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Dr. Vathana Fenn

Performance Variance – An Authentic Challenge While Striving Towards Brilliance

S. Sreejana, M.A., M.Phil.
Dr. K. Brindha, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Abstract

In a class room, sometimes languages and dialects bring up issues of possible discrimination due to the perception that some accents are more prestigious than others. In colleges only a few students participate in the classroom activity by interacting with peers and faculty. These activities could be a source of enrichment of knowledge in languages and cultures instead of leading to any discrimination. This paper attempts to analyze the situational influences that build up a student's

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linguistic skill. It thus enunciates the academic and semi-academic performance of students from varied backgrounds.

English versus Vernacular Medium Students

There are students in all classes with English medium and Non-English or Vernacular medium background. Vernacular medium is the medium in which the students learn in their respective regional or native language. Most of the first generation students do not get proper guidance or advice to guide them in the field of education since they may be the first in their family to seek formal education. The Vernacular medium students find it difficult to understand the individual sentences and organizational structure of a piece of writing in English. They are unable to figure out the ideas and perceive inference. They seemed to be reticent in the presence of students from English medium.

LSRW – Importance of Reading Skill

To widen the communication skill in each individual, LSRW – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing - is indispensable. In the current circumstances, the professionals indeed need efficient and convincing communication skill. To develop speaking and writing which are productive skills, the receptive skills like listening and reading are also important. Only when the students start reading, they will be familiar with vocabulary and it will help the reader to acquire new words and phrases that they come across in every day conversations. Several simple and technical words the students come across in their subjects will be new to the Vernacular medium students unless they nurture the habit of reading. So, in this paper, it is emphasized that enhancing the reading skill in these Vernacular medium and first generation students are important in order to develop good communication.

1. Introduction

There is demand made on the individuals to demonstrate their best and highest potential usually during formal education. Perhaps, this in itself calls for a need/situation-based learning. It is here the need for a regular learning habit gains emphasis as this doesn't have any time limit. The

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process of learning can be categorized as learning from lectures and discussions, visual learning, learning from books, e-learning, and learning via experience. One common aspect that is inherent in all these, directly or indirectly, is the habit of reading. It can be even stated that Reading Habit is the backbone of knowledge development.

2. Reading – A Skill Improvement

For Children to become skilled readers (Neuman & Celano, 2006) they will also need to develop a rich conceptual knowledge base and verbal reasoning abilities to understand messages conveyed through print. Reading skill is usually developed in second language acquisition like English using the following categories.

1. By creating supportive environment.
2. Discussing the textual inferences with friends and family members.
3. Surfing available resources to realize the true concept.
4. Understanding the benefits to cultivate a constructive habit.
5. Prescription of books with simple narrations.
6. Periodic project works on topics of interest of the students.

Obviously, the communication skill is considered to be a very important skill for an individual to succeed in life and reading is the best way to improve the command over a language, especially all students, both from English-medium and vernacular medium classes as well as slow learners. The final outcome will be better achieved if we use effective ways to learn and master the essentials of language for effective communication.

3. Objective of the Study

This paper aims at examining the predicaments second language learners face while trying to acquire reading skill. Some selected students were used to collect data.

4. Measures of the Research

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4.1. Process

A diagnostic study was done to examine the capabilities of the students by exposing a group of students to face several levels of checking modules such as reading comprehension, interpretation or trans-coding of a graphic and reviewing the given material. The results were analyzed based on certain materials given to the students to check out their personal interests, to review their reading and pictorial comprehension skills and also to evaluate the general reading capabilities.

4.2. Area of Study and Selection of Students

For the present study, the area from which the samples were drawn consists of the students from the first year engineering degree class who have had their studies either in English or Non-English medium schools in and outside Tamilnadu. 650 students were selected for this test. 237 were boys and 413 were girls.

On the basis of the Geographical division of the area of study, the variables considered were Rural and Urban (City). On the basis of the medium of instruction, the variables were further divided into two categories such as Government and Private Institutions. In the considered sample, 218 students obtained their higher secondary education through government schools and 432 students through private schools. The analysis was also made based on different strategies such as their family background, residing place, paternal and maternal educational qualifications, personal interests, medium of schooling, inclination towards reading, general knowledge regarding current affairs and capacity for understanding.

As a first step, these students were asked to fill up some general questions pertaining to their interests and general ability. On getting formally into the analytic session, the students were asked to answer the questions for a reading comprehension, mainly concentrating on exhibiting their core comprehension standards. This is considered to be **academics**. Secondly, a paragraph on a general topic was given and the students were instructed to depict a pictorial representation of the content. It did not focus on academics or any general category. The activity was knowledge-based that was grouped into the category of **semi-academics**. Thirdly, an article was given from a reputed

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newspaper *The Hindu* and the students were made to express their review with a write up on it. It is termed as **General Reading**.

By evaluating their answers and their basic self-information, several conclusions were drawn.

All these formulations were carried out in a direct way to derive a conclusion correlating the individual traits and performance. Some data showed that one scenario contradicted another, but still efforts were made to record and analyze the variations and the diversity among the students' levels.

