



AWARENESS OF PHONETICS IN DEVELOPING SKILLS RELATED TO READING AND COMMUNICATION AMONG B.ED. STUDENTS

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Abstract

The importance of reading should not be overlooked, as learning to read determines a large part of one's destiny. Every language has its collection of symbols and a unique way of pronouncing them. Learning to decode their distinct symbols is required for reading. The study conducted by Chall (1969, p. 93)¹ stressed that students who recognize their letters, read and comprehend better. Hence providing some kind of training program in Phonetics would help the learners not only recognize symbols and their corresponding sounds but also to read fluently and correctly. Reading and spelling difficulties are reduced and eased with instruction in speech-sound awareness and hence classroom instruction must have some training program on Phonetics that will help in accelerating reading and understanding. As one of the main goals of learning phonetics is to enable students to understand words even when they are spoken to by someone with a different accent. Learners' confidence and enthusiasm can be boosted by strengthening their pronunciation and also adult learners possess the ability to self-examine and self-correct what they learn.

The contemporary study intends to find out the awareness among B.Ed. student teachers in learning Phonetics to improve their reading abilities and communication skills. Hence

the investigator took a sample of 74 pre-service teachers from three different colleges and administered a test with 24 statements looking out for their awareness on learning Phonetics to improve their reading skills. The findings of the study indicated that prospective teachers were to some extent aware of the importance of Phonetics in improving their reading and communication skills and portrayed their dire need to undergo some expert training in Phonetics.

Keywords: - Phonetics, pronunciation, reading abilities, communication skills

Introduction

To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark. — Victor Hugo²

Reading and spelling out words is an important aspect of becoming educated. The majority of words are processed during the text reading, and good readers may do it with a lot of ease. This becomes easier for good readers as they are aware of letters and their corresponding sounds. A person without understanding the sounds of different words may fail to read properly. Thus, to give the readers the power to read, phonetic spelling becomes vital. It also improves thinking skills such as comparative reasoning and probabilistic reasoning.

Phonetics is the study of speech sounds and Phonology is the study of different patterns of sounds in different languages. When reading, most good readers hear and identify full words and comprehend them as a whole. They're also capable of comprehending different patterns of sounds within those words. For example, when they hear or read the word rug, they may think of something that is lying on the floor, but they can also recognize three separate sounds in the word “rug” namely the sounds of /r/, /u/, and /g/. Good readers can manipulate these sounds as per their need eg using a rhyming word for “rug” could be “bug”. This skill of phonemic awareness is not acquired naturally but is learned by reading or writing any alphabetic language such as English. Hence such training is essential for any individual who would want to be skilled in reading abilities. Research tells us that adult non-readers have almost no phonemic awareness and adult beginning readers also have phonemic awareness deficiencies (Kruidenier, 2002)³ which indicates the importance of providing Phonetics training to the learners.

The combining of speech sounds to produce words that represent thoughts is known as language. The words are then combined to form statements. Hence language is used as a medium to express one's thoughts. Generally, in India English is the second

language used for communication purposes. Hence talking about schools in India mostly focus on the writing aspect of a language rather than the communicative aspect which can be improved by providing challenging tasks related to comprehensive reading. The bulk of India's 125 million English speakers learn English as a second language, either in school or during higher education. Indians' English pronunciation varies depending on their geography area, educational medium, mother tongue, and other factors. This has led to General Indian English which is nationally accepted. (Priya, M. L. S., & NS, P. K. (2020)⁴. Thus, making Phonetics an essential part of language learning particularly for the skills of reading and communication.

Fluent readers are the consequence of the regular phonetic reading practice. The readers will be able to read a passage using phonetic methods. It makes it simple for an individual to read words they are familiar with. They may also come across words that they are unfamiliar with. A person who understands phonetics will readily break the word down into its corresponding sounds and pronounce it accurately.

