ABSTRACT

Literacy is a person’s first step in learning and knowledge building and therefore, literacy should be an indicator for any measurement of human development. Education, formal or non-formal, is the foremost agent of empowerment. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015) has reported that about 757 million adults around the world cannot read or write a simple sentence and women are the first to be denied these basic skills. As per Census report of India 2011, the literacy rates reported for the rural areas for males was 78.5 per cent and 58.7 per cent for females. There were 159 million non-literates in India in the 35+ age group. Nearly 60 per cent of them were women. The low literacy rate for the females in the 35+ age group and further among the rural population calls for immediate action for promoting their literacy status.

Many strategies like the traditional method, alphabetic method, each one teach one method, letter method, laubach method, synthetic method, analytical method and word method have been adopted worldwide and in India to impart literacy to adults. Morphological sequencing, the process of building letters by sequencing a series of structures before the letter is formed is another recently used method. It deals with combinations of lines and curves that form letters and makewriting easy for a beginner. In the present study, the researcher has done a field experiment in selected villages with illiterate women in the age group of 35 to 55 years using school children as Literacy Facilitators. The major objective of the present study was to empower rural women of selected panchayats in the age group of 35-55 years through basic literacy skills and post literacy education. The methodology included a multi-phased and multi-level field experiment aimed at literacy empowerment of selected rural women through basic literacy exercises at level one followed by guided reading exercises using the post literacy materials on nutrition and health and environment education at level two. The field experiment was conducted in five villages of Athoor block in Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu.

A total of 90 Literacy Facilitators, 180 Learners and 10 Literacy Education Supervisors were selected from the same locality through the purposive sampling method. ‘Each One Teach Two’ was the motto chosen for teaching illiterate women. The flexibility in the choice of venue and the timings had permitted a good proportion of the adult learners to regularly participate in the literacy programme.

The findings revealed that the female illiteracy rate of the population ranged from 20.8 to 35 per cent with a mean of 28.1 per cent, as against the male illiteracy
rate varying from 8.8 per cent to 18.1 per cent. The Gender Parity Index of the population ranged from 0.75 to 0.87 which meant that in all the panchayats selected from the study area, the female literacy rates were below the male literacy rates.

More than three-fourths of the learners showed a high level of interest in the literacy experiment. Forty two per cent of the learners found the primer simple and easy to follow. 38 per cent of the learners expressed that the primer gave them motivation to learn Tamil alphabets.

All learners invariably reported that the literacy experiment helped them to read the name-board of a bus; 98.8 per cent stated that they could read and write Tamil letters; 91.6 per cent felt happy over their capability to write their house address correctly; 85.5 per cent of them learned to put their signature. 83.3 per cent of the women stated that through the literacy experiment, they could accomplish their literacy needs which they could not fulfill during their childhood and 57.2 per cent of them felt that they could travel alone with full confidence, because they could read by themselves the name board of a bus.

The results of the statistical tests revealed that age, community and family size were the major factors that influenced the learning level of the illiterates. There were some improvement in the knowledge level of the learners on both the post literacy materials (Nutrition and Health and Environmental Education) after attending the literacy training.

The experiment also revealed that the primer developed on the basis of morphological sequencing was found to be very much suitable to impart literacy. The tool kit designed for the learners and the Literacy Facilitators comprising the primer, manual, exercise book, alphabet cards and card holder, slate and note book were appropriate to facilitate the teaching-learning programme.

The methodology of using Literacy Facilitators who were close relatives, namely, daughters and nieces was also very effective as this methodology fulfilled the requirements of Androgogy. The place chosen for classes, the time chosen for literacy training have been found replicable as the learners found them very much suited to their living conditions. The success of this methodology has contributed to the knowledge that school students could be used advantageously in imparting literacy. Age, community, family size and economic status were found to influence literacy learning. The concept of “Each One Teach Two” has also been found applicable in teaching women literacy.