Table: 1 Gender-based Analysis of Reading Habit

S. No	Gender	Total	Reading	Playing	Reading Habit
1	Male	237	48	189	20.25%
2	Female	413	172	241	41.64%

An analysis based on Gender was done. Out of 650 students, 237 are boys and 413 are girls. Here 41.64 % of the girls were interested in reading whereas only 20.25 % of the boys were interested in reading. The decline in interest in boys may be a result of socializing among other boys in the college.

Table: 2 Percentage of Students who scored above 70%

S. No	Content	% of Students with Reading interest	% of Students with interest in sports.
1	Academics	15 %	2.4 %
2	Semi Academics	70 %	46 %
3	General Reading	10 %	7 %

When a comparison was made between the students with reading interests with the students who have interest in sports, it is noted that the students with reading as pastime excel in their reading skill more than the students who have greater interest in sports.

5. Observations

As far as the students' pastime of reading and sports is concerned, the following points have been observed.

1. Government schools in the city support reading habit better than the schools in the rural area. The girl students display more interest on reading rather than the boy students since the girls are trained to remain at home and not generally allowed to go out often. Girls have more time for activities like reading, writing, viewing and so on, whereas boys are provided with more freedom to move out and hence they find themselves with less time to engage themselves with activities like reading.
2. Performance of students from private schools or by English medium students is better when compared to the performance of Government school or non-English medium school students because the private institutions are forced to prove their quality of education to capture market share which depends on the success rate of their students whereas Government institutions do not have to compete to ensure enrollment of students as done by the private institutions.
3. Students who move from Vernacular medium to English in higher classes find it extremely difficult to adjust. English, as a medium of education, seems to have become a necessity for all including those from the first-generation learner group. English medium is in demand among all economic and social classes. Because of this factor, the parents, who themselves had no access to English education; now want their wards to study in English-medium schools.
4. Students of English medium education have more exposure to English than non-English medium students. English medium students are able to infer knowledge because of more usage and utilization of English in their classes since all the subjects except their regional

- language subject are taught through English, whereas the non-English medium students study the entire subject except English in regional language. This makes English reading and understanding more effective in English medium students in relation to the non-English medium students.
5. Performance of the students whose parents have a college degree is better because the parents possess some basic awareness on the process of learning and they choose the right platform for learning. The parents with a college degree are able to analyze their children's field of interest and encourage and equip them with resources to nurture their interest whereas the parents who do not have a college degree depend on third party information which would not be that effective in making a right decision for their kids.
 6. Both educated and uneducated parents motivate their children. The effective motivation is found to be provided by the parents with education since they are able to understand their kid's emotional and mental situation and encourage them via right channel. The uneducated parents motivate their kids but often without direction or without knowing the nuances.
 7. Students with reading as pastime excelled more in their comprehension than the students with sports as pastime. This is because of higher level of exposure towards reading process. Students whose pastime is reading are exposed to more vocabulary and hence there is continuous learning, unlike students who are interested in sports. It can be stated that the continuous learning aided by book reading is the key ingredient for the better performance rate by the students who are interested in reading.
 8. Students who read novels in English are found to have better success rate in the tests than the students who are keen in reading magazines and newspapers. This is because, a novel is chosen out of interest and the entire book will be moving in and around the core field which ensures that the students stick with the book completely. Hence the students who read novels have a better exposure to vocabulary and usage compared to students who are interested in reading magazines and newspapers.

However it may be pointed out that the interests and the circumstances in which a student is nurtured may vary from one student to another which directly may impact a student's performance. In order to become proficient in their second language, young children will need to acquire familiarity with the phonology to the second language, its vocabulary (typical everyday discourse as well as academic vocabulary), its morphology and grammar (Geva, 2006). Further, to become literate in a second language, it is important to have an adequate level of oral proficiency in that language (Bialystock, 2007).

6. Scope for Future Research

6.1. Suggested Activities for Improvement

Based on the analysis and findings, students can be grouped according to the level and a suitable methodology may be introduced to suit the needs of groups. The following are some of the suggested activities that may be followed to improve their reading skill.

6.2. One-on-One Groups

Numerous study groups can be created with the combination of a student with adequate English and reading skill and a student without adequate English and reading skill. We may allot time to develop and nurture the skill set through interactive games and activities within the group.

6.3. Extempore

Preparing on a topic of interest by students without good English skills and presenting it to a heterogeneous group.

6.4. Translated Books

The students will be provided with an original version of English and also its translated version. Then they will be given practical exercises like reading a chapter and relating the two versions of the same book.

6.5. Skill Club

We may create groups according to their skill in language usage and conducting competitions and recognizing of their development.

6.6. Speech

Motivational speech by the experts who have succeeded in life and career even though they had a non-English medium background will be a great asset.

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S. Sreejana
Assistant Professor
Department of Science and Humanities (English),
Kumaraguru College of Technology
Chinnavedampatti
Coimbatore – 641 049

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Tamil Nadu
India
sreejanasasikumar@gmail.com

Dr. K. Brindha
Associate Professor of English
Department of Science and Humanities (English)
Sri Krishna College of Engineering and Technology
Kuniamuthur
Coimbatore – 641 008
Tamil Nadu
India
brindhaprabhakar@yahoo.co.in