Bridging the Gap: Reading difficulties and Identifying Reading Difficulties among children with and without special needs in Inclusive Setup

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Abstract: *Reading improves overall performance of students in academics and requires some basic skills i.e. Encoding, Decoding, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. Students with and without special needs face difficulties in reading process which may affect academic performance. Medical, psychological & environmental problems, socio-economic background, parental education, motivation, exposure, disability etc. are some of reasons associated with reading difficulty. Identification of reading difficulties faced by students is time-consuming process. This paper presents researcher developed and validated Reading Difficulty Screening Test (RDST) which can help to find out the reading problems faced by students with and without disabilities in inclusive setup from 1st class to 5th class. It can also identify types of reading difficulties and possible remedies for the same.*

Keywords*: Inclusion, Reading, Reading Difficulties, Students with Special Needs, types of reading difficulties, and Remedies.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Reading is among an important skill for developing the language ability and the social skill. A child having difficulty in reading may manifest difficulties in reading skills that may be unexpected in relation to age, cognitive ability, quantity and quality of instruction, and intervention of the child. The reading difficulties are not the result of generalized developmental delay or sensory impairment (Lundberg & Hoien, 2001; Mather & Goldstein, 2001). [1] According to National Research Council, National Academies Current difficulties in reading largely originate from rising demands for literacy, not from declining absolute levels of literacy. The ability to read is crucial for children's future academic, economic, and social success (Norton & Wolf, 2012; Olitskey & Nelson, 2003; Snow, Burns, & Griffen, 1998). Children who struggle to learn to read have been described in many ways. The term dyslexia is usually reserved for more severe or persistent word reading difficulties, but other terms are used such as low reading ability, poor reading, reading difficulties, and reading problems often without clear distinctions among them but sometimes carrying implications about the proposed causes and the likelihood of successful remediation. Reading disability (also known as dyslexia) is the most common Learning Disability, accounting for at least 80% of all Learning Disabilities.

At present India is in severe learning crisis. [2] The ASER- Learning Trend 2012-18) All India shows, in 2012, 6.7% Standard II children enrolled in government schools could read at least Standard II level text.10.4 percentage points gain from 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016 is observed in the report. The findings from the 2018 ASER report writes that only 50 per cent of children in Class V in rural India could read a Class II-level text. 2.7 per cent of rural children in Class I could not even recognize letters in their medium of instruction, and 35.7 per cent could not recognize numbers from 1-9.

[3] The National Achievement Survey of 2017 tells us that one in three students in Class III cannot read small text with comprehension. According to Hindu Business Line dated 17/ 01/ 2020, India needs to invest more on education. As the learning abilities of children are alarmingly low, a comprehensive and creative pre-school program is absolutely essential. A comprehensive and creative learning Programme at the foundational stage is critical, as 90 per cent of the brain's growth has already occurred by the time a child is six years old. The ultimate goal should be prevention of reading problems and the provision of early intervention for students who are experiencing difficulties (Lyon, et al., 2001).

There are number of studies which are focussing on identifying the causes of these reading difficulties. The research reviews highlight few such studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Researcher has reviewed several researches on reading problems, reading difficulties and reading disabilities. Researcher has studied different tools and tests used for identifying and diagnosis the reading problems.

[4] Mahana et. al. in "Reading Problems of Secondary School Students in English Language" have used three tool viz. Classroom Language Interaction Checklist (CLIC) for Students, FGD with Students, Questionnaire for Students and Field Note Diary to measure the reading difficulties. Classroom Language Interaction Checklist (CLIC) for Students was adapted for Indian version from the original work of Dr. Catherine Collier (2016).

Another study conducted by [5] Veena Kapur and Megha Dang on "reading in the indian classroom" The students were given a simple story to read and comprehend from their NCERT textbook, following which they were asked to answer some pertinent questions based on the story. This was done before implementing an intervention plan for fostering reading comprehension. The answers of the students were assessed and recorded. The issues that emerged included difficulty in: decoding and pronunciation, reading comprehension and negotiating the narratives.

Study conducted by [6] Alla' Yaseen on "Reading difficulties in English and how to deal with them as perceived by teachers and students in Nablus District". To know the teachers perspective towards reading difficulties in English and how to deal with them, researcher developed two tools; i.e. questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was organized in five parts. First two parts were discussing the demographic details and description of study and questionnaire. Third part of questionnaire was measuring the reading difficulties in English and how to deal with them as perceived by English teacher and students. Interview consisted 7 questions about English reading difficulties. Researcher also reviewed National Institute for Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS) battery, Grade Level Assessment Device GLAD, Diagnostic Test for Learning Disability (DTLD) and Dyslexia Assessment for Languages of India (DALI).

The review of the research revealed that the test and tools used in above mentioned researches are focusing on the components of reading i.e. encoding, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Some of them are focusing on skills of reading i.e. scanning, skimming, word attack, and other.

