

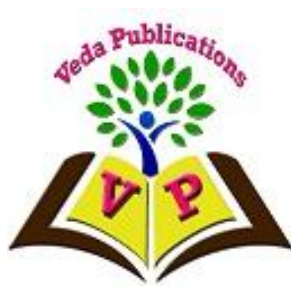


ROLE OF THE CULTURALLY FAMILIAR TEXTS IN ENHANCING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF LAMBADA LEARNERS – AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT



Teaching of English has gained a lot of significance in present scenario in the context of globalization. However, in a multilingual society like in India, it becomes extremely difficult to teach a foreign language to which teacher and learners do not have regular expose in the society. In this context the introduction of multilingual education helps the learners to learn English through their mother tongue. The concept of multilingual education is to provide education for the minority language group learners in their mother tongue.

Keywords: *Multilingual Education, Reading Comprehension Skills, Lambada Learners.*

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BACKGROUND

Several researches in the field of English language teaching have been done and explored that the cultural familiarity of the text helps the learners to understand the given text in English. The researches on schema theory and, its relation in reading comprehension results that, the cultural familiarity of the learners helps in reading and understanding a text in English. The Researches in connection with schema theory and, multilingual education say that, the introduction of the cultural familiar text helps in teaching and learning reading skills in English for minority language learners. The

languages which do not have script can introduce their culturebased texts and teach reading comprehension.

Many studies have been done by the researchers on the relationship between background knowledge and reading comprehension. Smith (1973) states that reading involves a tradeoff between visual and non-visual information ... the more that is already known behind the eyeball the less visual information is required to identify a letter, a word or meaning from the text (as cited in barnitz.1985).



Kaplan (1966), Long (1989), and Nostrand (1989) also indicate that culturally specific schemata affects comprehension. Nostrand, for example, has shown that authentic texts from one culture may give a false impression of that culture to members of a second culture. To avoid this false impression, such texts should be presented in authentic context and students' appropriate schema should be activated. According to Kaplan, cultural differences lead to different approaches to teaching reading to L1 speakers and L2 speakers. Cultural knowledge is also important because to comprehend some types of writing, humor, for example, knowledge of the culture must be taken into consideration. *Garfield*, a US cartoon, translated into a second language, is humorous only in those situations in which the reader understands the cultural significance behind it.

With the above example the researcher underlines the importance of corresponding the reading material with the cultural schema of the learner in the situation.

This is true of other genres as well. Carrell's (1981) study has shown the effects on comprehension and recall of English stories by ESL readers based on cultural origin of the stories given for them. She gave two groups of students; Chinese and Japanese, stories in English which had been translated from Chinese, Japanese, French, and American Indian folktales. The results showed that where story schemata differed drastically from that of their own culture, students ranked comprehensibility of the passages concerned as low. Their rewriting of those stories was also ranked low in comprehensibility by American native speakers. Johnson (1981) found similar effects of the unfamiliar cultural background of a text on reading comprehension. By examining the language complexity and the cultural origin of prose on the reading comprehension of Iranian students (intermediate and advanced ESL students), she found that the level of syntactic and semantic complexity of the stories had a lesser effect on reading comprehension than did the cultural origin (Iranian versus American folktales) of the story.

Recent trends in research on the role of cultural background knowledge in L2 reading

comprehension have focused on two groups of subjects with the same cultural background and one text in two different contexts. That is, several culturally unfamiliar words in the original text are changed to more familiar ones in the modified version. Then each group reads either the culturally familiar or the culturally unfamiliar version of the text. The first study of this type was carried out by Chihara, Sakurai, and Oller (1989). Based on the assumption that "very simple things like nouns referring to persons and places carry with them some fairly subtle semantic and pragmatic information", they changed several culturally unfamiliar words (e.g. Nicholas, Athen, Klein) from two English texts into more familiar words (Ben, Osaka, Daiei) for the Japanese participants. Leaving all other words whole, Chihara et al. could control other possible intervening variables such as the content and syntactic complexity of the two texts. The results of the cloze test showed that the participants performed significantly better on the modified, that is culturally familiar, cloze texts than on the original texts.

