

Name of Scholar: **Dhirvir Jhingran**
Name of Supervisor: **Prof. Mohammad Miyan**
Department: **Department of Educational Studies**
Title of research: ***A Study of School Based Academic Factors Influencing Reading Achievements in Primary Grades***

ABSTRACT

Language is a medium for communication, thought and cognition. Education in the early primary years should focus on development of a strong foundation of reading and language skills. Unfortunately, the approach and practices for language teaching in early primary grades in most countries in South Asia are inappropriate, and most children do not acquire the basic language skills that are so crucial for all learning in the future. This paper presents the findings from a year-long research on the language curriculum and teaching practice in grades 1 and 2 in two states in India. The objective of the research was to identify academic factors that influence reading achievements in early grades.

Based on a study of theoretical concepts, research findings, and analysis of effective strategies used in programs for language development, reference points were created for appropriate language teaching-learning strategies in primary classrooms. A conceptual framework developed for the study helped compare teaching strategies observed in the study schools with the identified good practices and examine the factors that are responsible for such inadequate/inappropriate practices and low student achievements in language learning.

A multiple method research design with a focus on qualitative analysis was used for the study. A major part of the study was an in-depth research in 36 grade 1 and 2 classrooms in two selected states in India. This included student assessment, classroom observations, time-on-task records and teacher interviews. In addition, the following other methods were used- teachers' survey; focus group discussions; comparison with a 'good school' in each state; case studies of schools and teachers; and analysis of the curriculum, textbook and in-service training. Extensive triangulation of findings from different methods was carried out.

The main findings are summarized below:

- Overall, student achievements in language in both states are characterized by '*low means and high variance*'. Less than 3% students achieve reading fluency rates considered essential for reasonable comprehension. Most students are not able to respond to questions that require an

inference to be made or an opinion to be expressed. Writing skills (dictation) are abysmally poor.

- Listening, ‘watching’, repeating after the teacher or another student and copying constituted almost 90% of the on-task time of students. Very little time was spent on actual reading. What counts as reading is really choral repetition of a memorized text. Writing includes only copying and handwriting practice; no composition tasks are given to the students. There is little focus on comprehension.
- All schools have multigrade teaching and teachers do not have a strong understanding of good multigrade teaching practices. This results in students remaining off-task for long periods. Teachers are aware of the high intra-class disparity in student learning, but they are not equipped to handle this effectively. Teachers do not have a good conceptual understanding of early language development and strategies for balanced literacy instruction in early grades.
- Students whose first language is very different from the standard language used at school face immense problems in learning that language since the focus of the language class is mainly on choral repetition and copying.
- There is not enough emphasis on practice by students or on revision and consolidation. Teachers do not practice any differentiated instruction matched to students’ reading levels. Students who lag behind do not get special attention or remediation.

Conclusion

Based on an analysis of these findings and the linked academic issues, the **following seven academic factors** have been identified, through this study, as the most important in influencing and improving reading achievements in early primary grades in the states of Assam and Rajasthan. These factors do not work in isolation. There is a complex interplay of these factors in different contexts that influences teaching-learning processes and students’ reading achievements. The main academic factors that support improved language learning are: (a) enhanced instructional time for language teaching, (b) more effective learning organization within the language classroom, (c) teachers’ understanding and use of effective reading strategies, (d) curriculum and textbooks oriented to real classroom situations and support active learning pedagogies, (e) better understanding of the importance of reading and language learning in early grades within the education system and greater accountability for students learning to read in early primary grades, (e) encouraging teacher professional learning through a variety of strategies, and (f) quality pre-primary education