training improved children's ability to read and spell in both the short and the long term. Programs that focused on teaching one or two Phonological Awareness skills yielded larger effects on Phonological Awareness learning than programs teaching three or more of these manipulations. Instruction that taught phoneme manipulation with letters helped children acquire Phonological Awareness skills better than instruction without letters. Teaching children in small groups produced larger effect sizes on Phonological Awareness acquisition than teaching children individually or in classroom-size groups. students in the lower grades, namely preschool and

kindergarten, showed larger effect sizes in acquiring Phonological Awareness than children in 1st grade and above.

Teaching that focused on one or two types of Phonological Awareness manipulations yielded larger effect sizes than teaching three or more Phonological Awareness skills. Teaching children to manipulate phonemes using letters produced Reviews of bigger effects than teaching without letters. Blending and segmenting instruction showed a much larger effect size on reading than multiple-skill instruction did. Small group instruction produced larger effect sizes on reading than individualized instruction or classroom instruction. Length of training exerted an influence as well, with the lengthiest training associated with the smallest effect size. Classroom teachers provided Phonological Awareness training that was effective in promoting transfer to reading although the effect size of teachers was smaller than the effect size of other trainers. Phonological Awareness training on computers transferred to reading as well. Characteristics of learners did make a difference. Kindergartners benefited more in their spelling than did 1st graders. Students classed as mid-to-high SES showed a larger effect size in spelling than low SES students. Phonological Awareness training in English produced a larger effect on spelling than Phonological Awareness training in other languages.

According to NRP findings, children who received training that focused on one or two Phonological Awareness skills exhibited stronger Phonological Awareness and stronger transfer to reading than children who were taught three or more Phonological Awareness skills. Various explanations might account for the difference. Perhaps focused instruction resulted in more students mastering the skills that were taught. Perhaps teaching multiple skills created some confusion about which manipulations to apply in the reading transfer tasks, or perhaps it obscured children's grasp of the alphabetic principle. Clarifying why multiple skills instructions might limit children's gains in Phonological Awareness and reading needs. Phonological Awareness skills are the objective, it is prudent to teach one at a time until each is mastered before moving on to the next, and to teach students how each skill applies in reading or spelling tasks. The reason to teach first-sound comparisons is to draw pre-schoolers' or kindergartners' attention to the fact that words have sounds as well as meanings. A reason to teach phoneme segmentation is to help kindergartners or 1st graders to generate more complete spellings of words. The reason to teach phoneme blending is to help them decode words.

It is important to note that when Phonological Awareness is taught with letters, it qualifies as phonics instruction. When Phonological Awareness training involves teaching students to pronounce the sounds associated with letters and to blend the sounds to form words, it qualifies as synthetic phonics. When Phonological Awareness training involves teaching students to segment words into phonemes and to select letters for those phonemes, it is the equivalent of teaching students to spell words phonemically, which is another form of phonics instruction. These methods of teaching phonics existed long before they became identified as forms of phonemic awareness training (Balmutha, 1982; Chall, 1967). Although teaching children to manipulate sounds in spoken words may be new, phonemic awareness training that involves segmenting and blending with letters is not. Only the label is new. Explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle necessarily includes attention to phonemes because these are the phonological units that match up to letters. According to NRP findings, it is likely that the inclusion of phonemic awareness training in phonics instruction is a key component contributing to its effectiveness in teaching children to read.

An example of a program focused on teaching only one type of phoneme manipulation was that studied by Byrne and Fielding-Barnsley (1991) for pre-schoolers, called Sound Foundations. This program taught phoneme identity. Children learned to recognize instances of the same sound in both initial and final positions across different words. Children were shown several large posters covered with pictures of objects. Their job was to pick out from a larger set the objects having a specified beginning or ending sound, for example, sea, seal, sailor, sand. Also, children were shown an array of pictures on worksheets or cards, and they selected those having targeted sounds.

In each session, one phoneme in one position was taught. The letter representing that phoneme was introduced as well. In this study, pre-schoolers averaging 4.5 years of age received either the Phonemic Awareness training described above or control training that focused on story reading and semantic activities with the same posters and worksheets. Children were trained in groups of 4 to 6 children, one 30-minute lesson per week for 12 weeks. At the end of training, children in the Phonemic Awareness-trained group were able to identify substantially more initial and final phonemes in words than control students. They demonstrated superior skill identifying not only sounds they had practiced but also unpractised sounds, indicating that phoneme identity skill transferred to untaught phonemes.

