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IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING ABILITY USING LANGUAGE GAMES : AN ACTION RESEARCH

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'You can teach a student a lesson for a day, but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he will continue the learning process as long as he lives''
– Clay P. Bedford

ABSTRACT :

Innovative teaching methods are essential in addressing the diverse learning needs of students, particularly in improving fundamental skills like reading. This study was conducted to enhance the reading abilities of students through the implementation of language games. Despite reaching high school, many students continue to struggle with reading, highlighting the need for innovative teaching approaches to address these challenges. The present study explores the use of language games as an effective strategy to improve reading abilities among students with poor reading proficiency. An Action research was conducted, beginning with a pre-test that revealed poor performance of students' reading ability. To address these deficiencies, a learning package of thirteen language games was implemented, designed to make reading more interactive and appealing. After a period of implementation, a post-test was conducted to measure the effectiveness of this intervention. The results, supported by observations from multiple investigators, revealed notable improvements in students' reading proficiency, demonstrating the value of integrating innovative teaching techniques like language games into educational practices.

Keywords: Action research, Reading ability, Language games, Secondary school level

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Introduction :

Reading is a critical skill that supports learning in listening, speaking, and writing, playing a central role in language acquisition. It enhances students' comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar, which in turn strengthens their overall language abilities. Despite its importance, many students find reading in English challenging and boring, which leads to poor performance and slow learning progress.

Teachers face the challenge of making reading enjoyable and engaging to overcome students' disinterest and difficulties. To address this, it is crucial to use methods beyond traditional lectures. One effective strategy is incorporating language games into the classroom. These games make learning interactive and fun, reducing students' anxiety and boredom while fostering a love for reading. Language games are particularly beneficial in improving reading skills as they encourage active participation, align with students' interests and experiences, and provide a relaxed environment where students can experiment with language.

By making reading more engaging through games, teachers can help students develop better reading habits, improve their comprehension, and ultimately enhance their overall language proficiency. This approach not only makes learning more enjoyable but also helps students progress more quickly and effectively in their language studies.

Problem Analysis

As part of the B.Ed curriculum, the investigator was deputed to complete phase II teaching practice in a higher secondary school. Witnessing students with poor reading abilities was a deeply sobering experience. Some students struggle to read even the simplest words or sentences. Constant struggles with reading also led to feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and disengagement from learning. As a result, students start to develop negative attitudes towards reading. The lack of reading ability also affected the other skills of learning including writing, speaking and listening. It also led to the poor academic performance and reduces self confidence among the students. The investigator also faced a few pedagogical difficulties while handling students with poor reading ability. This made the investigator to conduct an action research to improve the reading ability of the students. As students develop negative attitude towards reading, the investigator thought of ways to arouse curiosity among learners to read. This resulted in the use of language games as a method to improve the reading ability of the students. As students are fond of games, they will never get bored and at the same time, they will also start to develop a taste for reading.

Research Question

Can language games help to improve the reading ability of the students?

Need and Significance

Many students, particularly in rural areas, struggle with reading proficiency, hindering their academic progress and overall educational attainment. Language games represent an innovative and alternative approach to traditional teaching methods. By incorporating language games into the learning process, the present study seeks to create a dynamic and interactive classroom environment that captures students' attention and fosters a genuine interest in reading. Language games encourage active participation and hands-on learning, allowing students to engage with reading material in a fun and meaningful way. By instilling a love for reading through engaging activities like language games, this study contributes to the cultivation of a lifelong learning. Students who develop strong reading skills are better equipped to pursue further education and succeed in their personal and professional lives. Action research allows for a personalized approach to instruction, catering to the unique needs and learning styles of individual students. Enhanced reading ability not only correlates with improved academic performance but also boosts students' self-confidence and self-esteem. By empowering students to succeed in reading, this study can have a positive impact on their overall well-being.

Objectives of the Study

1) To improve the reading ability of the selected sample of students from secondary school level.
2) To prepare a learning package that includes language games.
3) To inculcate interest in reading English language through language games.

Techniques and methods applied for evaluation of identified problem

To evaluate the action research on improving students' reading abilities using language games, a pre-test and post-test approach was employed. Initially, a pre-test involving reading passages of varying difficulty was conducted to establish a baseline of students' reading skills. An observation schedule was also prepared to assess criteria like voice clarity, pronunciation, fluency, and gestures. This schedule was reviewed by two other investigators for reliability.

After implementing a language games learning package tailored to these criteria, a post-test using similar passages was administered. Comparing the pre- and post-test results, along with observations, showed significant improvements in students' reading abilities, demonstrating the effectiveness of the language games intervention.

Action Hypothesis

a. Students will read with a more distinct voice and better audibility.

b. Language games will help students pronounce words correctly.

c. Students will learn to read in meaningful chunks, enhancing comprehension.

d. Language games will help students use correct stress, intonation, and voice modulation.

e. Regular practice will increase students' reading speed and fluency.

f. Engaging in language games will encourage appropriate gestures and facial expressions.