It's always a secret when it comes to teaching pronunciation. Pronunciation instruction has recently acquired popularity as a result of some modifications in teaching methods and approaches. Teacher educators must focus on the learner's needs and diagnose the learner's level of communication ability. It can be concluded that by putting in the necessary effort into teaching English pronunciation, students would be able to achieve maximum communication strength and improve their reading abilities.

Need of the study

The study of phonetics is crucial to acquiring language skills. Over time, English teachers have discovered that simply teaching children how to pronounce letters and how to combine them into words is insufficient. While proper pronunciation is necessary for efficient communication, students must understand why sounds are essential and how they might affect communication abilities. Phonetics can assist in avoiding pronunciation ambiguity and makes it easier to understand stress and intonation of sound, both of which are important aspects of pronunciation. Fluency and decoding words, both are taken care of by phonetics. The 'ease' with which one can read literature is referred to as fluency. Furthermore, when an individual decodes words, a memory dictionary is formed in their minds, which aids in the development of comprehension skills.

Since learning of Phonetics is gaining popularity these days especially at the school level. It becomes mandatory for the teacher education program to train prospective

teachers in Phonetics so that they can be at par with others and help learners gain utmost competence when it comes to reading and communicating efficiently. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to ensure that whether student teachers are aware of the concept of Phonetics and its importance in developing the skills related to reading and communication. The B.Ed. the curriculum emphasizes enhancing the professional capacities of the student teachers, there was an addition of Ability courses in the present curriculum which emphasizes developing skills rather than the content of the syllabus.

The ability course of Reading and reflecting on texts enables student teachers to enhance their capacities as readers and writers by becoming participants in the process of reading. The addition of Phonetics to the syllabus of reading and reflecting on text would help student teachers to gain competence in reading and thereby develop their skills related to reading and effective communication. Hence, the researcher felt the need to find out the answers to the following questions.

1. How much are the student teachers aware of the concept of Phonetics?
2. To what extent are student teachers aware of the need of mastering phonetics to build reading and communication skills?

Hence the investigator felt the need to conduct the present study.

Aim of the study

To determine the level of awareness among student teachers about the importance of phonetics learning in the development of reading and comprehension skills.

Objectives of the study

The objectives for the present study are as follows:-

1. To find out the level of awareness about the importance of Phonetics learning in the development of reading skills.
2. To find out the level of awareness about the importance of Phonetics learning in the development of communication skills.
3. To develop a model framework that will help student teachers to improve their reading and communication skills.

Research Questions

1. How much are the student teachers aware of the concept of Phonetics?
2. To what extent are student teachers aware of the need of mastering phonetics to build reading and communication skills?

Methodology

The study adopted the Descriptive survey method

Sample

The sample consisted of 74 student teachers from three different B.Ed. colleges who were selected through the lottery method to avoid any biases. The selected samples completed their first year and have now progressed in the second year of their B.Ed. program. The respondents were made to administer the questionnaire. Since the targeted respondents for this study were meant for SYB.Ed. Student teachers who had no exposure to the Reading and reflecting on text course, the investigator tried to get the responses from these student teachers at the entry-level before they were trained for the reading and reflecting course. The study intended to check their awareness about the concept of Phonetics and its usefulness in acquiring the skills of reading and effective communication.

Tool

A survey questionnaire with a total of 24 items was used as the main instrument in this study to analyse the awareness level of student teachers about the importance of Phonetics in developing reading and communication skills. The questionnaire was given to the respondents using Google forms and student teachers were instructed to read the statements carefully and choose their answers based on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1- Agree, 2- Undecided, 3- Disagree. The questionnaire consisted of statements catering to the student teachers' awareness level in the learning of Phonetics to improve their reading and communicative skills. The content validity of items was conducted by experts from the field of education.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical measures, such as mean and percentage, were used to analyse the data.

