

Vol. 7, Issue 4, January 2018

ISSN 2249-894X

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

An International Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

Impact Factor: 5.2331

UGC Approved Journal No. 48514

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LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH AMONG GIRL STUDENTS AT THE END OF PRIMARY LEVEL IN KOLKATA

Antara Mitra¹ and Dr. Muktipada Sinha²

¹Assistant Professor, Department Of Education, Jadavpur University.

²Assistant Professor, Department Of Education, Jadavpur University.

ABSTRACT:-

This paper proposes to assess the impact of few demographic variables namely number of siblings (family size indicator), private tutor (income level indicator) and caste (race indicator) on girl students' learning achievement in English as a second language at the end of



primary level or class IV. The present survey was cross-sectional in nature and it focused on three major areas: Reading Comprehension, Grammar and Writing. The target population was the female students of grade IV from urban primary schools of Kolkata district and affiliated to Kolkata Primary School Council. 17

primary schools of Kolkata district were selected for the purpose of survey. The sample consisted of 342 girl students at the end of primary level from different Bengali medium schools. An English language competency test consisting of different items was developed to analyze the girl students' learning achievement in reading comprehension, grammar and writing skill. Chi-square test was applied to analyze the students' proficiency in respective fields. Results revealed that girls with no sibling were more likely to develop Reading Comprehension Skill than girls with siblings. This skill appeared to be independent of having private tutor and not having the same. It also appeared independent of girls belonging to different castes. Moreover, Grammatical Skills and Writing Skills of girl students also appeared to be independent of having siblings and having private tutor and not having the same in both cases. These two skills also appeared independent of girls belonging to different castes.

KEYWORDS: demographic, cross-sectional, students' learning achievement in English as a second language, Reading Comprehension.

INTRODUCTION :

A person's second language is a language which is not the native language of the speaker, but that is used in the locale of that person. Regarding matters of learning of the second language, people are not exposed to natural situation rather they are to depend on artificial, unreal, mock situations. So they need to exert conscious effort for learning the second language. The picture is just the opposite in case of first language learning. Learners are constantly exposed to the first language at home, in general, or in the social atmosphere or in the school and thus develop the habit of listening and speaking without any formal instruction in it. Thus it would be apt to say that people 'acquire' the first language and 'learn' the second language. In West Bengal, English learning as second language is observed as one of the weakest areas at primary level of schooling. Knowledge of English as a second language has strong correlation with appropriate approaches, text preparation, curriculum contents,

plan and presentation of texts. It is however important to notice in primary schools of West Bengal that text books contain lessons which are not pedagogically sound for generating basic skills in English language learners at primary level. Research shows that 90% of children suffer from stereotyped presentation of themes and hardly 10% of them find pleasure of joyful learning in the language classrooms and in the lessons being supported by their socio-cultural environment. The phobia in English language is one of the major reasons for the large number of dropouts from primary classes, particularly in rural areas. No detention is acknowledged as a sound pedagogic principle at the primary level. But in practical situation, it is evinced that a large number of students are found not worthy of joining the secondary stage after finishing the primary level of learning. The reason as often found in researches is the failure to properly conduct continuous and comprehensive evaluation and influences of certain demographic variables like poverty, family income, family structure, student's health, school environment, parental education, location of school, classroom size, gender, caste, number of siblings, academic discipline, private tuition, interest of learners in English language, etc. which need special mention and which can never be ignored.