Chihara et al.'s (1989) study was later followed by Al-Fallay (1994, as cited in Oller, 1995), who examined the effect of cultural familiarity on Arab EFL students' cloze test performance over a three month period. In his study, he used two narratives. One was an English translation of a story originally written about an Arab setting, and the other was a story in English by an American with reference to events that took place in the United States. The American story was adapted positively to fit Arab expectations, and the Arab story was adapted negatively to violate Arab expectations. Five cloze tests over the Arab story and five over the Arabized version of the American story were presented sequentially in ten administrations over a three month period to the experimental group. The counterpart tests, consisting of five tests over the unmodified American story and five tests over the Americanized version of the Arab story were presented over the same period in matched administrations to the control group. Results indicated that the experimental group performed better on all ten cloze tests owing to the conformity of the textual material to their socio-cultural expectations.



Sasaki (2000) investigated how schemata activated by culturally familiar words might have influenced students' cloze test-taking processes. Two groups of Japanese EFL learners with equivalent English reading proficiency completed either a culturally familiar or an unfamiliar version of a cloze test. Partially replicating Chihara et al.'s (1989) experiment, she changed several unfamiliar words in the original cloze test passage to more familiar ones in the modified version. Unlike Chihara et al., however, students were asked to give verbal reports of their test-taking processes, and to recall the passage after they had completed the test. Results demonstrated that those who read the culturally familiar cloze text tried to solve more items and generally understood the text better, which resulted in better performance, than those students who read the original text.

Alptekin (2006) says that by contextual further means, culture-specific customs, rituals, notion, structures, and values. In fact, he defines nativization based on sociological, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions of culture, as described by Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990). The sociological dimension, as Alptekin (2006) argues, includes culture-specific contextual cues of customs and rituals such as religious conventions, courting patterns, social festivities, interpersonal relationships, and home and family life. Examples of sociological adaptations are replacing *the traditional American Sunday dinner* in the original story by *a Bayram (a religious holiday for Turks) meal* and *Sunday Clothes* by *Bayram clothes*. Nativization through the semantic dimension, according to Alptekin (2006), involves the adaptation of culture-specific notions and structures, for example, conceptual and lexical changes made in areas such as food, currency, clothes, drinks, and institutions. Finally, nativization through the pragmatic dimension, as Alptekin (2006) mentions, embodies substitution of native cultural values for target language cultural values; for instance, the sense of American individualism seen in the protagonist's actions in the original story is replaced by the sense of Turkish group solidarity conveyed through the protagonist's deeds in the nativized version.

The above mentioned research stimulates the researcher to undertake the present study which can help the marginalized community like Lambada learners.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present study is to know the role of the culturally familiar text in developing reading comprehension skills among the Lambada learners at secondary level in tribal school. As far as schema theory is concerned, the cultural schema which the learners have in their schema, helps them in comprehending the text which is given in English. Culturally familiar text helps the learners in understanding non cultural based texts, if the learners would give practice in reading comprehension by using culturally familiar texts of the learners. It is also assumed that the cultural familiarity of the text helps in reading and understanding non culturally familiar text.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do the Lambada learners face problems while reading and understanding English?
2. To what extent the culturally familiar texts help Lambada learners to develop their reading comprehension skills in English?

