IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS OF SLOW LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ENGLISH SUBJECT

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ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to identify the problems of slow learners with special reference to English subject which is crucial in present scenario. Two blocks of Ganjam district named Bellaguntha and Bhanjanagar were selected by using cluster sampling for collecting the data. Two schools from Bhanjanagar block and three schools from Bellaguntha block were randomly selected by the investigator. A sample of sixty slow learners were drawn by applying Oral test. The investigator used descriptive survey method for this study. Data were analyzed by using quantitative approach using simple percentage analysis. The objectives were to identify the academic and personal problems of slow learners. The main findings were that most of the slow learners don't get an opportunity to interact with the English teacher during teaching learning process as a result they don't take participation. More than half of the slow learners don't have interest in learning English subject. It was also disclosed that the slow learners need to be introduced to some concrete concepts which can be possible by proper use of TLMs related to English subject and teaching methods.

Key words- *Slow learners, personal problems, academic problems and English subject*

INTRODUCTION

Psychologists and educationists have suggested a number of strategies to provide right kind of education to right children as they have variances in their attitudes, personalities, skills and most importantly intelligence. In a classroom, language subject teacher may face some children with below average intelligence who fail to exhibit excellence in a subject, particularly a foreign language subject i.e., English at the same rate as their peers. They are also known as backward children or slow learners who may possess low intelligence with I.Q. 70-85 (Daga & Jain, 2022). It is seen that the thinking skill of slow learner is developed at a slow rate even he is slower than the children who are younger than him but it is considered that slow learner has the same developmental stage as other children have (Daga & Jain, 2022).

Slow learners find it difficult to cope with the education imparted in schools for average children, unless special provision is made for them and the curriculum is oriented towards practical and real-life activities. There are some of the prime inhibiting factors attributed widely to the poor performance of slow learners; such as low self-esteem, lack of goal-setting and problem-solving skills, poor memorizing abilities, lack of achievement motivation, emotional disturbances, poor peer relationship, lack of parental support etc (Shakeel, Raheem, Mahmood & Zuberi (2022). Apart from this, there are other factors which affect the personality of slow learners such as- child's neighbourhood, groups, friends, teachers, adverse parental attitude towards education, shortage of sleep, poor quality of teaching, poor home facilities for learning skills, schools, physical & mental defects, emotional imbalance (Vasudevan, 2017; Sharma & Chopra, 2021). There are some characteristics of slow learners which the English subject teacher observes in the classroom such as: less interest in how the rules of a language work and may show less curiosity in speaking even few words in that language, poor academic performance especially in English subject, inattentiveness, not interested in completing home assignments, weak in four language skills, reverse attitude towards English subject teacher or fear of him and low confidence in expressing views in the period of English subject.

Rationale of The Study

Khalid (2017) explored that lack of participation from students, poor academic performance, identifying the slow learners, slow learners' low attention span and slow learners' low learning rate are the challenges mainly due to the slow learners' low cognitive ability, which leads to some learning problems. With this, lengthy teaching process, lack of teacher training, improper class setting, language barrier, and parents' reluctance are the external challenges. Language barrier can be considered as a double-barrelled challenge because English language teachers not only have to ensure slow learners understand a particular lesson, but also the language used. The slow learners have also the right to get quality education like other children in the classroom as they are also human resource of the country. If a slow learner starts to believe that he/she no longer possess the ability to learn something, their efficacy beliefs go down which can lead to lack of attention in the classroom, failure to prepare for exams and this increases alarmingly. So, the researcher decided to find out the academic and personal problems of slow learners particularly.

A major characteristic of the slow learners is that they have little interest in learning and schooling (Arini, Choiri & Sunardi, 2017). Creating and retaining their learning interest is a challenging task for the English subject teachers. It is well known to all that there is a common curriculum for all children of different cognitive abilities though slow learners may need special coaching (Afzal, Munir, Khan & Ali 2021). Lessons designed for the majority of students frequently fail to suit the special learning demands of the slow learners (Shanmugam & Jeevarathinam, 2021). The single digit marks they secure in the English subject in quarterly and half yearly examination is ignored. If they don't get minimum marks in the annual examination, those marks in the subject are raised to pass marks and they are promoted to next class. Further, to RTE act No Detention policy, there is a provision of the government that no child should be failed up to 8th standard. Further, to ASER 2022 report, the % of children who can read simple sentences in English is less than half of the total (47.2) at the elementary school level which is a matter of concern. Listen and learn, speak and learn, read and learn, write and learn and act and learn are not given due priority in the learning system of slow learners. They carry out their dullness from elementary schools to secondary schools.