Trained students read more words than control students, indicating that Phonemic Awareness training improved pre-schoolers' rudimentary word recognition skill.

The effectiveness of different ways to teach Phonemic Awareness was examined by O'Connor et al. (1995), who inquired whether Phonemic Awareness training has to be broad rather than focused to be most effective. They selected at-risk kindergartners with low Phonemic Awareness and randomly assigned them to one of three training conditions. In the comprehensive treatment, children performed a variety of sound manipulation activities that included isolating, segmenting, blending, and deleting phonemes; segmenting and blending syllables and onset-rime units; and working with rhyming words. In the focused treatment, children practiced segmenting and blending onsets, rimes, and phonemes only. Training extended for 10 weeks, two 15-minute sessions per week, totalling 5 hours. Beginning in the 5th week, letter-sound associations were taught for the sounds being practiced orally in both groups. However, children were not taught how to use letters to manipulate phonemes in the Phonemic Awareness activities. The third treatment, a control condition, received only the letter-sound instruction.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Foundational learning is the basis of all future learning for a child. Not achieving basic foundational skills of being able to read with comprehension, writing and doing basic mathematics operations, leaves the child unprepared for the complexities of the curriculum beyond grade 3. Recognizing the importance of early learning, the National Education Policy 2020 states that "Our highest priority must be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school and beyond by 2025. The rest of this Policy will be largely irrelevant for such a large portion of our students if this most basic learning (i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic at the foundational level) is not first achieved." To this end, a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy is being set up by the Ministry of Education (MoE) on priority.

World Children Report (1999) stated that nearly a billion people enter the 21st century unable to read a book or write their names. All over the world the reading habit of children is waning. A nation's achievement of basic quality education depends on good reading habits of children and adults. The reading habit is best formed at a young impressionable age in school, but once formed it can last one's life. (Choudhary, 1990).

The present study was conceptualized two years ago. The key elements of this study are reflected in the current comprehensive guidelines for Implementation of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat, 2021), which covers key technical aspects of foundational literacy and numeracy as well as the administrative aspects for effectively setting up an implementation mechanism at the National, State, District, Block and School level, reiterates the importance of early literacy measures, which has been developed through a series of intensive consultations with implementing partners and experts in the field.

The National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (2021) aims to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary classes by 2025 and to ensure that all children attain grade level competencies in reading, writing and numeracy. Also, one of the objectives of the mission is to enable children to become motivated, independent and engaged readers and writers with comprehension possessing sustainable reading and writing skills. Recognizing the importance of early learning, the National Education Policy 2020 states that “Our highest priority must be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school and beyond by 2026-27. The rest of the policy will be largely irrelevant for such a large portion of our students... “The first six years of life are critical since the rate of development in these years is more rapid than any other stage of development. Research in neuro-science confirms the importance of early years in a child’s life, particularly since 90% of brain development has already taken place by the time a child is six years of age (National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum framework, 2005).

Reading in languages with complex spelling patterns, like English, Portuguese, Tamil, or Urdu takes longer to learn. If the neural circuits used in reading are functional, even poor and malnourished children should learn to decode and read fluently (though they may have difficulties in comprehension). Since many do not get extra practice at home, they may require more teaching hours to become fluent. When large numbers of students are unable to read in grades 2 or higher, the likely reason is limited or inappropriate instruction rather than poverty and malnutrition.

Reading is integral to many of our day-to-day activities and is perhaps the most crucial skill learnt in school. It is almost impossible to imagine how a child can have access to the content of a subject without reading. Children who do not learn to read during the early grades

usually struggle with reading throughout their schooling (Juel,1988; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Stanovich,1986). The better and wider the background of the pupil's understood language the greater his chance of success in learning to read, irrespective of other conditions. Hence, learning to read must be preceded and accompanied by a background of language experiences obtained through home and school. Stories must be told and read, pictures must be shown and books provided so that a variety of talk about everyday situations will produce a wide vocabulary of common words (Schonell,1961).