ISSUE STATEMENT

The main reason for undertaking this research on Lambadas is that the Lambada learners come from a different culture compared to other learners. The main motivation is that the researcher also hails from the Lambada community. The problems faced by the researcher during his school days initiate him to do the present study. It was found that even though the reading skills are taught in the real classroom situations, the learners still exhibit very poor reading and comprehension skills in English. It was also observed that the teachers of second language (English) did not make any serious attempt to use culturally familiar texts in teaching reading.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The subjects for the present research are secondary level learners from Telangana tribal welfare residential schools of Warangal districts. The sample learners are from Lambada community only the total number of subjects 20, 10 from A.P.T.W.R.S,



(Boys) Ashok Nagar and 10 from A.P.T.W.R.S (Girls) Kothaguda of Warangal district. This study has two qualities like quantitative and qualitative in nature. The research has been started with student's questionnaire which helps the researcher to know the social, educational, parental information of the subjects. A pre-test has been conducted to know the learners opinion on English and on reading skills in English. Intervention classes have been conducted for 10 days by using culturally familiar texts of the learners. During intervention the Lambada stories and history of Lambadas have been introduced. The pretest and post tests are conducted by using non cultural based texts. The results of the pre and post-tests were compared to show how the culturally familiar texts helped the learners to develop their reading comprehension skills in English.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The carried out research discusses many factors which are related to the reading comprehension specifically reading comprehension in English.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The following are the findings of the study. They have been classified under the following categories.

LEARNERS' PROFICIENCY

- The learners have problems with vocabulary and pronunciation
- They have problem with connecting ideas between line to line and sentence to sentence
- The learners have much of their mother tongue influence and they have problem with second language or third language.
- The learners have problems with other language skills like listening, speaking and writing.
- Most of the classrooms in the rural and tribal areas are teacher centered.
- They have problem with reading and understanding a text in English.
- They ask the meanings of the English words in Telugu and their own mother tongue Lambadi.

- The learners ask the teacher to explain the given text either in Telugu or Lambadi.
- The economical status of the Lambada learners would not allow them to have extra access in developing reading skills.
- They do not have moral support from the educational institutes.
- They are not given proper facilities which are necessary for a learner.
- The poverty of the learners forces them to drop the school.
- The lessons in existing textbooks are not related to the culture of the learners. So, there is no scope to know the learners own culture.
- The use of culturally familiar texts during the intervention helped the learners develop their reading comprehension skills in English.
- Learners have curiosity to learn English but un-culturally familiar texts made the learners to feel uncomfortable.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- There is no students' friendly environment at the school which makes them learn things easily.
- Parents only send their children to the school but they do not check on their children's progress.
- The learners have interest in learning English but the learning environment is not encouraging.
- They know that English is very important to survive in the world, but there is no proper teaching-learning environment in the tribal schools.
- The home environment of the learners does not create any opportunity for learning English language.
- There is no regular practice on basic skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- The text materials which are available are not culture-specific.
- During the intervention when the culturally familiar texts were used, the learners were able to read and understand the text.



IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study have some implications for teaching reading comprehension skills to the Lambada learners at the secondary level. This study aims to know the role of the culturally familiar texts in enhancing reading comprehension skills of Lambada learners at secondary level. It will give some picture of the problem to the syllabus designers, policy makers and material producers. The findings will help course instructors to get insights into how the teaching of reading comprehension skills could happen in the classroom.

- The teachers should use the culturally familiar texts of the learners as authentic materials to make their teaching more effective focusing on reading skills.
- The use of bilingual and multilingual method will help the Lambada learners to understand whatever they listen to in the classroom.
- Every learner should get a chance to read the text in the classroom.
- The culturally familiar texts should be included in the tribal welfare schools which are related to the learners' cultural background, so the learners will show interest to know their own culture. Alternatively the skills of the learners will be improved and it is proved in this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE TEACHERS

It has been observed that the present system of education is unfamiliar to the Lambada learners in many ways.. Further the government's measures for the upliftment of Lambadas are mainly based on concessional provisions through protective discrimination but they are temporary in nature, the ultimate aim being to level them up with mainstream society. Preferential treatment and concession can hardly produce the desired results unless these are used as means of equipping the tribal with the knowledge and skills which enable them to compete with non-tribes counterparts on equal terms. The present study therefore focuses on the education of Lambadas through their own language and culture, creating in them a love and a pride in their culture and equipping them with skills and knowledge which

will put them on par with their non-tribal counterparts.

