

Guided Reading Strategy in Enhancing Reading Skills of Children with Special Needs

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Abstract

The present study aims to enhance the reading skills of children with hearing impairment through the use of guided reading at vocabulary (word) level. A purposive sampling technique, falling under the non-probability sampling method, was employed to select the participants. A total of 19 children with hearing impairment, who were users of hearing aids selected from four inclusive schools located in Mumbai suburb. A pre-test was administered to determine the initial reading skills of the participants followed by a guided reading intervention over a period of eight weeks (24 sessions) for 40 minutes.

The data collected were systematically analyzed, and the findings revealed that the guided reading led to a significant enhancement in the reading skills of the children. The results of the study highlight the effectiveness of using guided reading techniques to support the literacy development of children with hearing impairments at an early age. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need to raise awareness among teachers about the importance of adopting varied strategies and techniques to foster reading skills in children with hearing impairment.

Keywords: Children with Hearing Impairment, Guided Reading, Inclusive Schools, Reading Skills, Vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential and crucial skill which lays a foundation for gaining knowledge, improving communication, fostering personal growth, cognitive development and academic achievement. Hearing impairment refers to – ‘a condition in which an individual experiences partial or complete loss of hearing’. This condition can impact an individual’s ability to learn, communicate, and involve in social interactions. Hearing individuals naturally acquire language through constant exposure to spoken communication, an advantage unavailable to the children with hearing impairment. This disparity can profoundly affect language acquisition, particularly during critical developmental stages in childhood, unless appropriate interventions are implemented early. Without sufficient language foundation, literacy development and cognitive processes may be compromised, creating cascading challenges in educational and professional contexts.

However, children with hearing impairment often encounter difficulties developing reading skills due to their limited exposure to auditory language. This restricts access to spoken language and impacts their ability to identify phonemes, expand their vocabulary, and understand written text effectively. For children with hearing impairment, language development relies more on visual cues, sign language, and written text rather than auditory input alone. Consequently, conventional phonics-based reading instruction may not be entirely suitable for all learners with hearing impairment depending upon type, degree and onset of

hearing loss of individual child. Thus, restricted access to sound-based information presents another significant hurdle. To address this challenge, educators must implement instructional approaches that align with their unique learning needs.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is core to learning language (Shah, et al. 2019). The greatest challenge that deaf face is learning spoken language. This further leads to poor acquisition of knowledge of vocabulary (Paul, 1996 as cited in Shah, J. 2019). Vocabulary proficiency has been identified as a highly explanatory variable which is essential for reading comprehension in children with hearing impairment. (Geers & Hayes, 2011; Lederberg et al. 2001).

Guided Reading

The Guided Reading Approach, developed by Fountas and Pinnell (1996) is a structured teaching approach that helps students develop their reading abilities through interactive learning. This method involves small-group instruction, where learners engage with texts tailored to their reading levels though receiving personalized guidance from educators. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2017a), guided reading is ‘a small-group instructional approach’ where teachers help students to develop strategic reading skills to process new texts at increasing levels of difficulty. Guided reading is a structured, teacher-led reading strategy manageable by providing assistance when needed and encouraging students to develop independent reading strategies. For children with hearing impairments, guided reading proves highly effective as it incorporates visual learning methods, sign language, and direct teacher interaction to strengthen reading comprehension. This method is widely used in literacy programs to ensure that all students, irrespective of their reading ability, receive personalized support to enhance their comprehension and fluency. Children with hearing impairment often face challenges in literacy development due to limited phonemic awareness and difficulties in understanding spoken language. Guided reading can be an effective approach to support their learning by incorporating visual and interactive strategies. Teachers play a crucial role in modeling these strategies and selecting texts appropriate for students’ developmental levels. Additionally, guided reading must be adapted to accommodate diverse learning needs of the children in inclusive classrooms and reinforcing the significance of structured, strategy-based instruction in enhancing reading skills.