3. Reading Problems:

Reading is very important skills in academic area, which help us to decode the letters or symbols. Students with special needs are facing problems in numerous academic areas like reading, arithmetic, writing, comprehension, remembering, listening and seeing. The reasons for these problems vary with the type of disability. These problems interfere in normal teaching learning process of learner. A special educator uses different methods to make teaching learning process effective. These methods vary and depend upon the type of disability or difficulty.

The present paper highlights the reading problems which are commonly observed among the children of various age groups. **Some of common reading problems are**; Read slowly, Tracks figures, Exhibits difficulty in recalling known words, word by word reading, Incorrect phrasing, Poor pronunciation, Substitutions Omission, Distortion and Addition (SODA), repetitions, reversal,. Not able to **decode** the single words accurately and fluently, Difficulties **understanding structure of words**, Difficulties with reading **comprehension,** may have trouble learning the alphabet or connecting letters to sounds **(phonological issues)** , may make many mistakes when reading aloud, and repeat and pause often, may have difficulty in remembering the sounds of letters, may mispronounce words, pronunciation and/or vocabulary issues, and so many other difficulties with word recognition, poor spelling, and decoding abilities. The list of reading difficulties is long and there can be different reasons for these difficulties.

3. Causes of Reading Difficulties :

There are many factors which effects on reading skills of students. These factors may include medical problem, psychological problems, environmental problems, socio-economic background, parental education, motivation to learn, exposure to conventional education, disability and associated conditions. The reading readiness, socioeconomic status, emotional instability, physical deficiencies, and social pressure at home or school may responsible or effect on reading skills of students [7] (Pigada and Schnitt, 2009). Another study highlighted that most of the reading difficulties are created and inherent [8] (Hosp & Reschly, 2003). They are the result of un recognised, predisposing conditions within the child, but for the most part they caused by factors of child's surrounding at home, school and other daily environments.

Sometime reading difficulties may be because of inappropriate guidance or lacking of proper instruction at right time for reading skills. Because of this students will fail to acquire the skills required to develop appropriate reading ability. They also concluded that, reading difficulties vary from minor to severe form. Early identification, promptly corrections and remediation will improve the reading skill in students over the time.

4. Difficulties in identifying reading problems and their causes :

Reading difficulties or reading disabilities are hidden disability. Reading is an academic skill. Inorder to identify the reading skill among the students they are needed to interact with text. Until and unless student does not interact with text, it is very difficult to identify the reading problems among students.

After continuous observation of students, teacher may identify the reading difficulties of students, but teacher cannot confirm the exact reason of these reading difficulties. For example A is a students who is not able to read the

text. The reason for this may be low vision problem, He/she may be first generation leaner from his family, don't have exposure to traditional education system, may have some other disability, parental education and environmental factors. It is not possible for a mainstream teacher to identify the exact cause of these difficulties because neither they are oriented nor they are trained for it.

Thus realizing that mainstream teachers are unable to differentiate between academic reading difficulties and reading difficulties caused by other problems the researcher has developed a tool to facilitate the measurement of reading difficulty. The tool developed by the researcher is named   as i.e. Reading Difficulty Screening Test (RDST).

5. Reading Difficulty Screening Test (RDST):

Reading Difficulty Screening Test (RDST) is tool which help to identify the reading difficulties faced by students from 1st standard to 5th standard in inclusive education setup. Reading Difficulty Screening Test (RDST) comprises 6 sub-sets of checklist. Details of each are as given below.

> **Pre-Reading-** In this test two task are included.
>> a) Match the alphabets with pictures.
>> b) Match the capital alphabets given in left column with capital alphabets in right column.
> **Class-1-** In the 1st standard subset three task are given.
>> a. Match the capital alphabets given in left column with capital alphabets in right column.
>> b. Match the simple words given in left side with words given in right side.
>> c. Match the small alphabets given in left column from series of small alphabets in right column.
> **Class-2-** In this class four task are given to the student.
>> a. Picture matching with simple words,
>> b. Reading and copying the words,
>> c. Fill in the blanks with a, e, i, o, and u.
>> d. Circle the rhyming words.
> **Class-3-** In this check list 4 task are given.
>> a. Matching words written in capital letter with words written in small letters,
>> b. Copy the words,
>> c. Copy the sentence and read the sentence
>> d. Identify the picture.
> **Class-4-** In this check list 5 tasks are given.
>> a. See the picture and answer the questions,
>> b. Read and copy the words,
>> c. Read the pair words and fill in the blank,
>> d. Read the paragraph and select the appropriate answer for question,
>> e. Read the paragraph and copy it.
> **Class-5 -**In this check list 4 tasks are given.
>> a. Read the paragraph and answer the questions,
>> b. Differentiate words which are in the paragraph and which are not in the paragraph,
>> c. Read the picture and make sentences,
>> d. Read the sentences and differentiate them with the help of paragraph.

