EFFICACY OF PEER-MEDIATED, COMPUTER-ASSISTED AND TRADITIONAL READING PROGRAMMES IN FACILITATING SKILLS OF CHILDREN WITH READING DIFFICULTIES

ABSTRACT SUBMITTED TO UNIVERSITY OF DELHI FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Reading difficulties are a matter of great concern for a nation like India where multilingual and multicultural people live. In attaining important life benchmarks, reading plays a pivotal role. Incidences of reading difficulties are rising and need a check. Inspite of the fact that the large number of child population encounter substantial difficulty in reading, very little research has been conducted to develop effective learning programmes for these children. The present research demonstrates application of three major approaches to reading difficulties such as Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS), Computer- Assisted Instruction (CAI) and Traditional Classroom reading (TCR) in acquisition of reading skills. The study also attempts to make a comparison of the related efficacies of these methods on oral reading, cloze ability and comprehension skill parameters.

The children with reading difficulties were identified by assessing their intellectual ability, oral reading, cloze ability and comprehension skills. A quasi-experimental research with pre- post- follow-up matched random assignment design was used in this study to assess the effectiveness of three intervention programmes on 36 children with reading difficulties (grades 4 to 5) having no demographic differences. They were assigned to three groups of 12 each. Baseline assessments were done in the school settings whereas actual intervention was carried out in the laboratory setting. The measures used in the study were Raven’s Coloured Progressive Matrices (Raven, Raven, & Court, 1998), Ekwall Reading Inventory (ERI) 2nd edition, Grades pre- primer-9 (Ekwall, 1986), Cloze Test for Reading (Taylor, 1953) and Curriculum Based Comprehension Test (CBCT).

The reading assessments were done in the first language. The test materials for pretest and post test were the same but for the follow-up they were different taken from the sample’s course book. This was to avoid the practice effect.

PALS was administered to all the 12 individuals. They were divided into six subgroups forming dyads with a higher and a lower performing student. Peers were teaching each other with reciprocity. There was competition amongst the six groups. PALS employed play way teaching method. The team earning more points was rewarded. This
intervention exhibited motivational, cooperative and competitive spirit amongst the team members. Each session began with Partner Reading, followed by Paragraph Shrinking and Prediction Relay. For CAI intervention, the 12 students were grouped into six subgroups so as to work comfortably on the computer. The entire program was implemented through the computer. The errors committed by the child were identified to the child by giving the performance feedback. Traditional Classroom reading was the third and last intervention programme carried out in a typical classroom manner on 12 students. Typical chalk and talk method was used. No pairs were formed. All the three interventions lasted for 12 weeks, 45 minutes session, 3 sessions a week. After post tests, follow-up sessions were carried out in all the three intervention groups. The content and strategy (process) of learning were dealt with amicably, so that it could be generalized to the natural environment like a usual teaching process.

The findings revealed that on an average all the 36 children committed some major errors in their oral reading like letter-by-letter reading, poor pronunciation, pause and substitution. There were statistically significant differences between the three intervention programmes. PALS had shown better gains over other two intervention programmes on oral reading and comprehension. CAI seemed to be effective in reducing the number of incorrect responses on cloze ability of the overall reading. Whereas those from traditional teaching group showed very little change in the performance. However, they were very much imperceptible (5% to 10% change). In summary the study highlights efficacy of PALS over other two approaches. The reason could be its structured nature and involvement of peer group as a motivational factor.