Findings and Discussion

For the convenience of data processing, the tool's items were divided into three categories.

a) Awareness of the concept of Phonetics

55.4% are aware that expert training is required for learning correct pronunciation whereas 60.8% feel that learning Phonetics may require a good amount of time. To a large extent, 86.5% of the respondents are aware that the symbols of

Phonetics would help them to read the pronunciation using a dictionary. 74.3% do agree that Phonetics training would help them to identify words independently rather than memorizing the spellings of the words. 62.2% of respondents still feel that Phonetics training is required by beginning readers rather than adult learners. 79.7% of respondents are aware that knowledge of Phonetics would help them in understanding the stress and intonation of a word while communicating. 86.5% are aware that speech sounds can be articulated accurately by using correct speech organs. 77% of the respondents wished to have some sort of Phonetics training to help them to read and communicate well. A versatile study conducted by Marufov, E. (2021)⁵ showcased the need for Phonetics not only in improving speaking or communication skills but also stressed the experienced teacher providing support in learning Phonetics. Hence, it can be concluded that though student teachers to some extent are aware of the concept of Phonetics and its connection with reading and communication skills still they wish to have some expert training provided by experienced teachers.

b) **Communication skill**

97.3% agree that Phonetics would help them to communicate efficiently whereas 58.1% disagree that Phonetics may not bring permanent change in their pronunciation. 94.6% agree that pronunciation errors can be eliminated by learning Phonetics whereas 54.1% agree that their regional accent interferes with their English pronunciation. 94.6% agree that Phonetics training would motivate them to be more confident in speaking the non-native language with proper pronunciation. 85.1% agree that Phonetics training would help them improve their communicative competence and confidence. A study conducted by Gilakjani, A. P. (2011)⁶ stated that, with careful planning and implementation, pronunciation can help learners improve their complete communicating capacities. Hence it can be concluded that student teachers are aware of the importance of Phonetics training in improving their communication skills.

c) **Reading skill**

91.9% agree that reading aloud a modeled passage will improve their reading fluency. 87.8% agree that Phonetics training will help them to read words with correct pronunciation. 82.4% feel it is beneficial to read aloud after listening to fluent English speakers. 31.1% feel that Phonetics training is not associated with good reading.

58.1% feel that learning grammar and new words will help more in reading than pronunciation. 89.2% agree that Phonemic awareness is a step towards the goal of learning to read with understanding. According to the study by Ehri, L. C., & Wilce, L. S. (1985)⁷ both beginners and experienced find it easier to understand phonetic spellings as when the youngsters learn to read, their brains switch from visual to phonetic processing of words. Hence, it can be concluded that Phonetics training is helpful for the learners to improve their reading skills.

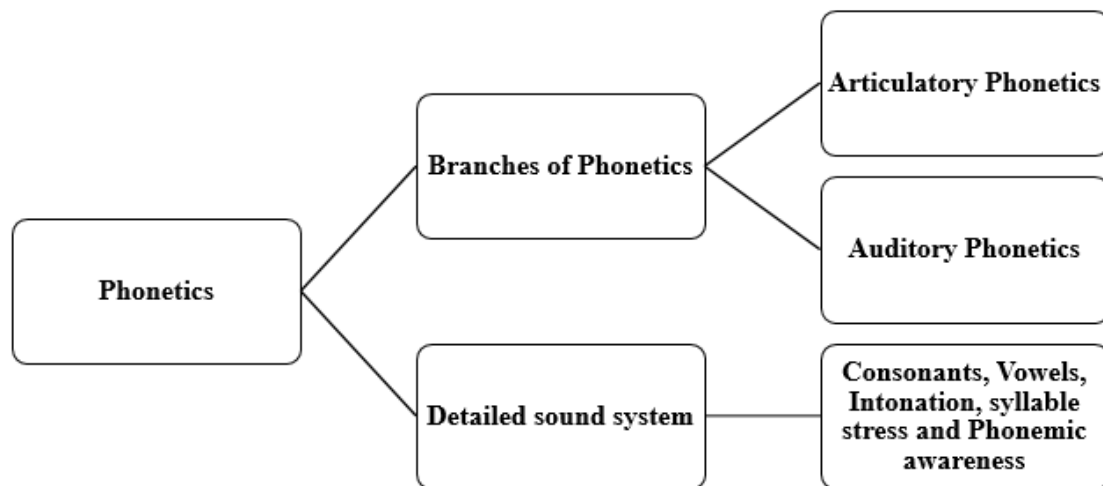
The researcher chose to convert the obtained scores to percent mean. The results indicated that the percent mean score was 47.22% which is less than 50% and hence can be concluded as though the student teachers were aware of the concept of Phonetics to some extent but they felt that learning grammar and new words would probably result in reading fluency rather than pronunciation. Some even felt that Phonetics training is time-consuming and may not bring permanent change in their pronunciation. Student teachers opined that Phonetics training must be given to beginning readers rather than to adult learners and through experienced personnel. Another reason for being less aware of the importance of Phonetics in developing skills related to reading and communication could be that student teachers are not exposed to native speakers' pronunciation and hence lack awareness. Another reason could be that student teachers feel learning Phonetics needs regular practice and the sounds in Phonetics are different sounds as compared to their mother tongue.