Participants

The participants in the present study include 10 secondary school students identified through a pre-test as having difficulties with reading. These students were selected based on their performance, which indicated specific challenges in reading skills. The aim is to address these difficulties and improve their reading abilities using targeted language games. The focus will be on enhancing various aspects of reading, such as clarity of voice, pronunciation, comprehension, and fluency, to support their overall development and boost their confidence in reading.

Preparation of Action Plan

An action plan is a document that outlines the steps necessary to achieve a specific goal. It breaks the goal down into actionable tasks that can be easily followed and tracked. The purpose of an action plan is to clarify the resources required to reach the goal and to create a timeline for when specific tasks need to be completed.

Learning is a transformative process that leads to change through experience, significantly enhancing future performance. It encompasses acquiring new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Among these, reading skills are crucial as they underpin the ability to understand, interpret, and engage with written material effectively. The present study found many students struggled with reading proficiency. A pre-test highlighted this gap, leading to the development of action plans to address it. To improve reading abilities, language games were introduced as a key strategy. These interactive games aim to make learning engaging and effective, enhancing students' reading abilities and boosting overall academic performance.

Action Plans

A learning package named *'Reading Carnival'* of thirteen language games were implemented.

1. Sight words sprint
2. Spelling bee
3. Word hunt
4. Reading treasure trail
5. Word chain
6. Alphabet Alchemy
7. Sentence Assembling game
8. Reading Relay

9.   Role play saga
10. Read and do
11. Story builder
12. Chunk it up
13. Tongue twister

Implementation of the plan

The action plan to improve secondary school students' reading ability through language games was executed over 13 days. Each day featured a distinct game or activity focused on enhancing various aspects of reading proficiency, such as fluency, pronunciation, comprehension, and expressive reading. The activities were designed to be both educational and engaging, with clear objectives and structured feedback sessions to reinforce learning.

Action Plan Overview

Duration: 13 days

Objective: To enhance reading proficiency by focusing on pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, and expressive reading through interactive language games.

Permission: Granted by the headmistress to conduct the program.

Day 1: Sight Word Sprint

Date: 01/07/2024

Objective: Improve fluency, accuracy, and speed in recognizing sight words.

Method: Students quickly identify and read as many sight words as possible within a time limit.

Day 2: Spelling Bee

Date: 02/07/2024

Objective: Enhance spelling accuracy and pronunciation.

Method: A spelling competition where students spell words aloud, reinforcing word structures and patterns.

Day 3: Word Hunt

Date: 03/07/2024

Objective: Improve fluency and visual scanning.

Method: Students locate specific words within puzzles, enhancing word recognition and familiarity with vocabulary.

Day 4: Reading Treasure Trail

Date: 05/07/2024

Objective: Improve expressive reading and intonation.

Method: A treasure hunt game where students find and read aloud passages, integrating physical activity with reading tasks.

Day 5: Word Chain

Date: 08/07/2024

Objective: Improve voice clarity and pronunciation.

Method: A word game where students say words beginning with the last letter of the previous word, promoting vocabulary recall.

Day 6: Alphabet Alchemy

Date: 10/07/2024

Objective: Correct pronunciation and improved fluency.

Method: Students create as many words as possible from a set of letters, enhancing vocabulary and word formation skills.

Day 7: Sentence Assembling Game

Date: 11/07/2024

Objective: Enhance sense group reading.

Method: Students assemble words into meaningful sentences, reinforcing grammar and sentence structure.

Day 8: Reading Relay

Date: 12/07/2024

Objective: Improve clarity, pronunciation, and fluency.

Method: A relay where students take turns reading aloud from a passage, practicing transitions between readers.

Day 9: Role Play Saga

Date: 15/07/2024

Objective: Improve clarity, pronunciation, fluency, and expression.

Method: Students enact characters from a script, integrating performance with text interpretation.

Day 10: Read and Do

Date: 17/07/2024

Objective: Improve clarity, pronunciation, and fluency.

Method: Students read aloud instructions and perform the described actions, linking reading with physical tasks.

Day 11: Story Builder

Date: 18/07/2024

Objective: Enhance clarity, fluency, and expressive reading.

Method: Students collaboratively create and read aloud a story, promoting creativity and narrative skills.

Day 12: Chunk It Up

Date: 19/07/2024

Objective: Improve sense group reading and fluency through chunking.

Method: Students read passages divided into meaningful phrases, focusing on natural pauses to improve comprehension.

Day 13: Tongue Twister

Date: 23/07/2024

Objective: Improve clarity and pronunciation of difficult word combinations.

Method: Students read tongue twisters aloud, practicing articulation and speed.

The action plan was comprehensive and aimed at addressing the diverse reading needs of secondary school students. By integrating language games into daily sessions, the plan not only improved the students' reading abilities but also made learning an enjoyable experience. The successful implementation of this plan lays the groundwork for continued improvement in students' reading proficiency.

Measures of Analysis

A detailed analysis was conducted to assess the effectiveness of each language game by comparing pre-test and post-test results and reviewing structured observations documented throughout the intervention. The analysis revealed significant improvements in various aspects of reading proficiency.