The term 'skill' is associated with 'doing' rather than 'knowing' and English teaching and learning in India tends to treat the language as a skill. The term 'competency' connotes necessary knowledge, skills or abilities to do something efficiently. Competency in English language abound in mastering the four basic skills of the language namely i) to listen ii) to speak iii) to read and iv) to write. An English as a Second Language (ESL) learner is considered to be competent in English language only when he has mastered its basic speech- the stream of sounds or symbols, grammatical pattern- in shape of various structures and required vocabulary- the word list, essential for that particular stage. All language learners need to develop these competencies in each of the four skills and the textbooks and curriculum framers should concentrate on incorporating activities related to this arena. Learning achievement in any discipline can be measured in various ways and Competency Test is one such measure. The intention of the authors in the present study was to find out the effect of demographic variables on learning achievement or competency of ESL girl students in English language who are at the end of primary level in Bengali medium schools of Kolkata district. The researchers reviewed some related literatures and drew certain inferences. A study by N.S.Farooq et al. (2011) revealed that students' gender strongly affected their academic performance with girls performing better in the subjects of Mathematics and English as well as cumulatively at secondary school level. Another study by Lin SiewEng et al. (2013) showed that analysis based on t-value revealed no significant difference between the performance of male and female students at Pakistani secondary school level in major content areas namely story listening, paragraph listening and listening comprehension. Findings based on t-test in a study undertaken by F.Shaheen and F. Gul (2014) revealed that no difference was identified in achievement scores of secondary students on the basis of gender. Another study conducted by Fakieh, Arabai (2016) displayed that among internal factors gender variable plays a vital role in EFL achievement among Saudi learners and females outperform the males in general. The related researches revealed that no significant difference was identified in achievement scores in English Language on the basis of gender while in many cases the girls outperformed the males.

Surveying the related literature, the researchers observed the fact that no research has been conducted on the impact of demographic variables like number of siblings, private tuition and caste on the learning achievement of learners in English as a second language at the end of primary level in Bengali medium schools of Kolkata district.

Hence, on the basis of investigation of the impact of demographic (here socio-academic) factors upon English language competency or learning achievement of girl ESL learners who are at the end of primary level schooling, the researchers have identified the basic research questions:

- i) What is the existing status of the socio-academic environment of girl ESL learners who are at the end of primary level?
- ii) What is the present academic standard of girls at the end of class IV with regard to their learning achievement or competency in various skills of English language?
- iii) Do the demographic (here socio-academic) variables have any role to play in achieving the learning

achievement or competency in English language in Bengali medium schools of Kolkata district where English is taught as second language?

Considering the background and purpose of the related literature survey, the researchers noticed that a wide gap in knowledge existed in the impact of demographic variables upon the learning achievement of girl ESL learners at the end of primary level in Kolkata district. Hence the researchers narrowed down the area and the study was specified as "Learning achievement in English among girl students at the end of primary level in Kolkata."

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The major objectives of the study were the following:

- 1) To find out the level of competency achieved in English as a second language by the girl students who are at the end of primary level (class IV).
- 2) To compare different groups of girl students in competency or learning achievement in English as a second language with respect to different demographic variables.

HYPOTHESES:

Following hypotheses were formulated in connection with the objectives stated in the present study.

H₀1: There is no significant difference in competency or learning achievement in English as a second language among girl students at the end of primary level with respect to their sibilings.

H₀2: There is no significant difference in competency or learning achievement in English as a second language among girl students at the end of primary level with respect to private tuition.

H₀3: There is no significant difference in competency or learning achievement in English as a second language among girl students at the end of primary level with respect to caste.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY:

Study Design: The present survey was cross-sectional in nature and conducted upon girl students at the end of primary level (class IV) in Bengali medium schools of Kolkata. The survey was conducted on 17 Bengali medium schools of Kolkata district under Kolkata primary School Council.

Population: All girl students studying at the end of primary level (class IV) in Bengali medium schools of Kolkata district where English is taught as second language.

Sample: 342 ESL girl students from 17 Bengali medium schools of Kolkata district.

Variables: In the present study, number of sibilings, private tuition and caste were identified as independent variables and learning achievement or 'competency' of elementary level learners (class IV) in English as a second language as 'Outcome' was considered as dependent variable. The English language learning competencies were Reading Comprehension skill, Writing Skill and Grammatical skill. The aim of the study was to measure the influence of independent variables on the status of dependent variables.

Tools: Questionnaire targeting the specific research questions was developed by the researcher in consultation with her research supervisor (second author). The questionnaire consisted of bilingual items. It contained 9 items which were based on three basic skills of English language namely reading comprehension skill, grammatical skill and writing skill. A Test-Retest was conducted at an interval of one month on the same sample found a high correlation (0.85) indicating reliability of the tool. A Cronbach Alpha of 0.79 proved the internal consistency of the tool.

