



ENHANCING ORAL READING SKILLS THROUGH ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

'Oral Reading' is an instructional strategy, which develop students' fluency in Reading. Reading plays a dominant role among the four macro-skills in English language acquisition. Arts Colleges in Tamil Nadu has English as a part of their subject. But, students are not well exposed to the basic skill of the English language. The traditional method fails to improve students' reading skills and increase their reading speed. Zone of Proximal Development concept can be exploited for the purpose of enhancing oral reading skills. The present study, documents an experiment that was conducted with the select first year undergraduate students. Instead of traditional lecture method, ZPD concept was used as a means to enhance the oral reading. Based on an experiment research, learners' feedback were collected to infer its activation and construction on English reading class.

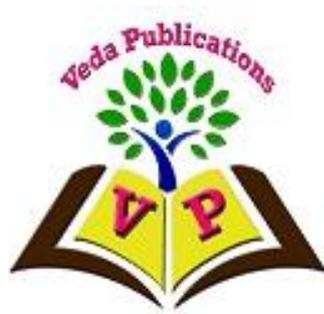
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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Oral reading is an ability to read the text rapidly, accurately along with expression. Oral reading serves four purposes: to grow and to develop as a performer, to communicate a message to an audience, to perform an artistic creation and to analyze the text as a literary critic. Students who read with appropriate speed and accuracy are able to focus on the meaning of the text. Students should have the ability to achieve the reading rate of at least 150-600 words per minute. The study develops a theoretical understanding of the processes involved

in oral reading through Vygotskian perspective. Lev Vygotsky is a seminal psychologist, who introduced the theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It refers to the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with the assistance of able peers. Lev Vygotsky defines ZPD as: the distance between the actual developmental levels as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978)





AIM OF THE STUDY

The paper aims at examining the oral reading skills of students with their peers under guidance. The researcher proposes to provoke students' ability to read aloud with the peers and to analyze both positive and negative impacts of oral reading with Vygotskian perspective in classrooms.

HYPOTHESIS

The study began its investigation with the following assumption:

1. Use of oral reading with peer group under the guidance of facilitator / teacher promotes the students ability in reading with a better comprehension, pronunciation, rhythm and intonation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions has been framed to address the research problem:

1. What are the benefits in practicing oral reading?
2. What is the role of ZPD concept in oral reading?
3. How can this ZPD concept be implemented in a classroom?
4. Does ZPD have a pedagogical value?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Since the present study is primarily a students' experience on oral reading skills with their peer group. The subjects are students of The American College, Madurai and are chosen randomly from first year of undergraduate level. Twenty students were contacted in person and received a good response from them. The experience of students has been collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 10 statements on a Likert-type five point scale from "strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree, strongly disagree" with 5, 4, 3, 2&1 points respectively for all positively worded statements and it was reversed in the case of negatively worded statements.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Nunan (1991), traditional reading is viewed as a matter of decoding a series of written symbols into their aural equivalents in the quest for making sense of the text. He referred to this process as the 'bottom-up' view of reading.

McCarthy (1999) has called this view 'outside-in' processing; referring to the idea that meaning exists in the printed page and is interpreted by the reader then taken in. Shohamy (1983) the major shortcoming of that test is that it does not encompass a wide enough variety of speech styles. Aly A. Amer (1997) Reading aloud by the teacher can, in fact, be equally important for the EFL/ESL readers, especially at the early stage of learning the language. Schinke-Llano (1993:123) 'private speech represents an effort on the part of the individual to regain control of the task situation'. Todd Ruecker (2011) the dual-language cross-cultural method of peer review proposed here alleviates problems with activating the ZPD by pairing language learners with fluent speakers of the target language.

DISCUSSION

Students who read orally surely attain their fluency in the language. Reading requires two things: decode words and comprehend what they are reading. 'Repeated readings' is the best-known oral reading method for developing fluency. In ZPD 'Paired reading' helps the struggling readers to read with a more fluent reader, results in significant improvements in word recognition and comprehension. The fluent reader adjusts reading speed to the less fluent reader. Such oral reading with assistance shows the development who finds difficulty in reading. Teachers need to motivate the students continuously, by following different techniques. The materials provided to students should be very interesting. Peer interactions will make them to correct their pronunciation, stress, accent, intonation. Vygotskian ZPD concept, surely improve students oral reading because students feel comfortable with their peers exchanges.

The function of ZPD is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. The ZPD is an area of learning that occurs when a person is assisted by a teacher or peer with a skill set higher than that of the subject. Once a student attains the skill, then the teacher will no longer be needed for the task. Before completing the task on their own, it is the teacher's job to move the student's mind forward step-by-step. Teachers need to assess the student reading level



first, then they need to provide a high level book which will challenge the student. Reciprocal teaching was the base to develop the students' interaction skill. In the context of adults, peers should challenge each other in order to support collaboration which lead to success.

The teacher must plan activities that encompass not only what children are capable of doing on their own but what they can learn with the help of others. (Karpov & Haywood, 1998). Instruction can be planned to provide practice in the ZPD classes. When planning lessons, teachers should keep in mind the scaffolding process by integrating guided practice. Teachers can help students connect their new learning to their prior knowledge. Hints and prompts will help students during the assessment. Teacher's instructions is a tactic for helping the student. Students should share their ideas and everyday experience with the peers.

A students' learning goals must be personalized to their needs and abilities and success measured in terms of progress from his personal prior levels. Homogeneous groupings is valued in this ZPD concept. Within ZPD, the cognitive acceleration projects aim to boost intelligence, by increasing a students' ability to handle complex information and make connections. Vygotsky's theory does not mean that anything can be taught to any student. Only instruction and activities that make the student to fall within the zone. Cooperative learning activities can be planned with groups of children at different levels who can help each other. A clear planning within ZPD will surely has its pedagogical value.

Summing up

From a Vygotskian perspective, ability is not inherent or genetic. It can develop from a proper habituation. Teacher and student conceptions about intelligence as fixed and static can affect successful learning. The goal to be set for each students' regarding their needs and abilities. Peer learning activities can be planned with groups of children at different levels who can help each other to learn. The relationship between the teacher and learner can be proximal / close to the learner and often explicit. The teacher construction's is most important in planning the activities for students. Thus, ZPD is greater

opportunities to students for mastering their skills from their ability.

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