Challenges encountered by students with Hearing Impairments

Hearing loss is a sensory disability affecting the ability to hear optimally. Hearing impairment is a hidden disability, not outwardly visible like other disabilities and most of the times, it may go unnoticed. However, un-noticed and un-treated hearing loss has many visible effects. The language and speech acquisition which is an auditory function gets affected and leads to further issues of communication, acquisition of literacy and therefore causes educational challenges. (Osberger & Levitt, 1979; Yoshinaga-Itano, 1998). Students with hearing loss are those who without amplification devices are not able to hear conversation speech at a prescribed level (Shah, et al. 2019). As a consequence of which they find it tough to keep pace with other students in the inclusive classroom with respect to their content, knowledge and learning (Marschark & Waulters, 2008). Students with hearing impairments face multifaceted challenges that hinders their academic and social development. This supplements by affecting the development of ability to engage in not only in age-appropriate activities but also affects their functional speech, communication skills, and language skills. Access to have quality education for students with disabilities worldwide, remains uneven due to heterogeneity of the group. In some of the developing nations facing with systemic barriers such as inadequate or scarce resources, and societal stigma (Zickafoose et al. 2024). Mpofu and

Shumba (2012) noted that insufficient specialist educators and inadequate training hinder personalized instruction. Additionally, proposed resource centers and teacher training programs highlighting the disconnect between policy and practice. Key findings highlighted several critical factors influencing development of reading among deaf/hard of hearing students in inclusive classrooms. These also includes qualifications of teachers, access to spoken phonology, alignment with the curriculum of general education, communication and language skills, along with the availability of support services. A study conducted by Alasim (2019) emphasized that teachers must hold specialized knowledge in giving reading instructions, including phonological awareness and visual phonics, to address the unique challenges faced by Deaf and hard of hearing students. Addressing these challenges requires holistic solutions, including use of multimodality approach, community sensitization and integrating sign language into national curricula—a step supported by global inclusive education frameworks (UNESCO, 1994).

Need and Significance of the Study

The need for the present study arises from the educational challenges faced by children with hearing impairment, particularly in developing reading skills in an inclusive setting. Reading is a foundational skill for academic success, and any difficulty in acquiring it have long-term consequences on educational and social participation of a child. In India, inclusive education is still evolving. Hence, it is crucial to develop and implement instructional strategies that cater to the diverse needs of students with Hearing Impairment. By focusing on guided reading as a structured, evidence-based approach, this study aims to create more accessible and effective learning environment for children with Hearing Impairment. It will further provide support in improving their literacy outcomes and overall academic performance.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the current level of reading skills among Children with Hearing Impairment in inclusive schools.
2. To find out the effectiveness of guided reading strategies in enhancing reading skills at vocabulary (word) level of Children with Hearing Impairment in Mumbai

Research Questions

1. What is the current level of reading skill of the children with hearing impairment?
2. What is the effect of guided reading in enhancing reading skills at vocabulary (word) level of children with Hearing Impairment?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the pretest and posttest mean scores of reading skills of children with hearing impairment using guided reading.
2. Guided reading has no significant effect in enhancing reading skills of children with hearing impairment at the vocabulary (word) level.
3. There will be no significant difference in the enhancement of reading skills using guided reading based on the degree of hearing loss in children with hearing impairment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study followed a single-subject experimental research design with a pre-test and post-test format. The intervention was implemented through guided reading to enhance the reading skills of children with hearing impairment. The study was categorized under Experimental Research Design, as it examined the direct impact of the intervention by comparing students' performance before and after the guided

reading sessions. The effectiveness of the intervention was analyzed through systematic observation and statistical evaluation of pre-test and post-test results.

Sample Selection

A total of 21 students with hearing impairment, aged 5 to 7 years, were selected initially for the study. However, two students dropped out, resulting in a final sample of 19 students. The participants were selected from inclusive schools and therapy centers located in Mumbai suburb. The study employed a purposive sampling method under non-probability sampling. Out of 19 children, 9 were severe hearing loss and 10 were with severe to profound hearing impairment using hearing aids were selected for the study. The selected participants demonstrated basic literacy exposure, including the recognition of letters, as part of their educational background. The medium of instruction for these children was in English. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher obtained permission from the Directors, Principals, and Headmasters of the respective institutions, as well as oral consent from the parents of the selected students in the current study.