6. Nature of the test :

- The test for identifying reading difficulties is an individually administered tool for identifying the reading difficulties among children from 1st standard to 5th standard.

- Tool identifies the reading difficulties among the students with the help of 6 tests from pre-academic to 5th class for students and 1 interview schedule for teachers.

- The result of test will help teacher to identify reading difficulties faced by the students. This will help the researcher to prepare a UDL based module.

- This test is a non-timed test but the time taken by the students for test will be recorded. A child can be given more than one tests. If it is found that a child fails to complete their class test, then one class down test will be administered.

7. Structure of Test :

Table 1: Domain wise and Class wise Structure of Test

Domain	Pre-reading	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	Component of reading
Letters & letters with picture	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Phonics
Small words	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Phonemic awareness
Big words	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Vocabulary
Sentences	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Comprehension
Picture reading	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Visualization
Small Paragraphs	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Phonemic & vocabulary
Big paragraphs	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Phonemic & vocabulary
Marks	**15**	**20**	**30**	**40**	**40**	**40**	

8. Selection of items for test:

The selection of items were based on the content of the NCERT Textbooks, The item selected in test are adopted from NCERT books of standard 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5. Items of Reading Difficulty Screening Test (RDST) covered components of reading which are Phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, visualisation and comprehension. To check all these components Letters/ Alphabets, Alphabets with pictures, small words with pictures, big words, one/two/three syllable words, sentences, Picture reading, small paragraphs, paragraphs with cues and big paragraphs are included in Reading Difficulty Screening Test (RDST). The Classwise distribution of task is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Class wise Distribution of Tasks

	Tasks 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5
Pre-primary	Match letter with Pictures	Match letter with letter			
1st standard	Match capital letter with capital letter	Circle word in capital letters with opposite Column word	Circle word in small letters with opposite Colum word		
2nd standard	Match pictures with their spelling	Read and copy the words	Fill in the Blanks with a, e, i, o, u	Circle the rhyming words	
3rd Standard	Match words in capital letters with words in small letters	Read and copy words	Read and copy sentences	Read the sentence and identify the picture	
4th Standard	Read the Picture and answer the questions	Read and copy the words	Fill in the blanks	Read the passage and answer the questions	Read and copy the paragraph
5th standard	Read the passage and answer the questions	Identify the words in the paragraph and words not in the paragraph	Read the Picture and answer the questions	Make the sentences on the basis of picture	Read the sentences and differentiate it

9. Validity of Test

Validity of test is important for ensuring that it is measuring what it intends to measure. The validity of the test was established by sending the test to various experts and modifying the test as per their suggestions. The following validity were established:

9.1 Content Validity

Content validity of the test was established by ensuring that maximum items are selected from respective class of NCERT textbooks. Each item in the test is compared with their respective class textbook and difficulty level of each item is minimized according to class level.

9.2 Face Validity

For the purpose of face validity test is given to experts in the field. Test is sent to 25 professors from 12 different institutions throughout the country. The test was modified based on the suggestions proposed by them.

10. Scoring and administration of test

Scoring and administration is an important part of every test. For the administration of the test class teachers were selected. They were briefed about it and were asked to keep in mind below listed points:

1. All the item given in the test are clear, observable and measurable.
2. Teacher will give proper instructions regarding the test.
3. Teacher will give all information of this test like; purpose of test and confidentiality of information.
4. Teacher will give all instruction about task to be performed in the given test.
5. Teacher will ensure distraction free environment and appropriate desk and chair arrangement.
6. Teacher will keep the required testing material ready
7. Teacher will give the one screening test to each student according to his/her class.
8. Students can ask for the repeated instruction.
9. Behaviour regarding reading should be observed if considered relevant
10. Students can complete the test at their pace and there is no time limit.
11. Total time taken is to be noted by teacher.
12. If student /s is /are facing so much difficulties in his/her standard, he/she will be tested on both level i.e. his / her current and previous standard.

11. Scoring System

1. 1 mark will be given for 1 correct answer.
2. Total marks of each task will counted and then total marks will be written at the end of the test.
3. If student are not able to perform on particular test or task in the given test then 1 level down test will be used for testing.
4. If student perform below 40% in any test then teacher will give one level down test.
5. If student achieve more than 80% in given respective test, then it will be considered as an independent level of reading.
6. Students who will perform below 80% we will considered for intervention or will be selected for research purpose.

12. CONCLUSION :

Thus the paper has presented the theoretical background about the meaning and causes of reading difficulty. It also highlights the factor affecting reading difficulty. Several research reviews are conducted to study the tests used by researchers. The paper has presented Reading Difficulty Screening Test (RDST) for the children of standard 1-5. This is a test used for identifying the reading difficulties among the students. It contains different type of reading tasks for different standards. The scoring of the test is also presented. The researcher hopes that the implication of this test would be that it will help mainstream teacher to identify the type and cause of reading difficulty.

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