Reading is one of the most important skills that students must master to be successful educationally, occupationally, and socially. It enables students not only for learning, careers, and pleasure, but also for language acquisition (Heba,2019). Reading is not simply knowing sounds, words, sentences, and the abstract parts of language that can be studied by linguists. Reading, like listening, consists of processing language and constructing meaning. The reader brings a great deal of information to this complex and active process (Goodman and Goodman,1994). Every act of reading (R) involves recognizing and understanding written words (D, decoding) combined with understanding the sentences and texts the written words comprise (C, linguistic comprehension). They pointed out that reading is the result of the output from two sets of very complex, separable but linked processes (decoding, linguistic comprehension). Sadly, older class children cannot attain proficient levels of reading, because once poor reading trajectories are set, it is almost impossible to reverse the damage (Francis et. al.,1996; Good et. al, 2009).

A study comparing the rate of development of word reading skills in children learning to read in nine European languages showed that learning to read words in English is more difficult than most other alphabetic languages (Seymour, Aro& Erskine, 2003). Children learning to read in English, these skills developed more than twice as slowly as those of beginners learning to read in Finnish, Spanish or Greek. The early stages of learning to read in this language are more taxing in English, and it takes longer for children to become fluent. The difficulty lies in its orthography, the conventional spelling system of a language and the way it maps onto spoken language. If a child cannot read, the chances of grade retention, dropouts, difficulties with employment and basic life activities can increase significantly (Lyon, 2001). So, the long-term effects of early reading difficulties can prove to be disastrous, hence it should be a top priority to impart effective early reading instruction to young children.

The most important factor in reading instruction is the initial attitude the children exhibit. If the children can successfully read at the beginning, then they will persist in further efforts. (Schonell, 1961)

Family involvement can be a potentially potent element in improving/enhancing early learning and development. It is a well-known fact that a child's brain develops rapidly between the age 0-5. Any delay in developing in this period may set a child back permanently in terms of cognitive learning abilities. With the pandemic going on we need to reimagine our literacy teaching –learning, with role of a teacher. The teacher can work as a mentor and a facilitator to the community. Online lessons help, but not all may have access to them. Television and radio lessons can also add to the teaching-learning process at home.

Young children who are starting out to write with their fine hand motor skills, should be encouraged to practice at home. The teacher can give some basic guidelines in a call/video call to the parents for this. The parents can communicate with the teacher regarding the daily activities their child can undertake at home. If the child has any learning hitch/impairment, the teacher can guide the parents about it. The teacher can squeeze the syllabus, sifting out the most important points/competencies. In a detailed call explain it to the parents. Also, a checklist of learning points can be made for parents to monitor the progress at home. The teacher can recommend watching educational videos, also distribute some materials to parents to refer to. To continue the learning process in this adverse situation, and minimize the learning losses, this can prove to be an effective strategy. Storytelling, field trips with the family can engage the children meaningfully. In case of parents being not literate, older siblings can read to children. Children benefit immensely when parents and family members get involved and support in their learning. When parents are directed by teachers, they become more engaged in their children's learning, irrespective of their educational background.

Children benefit when parents and teachers work together as partners in education. Especially in early literacy practices, dialogic and shared reading help a lot. parent-child interactions at home were associated with students' increased code-related skills, including: Print knowledge and preschool phonological awareness (Cottone, 2012; Fielding-Barnsley and Purdie, 2003; Weigel et al., 2006). Many researches posit that letter - sound knowledge is one of the most important factors of reading development (Bradley & Bryant, 1983; Dehaene, 2011; Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001; Nation, 2019; Solheim, Frijters, Lundetræ,

&Uppstad, 2018; Sunde, Furnes, &Lundetræ, 2019; Tønnesen&Uppstad, 2015). Dehaene (2011) argues that letter-sound correspondences must be systematically taught, one by one and that the amount of such teaching is the best predictor of reading performance.

It is essential to teach letters as well as phonemic awareness to beginners. Phonological Awareness training is more effective when children are taught to use letters to manipulate phonemes. This is because knowledge of letters is essential for transfer to reading and spelling. Learning all the letters of the alphabet is not easy, particularly for children who come to school knowing few of them. Shapes, names, and sounds need to be overlearned so that children can work with them automatically to read and spell words. Thus, if children do not know letters, this needs to be taught along with phonological awareness.