Students showed marked gains in reading fluency, accuracy, and speed. The Sight Word Sprint game led to faster reading speeds and greater accuracy in recognizing sight words, with observations noting increased confidence and reduced hesitation. The Spelling Bee activities enhanced spelling skills and accuracy, as reflected in improved performance on spelling tests and fewer errors in written work.

The Word Hunt game notably improved visual scanning skills, with students identifying words more quickly and accurately. The Reading Treasure Trail game resulted in better expression and intonation during reading aloud, as evidenced by more expressive reading and improved intonation patterns.

Pronunciation-focused games such as Word Chain, Alphabet Alchemy, and Tongue Twister led to clearer speech and fewer pronunciation errors. Activities aimed at reading in sense groups, like Sentence Assembling and Chunk It Up, helped students read with better comprehension and more natural phrasing.

The Reading Relay, Story Builder, and Role Play Saga games contributed to significant improvements in reading fluency and expressiveness. Observations indicated that students were more fluent and expressive in their reading.

Overall, the action plan's comprehensive approach using various language games resulted in substantial improvements across all targeted areas. The pre-test and post-test comparisons, supported by detailed observational data, confirmed that the objectives were effectively met, leading to enhanced reading abilities among the participating students.

Observation, Collection and Analysis of Data

Observation is a crucial research tool that enables the collection of accurate, real-time data by directly observing behaviours, providing detailed insights that other methods might miss. In the context of 13 language games, observation revealed how these activities impacted secondary school students' reading proficiency, focusing on clarity, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension.

Games like "Sight Words Sprint" and "Spelling Bee" improved speed, clarity, and pronunciation, while "Reading Treasure Trail" and "Sentence Assembling" enhanced comprehension and expressive reading through stress and intonation. Advanced games such as "Role Play Saga" and "Tongue Twister" developed expressive reading skills, voice modulation, and fluency.

Overall, the games effectively targeted various reading skills, though challenges like multitasking and text division highlighted areas needing further improvement. The analysis suggests that while these games were successful, additional practice in specific areas could further boost reading proficiency.

Reflection and Sharing

The *"Reading Carnival"* action plan addressed significant reading difficulties among students, rooted in insufficient support from parents and teachers, limited learning facilities, and a lack of early attention. To tackle these challenges, the plan was implemented with strong educator support and involved 12 initially selected students. Despite some initial absences, 10 students actively participated in the program, which featured 13 carefully designed language games targeting various reading skills.

Games such as "Sight Words Sprint" and "Spelling Bee" focused on rapid word recognition and correct spelling, while "Word Hunt" and "Reading Treasure Trail" combined reading with engaging activities to enhance fluency and expressive reading. Activities like "Word Chain" and "Alphabet Alchemy" aimed to improve clarity and speed, and "Sentence Assembling Game" and "Reading Relay" emphasized understanding sentence structure and maintaining fluency. "Role Play Saga" and "Story Builder" fostered expressive reading and storytelling, and "Chunk It Up" and "Tongue Twister" refined reading in sense groups and pronunciation.

Throughout the program, students demonstrated significant improvements in their reading abilities. Observations and feedback from teachers, peers, and parents indicated enhanced clarity, pronunciation, and fluency, along with increased enthusiasm for reading. The interactive and enjoyable nature of the games proved effective in making learning engaging and successful, underscoring the plan's impact on fostering better reading skills and greater student interest in learning.

Conclusion

Language serves as a powerful marker of identity, reflecting both the unique characteristics of a person and the cultural attributes of a nation. Just as individuals and societies are defined by their languages, the ability to effectively use language is foundational to personal and academic success. Education plays a pivotal role in building a cultured and value-oriented society, with literacy being a fundamental component.

For improving reading abilities, it was observed that, despite reaching secondary school, many students struggled with English literacy due to inadequate early support and engaging learning methods. Recognizing these challenges, an action plan was developed using a series of language games aimed at enhancing reading skills.

The action plan involved a series of carefully designed language games that targeted various aspects of reading proficiency. The progress observed in the students' reading abilities reflects the value of implementing targeted, enjoyable learning strategies. The improvement in students' reading skills and the positive feedback from peers, teachers, and parents confirm that the action plan was a successful intervention, affirming the importance of continuous, dynamic approaches to language education.

Re-evaluation

The action research study aimed at improving English reading skills through language games showed impressive results, exceeding initial expectations for most students. The action plan, which used various engaging activities, had a significant positive impact on the ten students involved. Each student made noticeable progress in their reading abilities.

The study revealed that students had different levels of reading skills, which emphasized the need for adaptable learning methods. The range of language games was effective in addressing these varying skill levels and kept the students engaged in their learning process.

To further enhance the success of the plan, it's suggested to include additional activities and adjust the program based on the feedback from students. Extending the duration of the program to better match individual learning speeds and providing consistent support will help ensure that all students benefit from the approach. These changes will make the action plan even more effective in improving reading skills for every student.

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