Collection of Data: The data was collected from respective schools in regular schooling hours with the help of the abovementioned questionnaire. The researcher explained the objective and the questions to the respondents and they were asked to write down the relevant responses within allotted time. Approximately 40 minutes were required by the respondents to complete the questionnaire. The data so obtained was tabulated in PSPP (open source version similar to IBM SPSS Statistics) and the inferences were drawn based on such findings.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

1. Chi Square Test of Independence was calculated comparing the Reading Comprehension Skill of girls having siblings and having no siblings category. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2 (1) = 4.783, P < .05$). Girls with no sibling were more likely to develop Reading Comprehension Skill (74.853%) than girls with siblings (25.146%).
2. Chi Square Test of Independence was calculated comparing the Reading Comprehension Skill of girls having private tutor and having no private tutor category. No significant relationship was found ($\chi^2 (1) = 0.552, P > 0.05$). Reading Comprehension Skills appeared to be independent of having private tutor and not having the same for girls at the end of primary level.
3. Chi Square Test of Independence was calculated comparing the Reading Comprehension Skill of girls belonging to various castes (general/SC/other/ST). No significant relationship was found ($\chi^2 (3) = 1.603, P > 0.05$). Reading Comprehension Skills appeared to be independent of girls belonging to different castes (general/ SC/ other/ST) who are at the end of primary level.
4. Chi Square Test of Independence was calculated comparing the grammatical skill of girls having siblings and not having the same. No significant relationship was found ($\chi^2 (1) = 2.225, P > 0.05$). Grammatical skills appeared to be independent of having siblings and not having the same for girls at the end of primary level.
5. Chi Square Test of Independence was calculated comparing the grammatical skill of girls having private tutor and not having the same. No significant relationship was found. ($\chi^2(1) = 0.30, P > 0.05$). Grammatical skills appeared to be independent of having private tutor and not having the same.
6. Chi Square Test of Independence was calculated comparing the grammatical skill of girls belonging to different castes (general/SC/other/ST). No significant relationship was found ($\chi^2 (3) = 0.333, P > 0.05$). Grammatical skills appeared to be independent for girls belonging to different castes (general/SC/other/ST).
7. Chi Square Test of Independence was calculated comparing the writing skill of girls having siblings and not having the same. No significant relationship was found ($\chi^2 (1) = 0.118, P > 0.05$). Writing skills appeared to be independent of having siblings and not having the same for girls at the end of primary level.
8. Chi Square Test of Independence was calculated comparing writing skill of girls having private tutor and not having the same. No significant relationship was found ($\chi^2 (1) = 0.441, P > 0.05$). Writing skills appeared to be independent of having private tutor and not having the same.
9. Chi Square Test of Independence was calculated comparing writing skill of girls belonging to various castes (general/SC/other/ST). No significant relationship was found ($\chi^2(3) = 3.161, P > 0.05$). Writing skills appeared to be independent for girls belonging to various castes (general/SC/other/ST) and are at the end of primary level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

In West Bengal, English learning as a second language has been traced out as one of the weakest areas specially in primary level or at the end of primary level where girl students hail from different socio academic context. The study was conducted to assess the impact of demographic variables e.g., number of siblings, private tuition and caste on learning or competency achievement of ESL learners in English who are at the end of primary level (class IV) and studying in different Bengali medium schools of Kolkata district affiliated under Kolkata Primary School Council. The results revealed that a significant difference is noticed in Reading Comprehension Skill of girl students at the end of primary level with respect to number of siblings. Girls with no sibling were more likely to develop Reading Comprehension Skill (74.853%) than girls with siblings (25.146%) whereas no significant difference existed in Reading Comprehension Skill of girl students at the end of primary stage with respect to private tuition and caste. No significant difference was however observed in Grammatical Skill of girl students at the end of primary level with respect to number of siblings, private tuition and caste. Again, no significant difference was noticed in Writing Skill of girl students at the end of primary level with respect to number of siblings, private tuition and caste.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:**The study has the following limitations:**

- i) Only three variables namely, Number of siblings, Private tutor and Caste were considered.

- ii) 17 Bengali medium schools under Kolkata Primary School Council were taken for sampling.
- iii) The locality was restricted to Kolkata district primary schools only.
- iv) 342 girl students who are at the end of primary level (class IV) were taken up for the study.
- v) The gender was restricted to only girl ESL learners.

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