In the report of National Reading Panel (NRP) (2019), it was found that studies children spent between 5 to 18 hours teaching Phonological Awareness yielded very large effects on the acquisition of phonemic awareness. Learning to read is a complex task for beginners. They must coordinate many cognitive processes to read accurately and fluently, including recognizing words, constructing the meanings of sentences and text, and retaining the information read in memory. An essential part of the process for beginners involves learning the alphabetic system, that is, letter-sound correspondences and spelling patterns, and learning how to apply this knowledge in their reading. Systematic phonics instruction is a way of teaching reading that stresses the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and their use to read and spell words (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Phonics instruction is designed for beginners in the primary grades and for children having difficulty learning to read. Phonics instruction taught early proved much more effective than phonics instruction introduced after 1st grade. Based on the association between letter-sound knowledge and reading skill, it seems reasonable to advocate learning letters and their sounds early on in the first year of school, to ensure that children have equal opportunity to learn how to read (Nation, 2019). In a practical setting this could mean that all children should be measured on letter knowledge when they start school. Children who have broken the reading code should be given the right challenges for their skill/action capacity to further promote their literacy (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). For those who have yet to break the reading code, effort should be put into acquiring enough letter-sound knowledge to start practicing decoding words (Hatcher, Hulme, & Ellis, 1994). As reading is the key to other keys in the

educational systems, these should be prioritized tasks in the first 1–2 years of school (Solheim et al., 2018).

From the research studies which are reviewed and discussed, it is evident that teaching reading skills early can help to resolve later reading problems among children. The investigator believes that developing/enhancing reading skills in English can be achieved early in school through a systematic programme in the classroom. The intervention programme is developed with this understanding and includes simple developmentally appropriate activities for kindergarteners to enable them to begin reading.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Development and Implementation of a Programme for Enhancing Reading Skills in English Language of Senior Kindergarten Students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To develop a programme for enhancing Reading Skills in English Language of Senior Kindergarten Students
- To implement the programme for Senior Kindergarten Students for enhancing their Reading Skills
- To study the effectiveness of the programme using DIBELS Next tool

HYPOTHESIS

The following null hypothesis was formulated to achieve the above stated objectives of the proposed study.

- There will be no significant difference between the mean achievement score of reading skills of the Senior KG students in pre- test and post-test.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How will the reading skills enhancement programme for English language improve the reading skills of English medium Senior KG students?
2. How will the enhancement of reading skills in English language help Senior KG students in English language comprehension?
3. What could be the conducive environment for learning reading skills in Senior KG students?
4. To what extent can reading be developed /enhanced in Senior KG students?

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Enhancement of Reading Skills: Reading score obtained by the Senior KG students in a reading test in pre-and post-test.

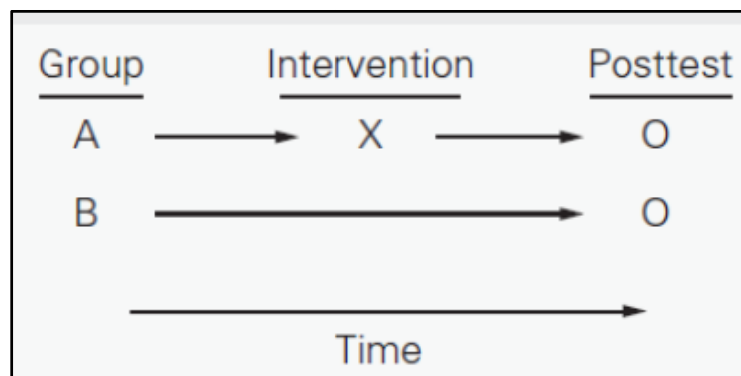
DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY:

This study will be delimited to the Senior KG students of Ahmedabad.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Kerlinger defined the Research design is the plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions and to control variance. It is the framework, a blueprint for the research which guides essential methodologies for the data collection and analysis.

The present
the umbrella
research



study falls under
of experimental
where the

researcherintended to improve the reading skills among senior kindergarten students through theintervention of the developed programme. Quasi-Experimental Design as random assignment to the control and experimental group was not feasible. Pretest-Posttest Non-Equivalent-Groups Design was found to be best suited for the present study. According to Best and Kahn (2011) “the pre-test – post-test non-equivalent groups design is used in the classroom experiments when experimental and control groups are such naturally assembled groups as intact classes”.

