ABSTRACT

The main objectives of the present study were to investigate the appropriateness of the introduction of English to young learners in state-run schools in Tamil Nadu and also to assess the pedagogical value and suitability of the Activity Based Learning (ABL) Methodology currently used to teach ESL to young learners in these schools.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one discusses the current state of education in India with specific reference to elementary education. Some of the initiatives taken by the central and state governments of India to increase the enrollment and retention rate of children in these schools have been discussed. The findings of the surveys undertaken by non-governmental organizations and their impact on educational policies have been presented. The chapter points out the need for teaching English to learners from the poorer sections of the society and the bourgeoning of private English medium schools that exploit the demand for an English education. The chapter presents the Hypothesis, objectives, methodology and scope of the study.

A comprehensive review of the research studies carried out on the issue of ‘age’ as a significant factor in the second language acquisition of young learners and other related aspects has been presented in Chapter two. Some of the seminal theories propounded by Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner
and also the various hypotheses relating to child language learning have been discussed in this chapter.

The third chapter serves as a background to the study. It provides a detailed description of the socio-economic background of learners in state-run schools. It also discusses the Activity Based Learning (ABL) Methodology adopted for teaching English to young learners. A comparison between private, English medium schools and state-run, regional medium schools, and a brief history of the language-in-education policies framed and modified accordingly by the government has been presented in this chapter. Some of the reasons that led to the introduction of English to young learners in classes I and II, and the role of teacher training institutes in Tamil Nadu have been presented in the chapter.

The fourth chapter presents a report on the field study conducted by the researcher to test the hypothesis framed in the first chapter. The first section of the chapter reports on the four classroom sessions observed in two urban and rural schools in Chennai, Sivagangai and Ramanathapuram districts. The second section presents the opinion of teachers on various aspects of ABL methodology elicited through questionnaires. The third section of the chapter presents a report on the listening and speaking skills test administered to young learners to study the quantum of language learnt by them to comprehend and respond appropriately to instructions and questions in English.
The fifth chapter presents the findings of the study. It also discusses the implications of the findings and lists out the recommendations. It identifies some of the topics for further research in the area and presents the limitations of the study.