The findings of the present research gave some of the concrete facts that, reading comprehension skills for Lambada learners are very important to improve their proficiency in English. The education of the learners is in the hands of the school teachers. So, the teachers should incorporate reading comprehension skills among the learners. The teachers who teach in tribal schools need to adapt texts from the available sources to develop reading skills of the learners. The additional adaptations of the texts will create interest among the learners. The basic skills are necessary to become good language user in the society. The teacher can also use technical equipments like computer, television, tape recorder, projector, graded reading cards and other teaching learning materials to enhance reading skills of the learners. It is essential for the teacher to take care of and encourage learners who come from minor groups.

EDUCATION THROUGH MOTHER TONGUE

English language teaching through the mother tongue has not been attempted so far with the Lambada community. They are taught English as if it is a second language. An important step in their teaching is to first teach Telugu and then teach English because the Lambadi language does not have a script of its own.

In tribal welfare schools, Telugu is taught from the beginning. The pronunciation of their own language and Telugu is very different for them. English is a difficult language for the Lambada learners to begin with and difficult to learn through formal schooling. It has been generally accepted that it is advisable to develop reading skills in their own mother tongue because it believes that the skills of one language can easily be transferred to another language. If a student who already knows how to read and write in one language does not have to struggle much with the problems of reading and writing in another language. But for Lambadas their own language has to be taught first, and it is impossible to teach through the mother tongue because they do not have script to their L1. Hence the government should at least employ Lambada teachers to teach English. So that, the learners can ask some unknown words in their mother tongue.

**TO THE MATERIAL PRODUCERS**

In the overall study we observed that the existing textbooks do not have culturally familiar texts for the Lambada learners. The material producers who prepare materials for the residential schools can include the tribal culture for the school level children which can help the learners learn language through their own culture. **TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT**

The state government should take initiation to establish autonomous institutions to undertake research in tribal languages and publish some of the literature related to the Lambada culture, so that the printed culture of the Lambada learners will help them in enhancing reading comprehension skills.

The existing tribal welfare institutes like TSTWRS and Ashrama schools teachers should be provided with training in teaching English. The government should provide special education funds for the tribal students and distribute books which can help them in developing the basic skills of English.

The use of culturally familiar texts to develop reading comprehension skills helps teachers to enhance learners reading skills in English.

Currently, the prescribed textbooks and lessons are not related to the learner's cultural and social background. When the researcher introduced the culturally related texts to the learners, they showed interest in reading the text and were able to understand the content of the passages. They were very happy to see their culture represented in the form of the text which was not available earlier. The researcher conducted pre-test by using unfamiliar and non-culture based text. With this the researcher came to know that the learners faced problems in reading and understanding the non culture based texts. Then, during the intervention the researcher used culturally related texts to teach and found the learners very enthusiastic to read the text because of their previous knowledge. The researcher also used texts that contained stories which were told by their parents and grandparents in their childhood. While reading the passage the learners were able to recollect all the things which were told by their parents some of the names and some of the

terms the learners could not remember because of the domination of the regional language. The learners are not allowed to use their mother tongue in the language. They do not have the teachers who teach English language from their own community who can help the learners to make understand by using their mother tongue.

The researcher argues here that texts based on learner culture should be introduced in prescribed text books to encourage the Lambada learners in learning English. The reasons for drop outs can be because the learners could not understand English properly. If the learners could have teachers from their own community who can make the learners to understand by using their mother tongue the learners can get some kind of encouragement with this we can stop dropouts rapidly. The researcher came to know this by using the learners' mother tongue in the classroom while teaching English. In the present prescribed book many lessons are from western culture which is no more related to the learner's culture. This makes confusions for the learners to understand English.

CONCLUSION

As discussed in this study, Lambada learners do not have script for their language and it is difficult to have education through their mother tongue, because most of the teachers who teach Lambada learners are not from the same community. So, providing multilingual education for the learners who come from the minor community is difficult. If the government could recruit Lambada community teachers even at elementary level which is initial stage in education, the learners could get some kind of boost in learning English with the help of the mother tongue.

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