Figure 1 – Framework of Nonequivalent Pre-test Post-test Design

Figure 1 explains the framework of selected research design for the study. Group A represents experimental group and group B depicts the control group. X represents the intervention programme developed by the researcher. The researcher selected a class of senior kindergarten students for the experiment and the students were divided into two groups – Experimental Group and Control Group. In pre-test, the fundamental early literacy skills of English language were assessed through standardized assessment tool. The scores measured for both the groups in the pre-test were used to make the groups equal. Intervention was implemented among the students of the experimental group and the control group was following the traditional learning methods used by teachers. During, post-intervention time, the early literacy skills were measured again among the experimental and control group.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population for the study was comprised of all the senior kindergarten students of Gujarat Secondary Education Board English medium schools of Ahmedabad city.

SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The sample of the study was selected using purposive sampling. The researcher selected Ahmedabad Municipality Corporation run public kindergarten school. The due permission was taken to conduct data collection and for the implementation of the intervention for senior kindergarten students.

There were 47 students in the class of senior kindergarten. Students were divided into two groups – Experimental Group (20 students) and Control Group (22 students). Pre-test was administered on both the groups after obtaining permission from the District Primary Education Officer, Ahmedabad. On the basis of pre-test scores of early literacy skills in English language, the experimental and control group were made equivalent. Creswell (2012) describes this process as a process of identifying one or more characteristics which can influence the outcome and assigning individuals with that characteristic equally to the experimental and control group. Matching of the groups reduces the risk of selection bias. After matching of the groups on the basis of pre-test scores, the sample size was 20 in both experimental and control group.

TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

- The researcher used the DIBELS Next tool to measure four fluencies, First Sound Fluency, Letter naming Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency and Nonsense Word Fluency.

- Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test was used for pre-andpost-test.

PHASES OF THE STUDY

The present study was carried out in three phases from the development of intervention to analysis.

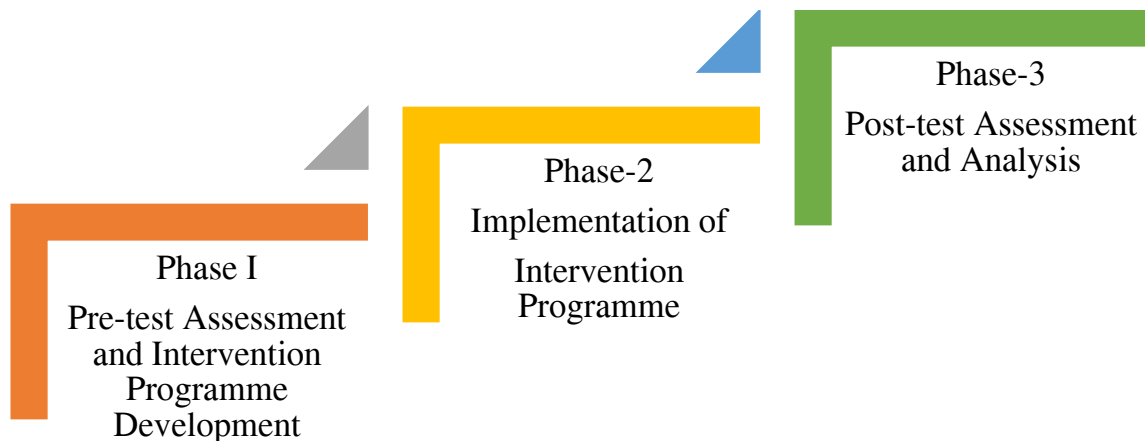


Figure 2 Phases of the study

Brief description of all phases is defined as below,

Phase 1: PRE – TEST ASSESSMENT

The researcher personally carried out the pre-test comprising of four fluencies according to the DIBELS Next for kindergarten, First Sound Fluency, Letter Naming Fluency, Phoneme segmentation Fluency and Nonsense Word Fluency at the beginning of the intervention program. The investigator prepared various activities based on the fluencies which needed to be enhanced for improving the children's reading skills.

Phase 2: IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERVENTION

The activities on enhancing the basic four fluencies for phonological awareness were prepared after the pre-test results. The children needed to have basic Alphabetic knowledge to start off with. The intervention program began on December 2, 2019 and finished on March 17, 2020, lasting 60 days. The activities included recognizing both the alphabets, the sounds of alphabets, playing songs on the laptop to introduce the sounds of each alphabet, simple stories, songs and rhymes for about 45 minutes every session. The children participated with enthusiasm and looked forward eagerly to the sessions.