Tool

Researcher made intervention program was developed to examine the pretest - posttest effect in the improvement of reading skills of children with hearing impairment. The tool included consonant sounds (bilabial, dental, labiodental, and nasal sounds), along with vowel sounds. For each consonant sound, six simple vocabularies (words) were provided, whereas for each vowel sound, five basic vocabularies (words) were included. All the words were presented with pictures to help the children understand better. The words were chosen in such a way that the phoneme could appear at the beginning, middle, or end of the word. A total of 19 Children with hearing impairment participated in 24 sessions (eight weeks) comprising of 40 minutes in length. To make sure the suitability of the tool, it was checked and approved by a speech and language pathologist. This tool was designed to give clear and fun learning support to help children recognize sounds and words easily through guided reading.

To evaluate the existing abilities of children with hearing loss, the "Pro-forma 6 - Academic/Educational Screening Checklist" was used. This tool includes various domains such as: Motor/Physical Activities, Language/Communication Activities, Social/Play Activities, Number Activities, Arithmetic Activities, Reading-Writing Activities. For this study, the researcher specifically selected Language/Communication Activities (LKG level), which consists of 25 items, and Reading-Writing Activities (LKG level), which includes 11 items. These areas were selected based on the current learning levels of selected students with hearing impairment from the inclusive schools. The scoring was given as (1 = successful response, 0 = no response). This evaluation helped to establish a baseline for their reading vocabulary and communication skills before beginning the intervention.

The guided reading intervention was conducted over a period of eight weeks (24 sessions) with each session lasting 40 minutes., conducted in four special schools, with a total of two sessions per day to ensure effective learning. The structured intervention sessions focused on enhancing vocabulary reading skills through guided reading techniques. Total of thirty-four words/ vocabulary was introduced which was used in daily routine. To make learning more engaging and effective, multimodality approach was used like flashcards and real objects that were easily available were used as teaching material. These materials helped students associate words with visual and tangible references, reinforcing their understanding and retaining of vocabulary more meaningfully.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To assess the current level of reading skill of the children with hearing impairment, each student was evaluated across 36 tasks consists of 25 tasks from language/communication and 11 tasks from Reading/writing domain. The cumulative analysis across both domains reveals that the current level of reading skill among children with hearing impairment in Mumbai was significantly below expected standards, at the pre-primary level. The consistent low performance across tasks implies a need for Guided reading interventions designed specifically for hearing-impaired learners.

Table 1.1 Mean Standard deviation and t value for vocabulary/ word skill of Children with hearing impairment

Vocabulary	Pre/Post	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p value
TOTAL	Pre	19	4.89	2.64	-20.829	<0.001
	Post	19	30.39	4.64		

To test the difference in the Pre Test and Post Test mean scores of vocabulary (word) level of children with hearing impairment using guided reading, an independent sample t test was used to compare the mean scores and the results (Table 1.1) showed significant difference exists between pre and post test scores of respondents for all the vocabulary, as the p-value was less than 0.01. Across all vocabulary, there was a significant improvement in scores from "Pre" to "Post" test at ($p < 0.001$). The result coincides with the research findings of Hettiarachchi et al. (2021) emphasizing on a multisensory approach along with use of sign language during the vocabulary intervention for Deaf/Hard of Hearing children between 5 and 7 years of age in another single-subject study. Similar findings of Lederberg et al. (2013) also emphasizes multimodal explicit vocabulary instruction for DHH children which was helpful in improving vocabulary acquisition with respect to baseline levels. It was also observed that children with severe and severe to moderate hearing loss showed same improvement in reading skills at vocabulary level. This may be due to use of guided reading which addresses special needs of each child using multimodality approach in inclusive classrooms.

CONCLUSION

Many children with hearing impairment struggle with reading skills due to their limited access to auditory-based learning. These children with hearing impairment have different type and degree of hearing loss which constitutes a heterogeneous group (Shah, et, al. 2019). This study highlights how guided reading can help to bridge the gaps and support literacy development. The findings also provided educators with practical strategies to improve reading skills for children with HI, ensuring that they receive appropriate support in inclusive classrooms. The study lines up with the goals of inclusive education by advocating for effective interventions that support and address students with diverse learning needs. The teacher in the inclusive schools can used guided reading strategy at different stage which will enhance the reading skill of children with hearing impairment. Empowering Parents and Caregivers by providing understanding the importance of guided reading, parents can actively participate in their child's literacy development, reinforcing learning at home.

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