Model Framework of Phonetics for better Reading and communication skills

The sound system' of a language is the most striking feature that differentiates it from other languages. Phonetics can help the learner to optimize accurate pronunciation by increasing awareness of important parts of speech sounds. As it is a known fact that since English is a language that has words with different vowel letters and sounds that can be spoken differently, Studying pronunciation is challenging within itself, but any challenging thing if eliminated, hardly has it left scope for new learning to take place. The B.Ed. curriculum focusses on innovative practices, to reconstruct his or her existing knowledge of the academic specialization, but also to be well-versed in the essentials of pedagogy, competence, and skills required to create a pleasant learning environment in schools for all students. Hence acquiring new skills of reading and communicating effectively will enable student teachers to be professionally capable of surviving in the sector with utmost confidence and enthusiasm. Through the present study, it is clear that

student teachers are aware of the importance of learning Phonetics which will help them to not only improve their communicative skills but also help them in developing skills of reading and attentive listening. Hence, Phonetics can be introduced as a part of the ability course Reading and Reflecting on text. It should include the detailed system of all the speech sounds like consonants, vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs, intonation, syllable stress, and phonemic awareness.

Graphical representation of the Phonetics model



Example:-

Objective: - To analyse the skill of Phonemic awareness

Learning outcomes:-

The learner identifies individual sounds in a word

The learner blends the syllables to form a word.

The learners determine the syllable stress in the word

The learner transcribes individual sounds to write a word

Let's understand the above outcomes with an example. The individual sound in the word “tough” is /t/, /ʌ/, and /f/. These symbols and their corresponding sounds can be pronounced either individually or by blending them. The symbols associated with its sounds will also help to transcribe the word accurately like as [ˈtʌf]. The stress mark like an apostrophe on /t/ indicates the syllable stress.

Conclusion

Overall, sound awareness provides readers with a method to approach the sounds and read new words with accuracy. It explains the alphabetic standard, which states that the letters in words are consistently represented by their corresponding sounds. As a result, learners achieve reading accomplishment. The B.Ed. curriculum focuses on

enhancing abilities through ability courses, Phonetics can become an essential element of the ability course Reading and reflecting on text as this course enables the student teachers to enhance their capacities as readers and writers by becoming a participant in the process of reading and aims to get engrossed in the readings interactively. Hence this study leads us to the conclusion that student teachers are to some extent aware of the importance of Phonetics in developing their reading and communication skills but they need some expert training with regular practice that would help them to bring in a permanent change in their pronunciation and can move swiftly through the journey of Phonetics which will help to enhance their capacities and enable them to survive in this competitive education sector with loads of confidence and competence

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