Phase 3: POST - TEST ASSESSMENT

DIBELS Next measures are designed to be indicators of the basic early literacy skills. Each measure is a quick indicator of how well a child is doing in learning a particular basic early literacy skill. Phonemic Awareness is measured through FSF (First Sound Fluency) and PSF (Phoneme Segmentation Fluency). Alphabetic Principle and Phonics are measured from NWF (Nonsense Word Fluency) which checks correct letter sounds and whole words read. Four sheets comprising of four different fluencies were prepared. Children from the experimental group and control group were tested. Each fluency lasted a minute and the correct responses were underlined and wrong responses were slashed.

DATA COLLECTION

The researcher visited the five Government schools and proposed them to allow for data collection and the implementation of the programme for reading skills enhancement of pre-schoolers. One school agreed and allowed the researcher for data collection. The researcher visited a school, met school teachers of pre-primary classes and understood the teaching approaches used for pre-schoolers especially for English language teaching. Then, the researcher conducted pre-test assessment by using DIBELS tool to measure the existing knowledge of pre-schoolers for English language reading. Same DIBELS tool would be measured during the post-test assessment after the implementing the intervention. Both pre-test and post-test assessments are conducted on worksheets and scoring was done based on the responses given by the pre-schoolers. The scores were to be analysed statistically to measure the effectiveness of the intervention.

DATA ANALYSIS

The responses given by pre-schoolers were administered on worksheets and scoring was done based on the standardised scoring system of the DIBELS Next tool. The scores pre-test and post-test assessments of both Experimental and Control groups were entered into Microsoft Excel document. The data were coded and imported into SPSS software for further data analysis.

As the sampling was done purposively, non-parametric statistics was used for data analysis. As the research design was quasi experimental in nature, non-parametric equivalent of t test, that is Mann-whitney U-test was calculated on the post test scores of the control group and experiment group through SPSS 24.0

MAJOR FINDINGS

- The intervention developed for the enhancement of the reading skills for English language was found effective for the Experimental Group.
- There was no significant difference found in the reading skills of English language of senior KG students who belonged to the Control Group.
- There was a significant difference found in the Phonological Awareness of senior KG students of the Experimental Group after the intervention programme.
- There was a significant difference found in the phonics of senior KG students of the Experimental Group after the intervention programme.
- There was a significant difference found in the first-sound fluency and segmentation fluency of senior KG students of the Experimental Group after the intervention programme.
- There was a significant difference found in the rhyming words and alphabetical knowledge of senior KG students of the Experimental Students after the intervention programme.
- There was a significant difference found in the long and short vowel and diagraphs of senior KG students of the Experimental Group after the intervention programme.
- There was a significant difference found in the nonsense word fluency of senior KG students of the Experimental Group after the intervention programme.

DISCUSSION

The intervention programme developed by the researcher had many joyful learner-centric activities for enhancing the reading skills of Senior KG students. These activities helped develop students' interest in reading. The experimental group got enough exposure to LSRW activities and the enhancement of their learning is reflected in the post-test results.

CONCLUSION

Language is considered a significant tool to transmit thoughts. Neuroscience urges to utilize the 0-6 years of period of a child's life for maximum language input. It is essential that a child begins her schooling equipped with basic reading skills. Teaching young children to read is not only a challenging task, it has to be done in a way that children become lifelong readers. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that all children gain reading proficiency in the first year of school/kindergarten. The researcher strongly feels that the intervention programme which incorporated effective research-based instructional strategies,

helped children break the reading code, and thus motivated them by instilling a sense of confidence to tackle their learning easily and/ enable the kindergarteners a smooth transition into the primary classes.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE STUDY

From the experience of the study, below mentioned are the aspects which needs attention for further research and training development.

- There is a huge scope of research in reading development field, especially in the area of lower SES, ORF (Oral Reading Fluency). After children learn to decode (read) print, how they can learn to read with better comprehension and also learn to encode (spell) is an area which deserves further research.
- Training programme can be developed based on five cornerstones of reading skills enhancement recommended by National Reading Panel, United States and implemented for the professional development of pre-school teachers and students who enrolled in preschool education courses.

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