It is obvious that English language introduces the world to the learners. It is very rich in its literature and culture. It is defined as "the international language par excellence" (Clyne & Sharifan, 2008), the language of business (Charles, 2007), the language of global economy and the job market (Annamalai, 2005; Verma, 2005). A number of job platforms are open to a person, fluent with English language. If a person has the mastery over the English language, he/she can be with the flow of global knowledge. Considering the importance of this, English has been made a compulsory subject in the curriculum. It is taught with an aim to make the learners efficient to communicate and to learn four language skills. Though it is beneficiary, yet it is difficult particularly for the slow learners as this is completely different from the mother tongue. It's a challenging subject for them. So, the investigator chose particularly the English subject to identify the problems to learn it.

A number of studies have been undertaken by taking the slow learners of primary schools (Qian, 2008; Wettasinghe & Hasan, 2007; Snead & Snead, 2004; Afzal, Munir, Khan & Ali 2021). A number of studies have also been carried out at tertiary level (Ponnuchamy, 2012; Verma 2005). The researcher also found some researches at the secondary level (Khalid, 2017; Khatoon & Akhter, 2010) and decided to take slow learners of the same out of the felt need as at this stage, they appear the High School Certificate examination and they find it extremely difficult to cope with secondary school curriculum, unless it is oriented towards practical and real-life activities (Shmavonyan & Karapetyan, 2017). Due to regress in marks in English subject, their overall performance and percentage decreases which affect their future negatively. She intended to take the Government schools only as it is often identified that the Government schools are poorly equipped and often do not have basic amenities (Ponnuchamy, 2012). Government school slow learners face more problems than private schools. Likewise, ASER (2022) says, private school children do perform better than the Government schools. After reviewing the literature related to this problem, the researcher found out that there is the need to study the academic and personal problems of slow learners in English subject in Odisha.

Operational Definition: -

Slow Learner: -

Here, slow learner was the one who failed (less than 30% marks) in the oral test taken by the researcher on the spot in the classroom.

Secondary School: -

In this study, secondary schools are the Government schools having secondary class i.e., class-IX.

Problems of Slow Learners: -

In the present study, the problems refer to the academic and personal problems of the slow learners with special reference to English subject.

Objectives of the Study: -

The objectives of the present study are—

1. To identify the academic problems of slow learners such as- related to English subject, school environment, teaching style and methods.

2. To identify the personal problems of slow learners such as illness, interest and confidence related to English subject.

Delimitations of the Study: -

The present study has the following delimitations:

- Secondary schools were delimited to Government schools only.

- The study was confined to the personal and academic problems of slow learners only.

- Secondary class was delimited to class-IX only.

- The study was confined to two blocks of Ganjam district, Odisha only: Bellaguntha and Bhanjanagar

METHODOLOGY

In the present study, descriptive survey method design was used. The researcher personally visited to the schools for data collection, met the students and administered the questionnaires.

Population And Sample: -

All the secondary schools of Odisha constituted target population of the study. All the secondary schools of Ganjam district were the accessible population. Cluster sampling method was used to draw two clusters i.e., Bellaguntha and Bhanjanagar blocks of Ganjam district. Three schools from Bellaguntha block and two schools from Bhanjanagar block were selected randomly. At the next stage, the investigator conducted an oral test for class-IX students in these schools. All the students who failed in oral test (secured less than 30% marks) were identified as slow learners. A total 60 students failed in oral test. Hence, all these slow learners were selected for the present study.

Tools: -

There were two tools that were used in the present study. They were: -

- **Oral test to draw out the slow learners**

   The investigator adopted vocabulary test, memory games, continuing a story, guess the word etc. in the oral test. She also created some scenes in the classroom to do the comprehension test and the students were to respond accordingly. The oral test was formed of twenty items. The maximum score of the test was 20.

- **Questionnaire to identify their problems**

   A questionnaire was designed with three options to find out the problems of slow learners. The options were: yes, no and undecided. The test consisted of 20 items out of which 10 questions were related to their academic problems and 10 questions were related to personal problems of the slow learners in relation to the English subject.

Statistical Techniques Used

After the collection of all the requisite data, frequency and percentage was used to analyze and interpret the data.

FINDINGS

Personal Dimension: -

SL. NO.	ASPECTS	YES	NO	UNDECIDED
1	Do you think English subject is important for your study?	91.42%	0%	8.57%
2	Do you give more study time to other subject than English?	57.14%	34.28%	8.57%
3	Do you practise English subject in your home every day?	48.57%	37.14%	14.28%
4	Do you come to school regularly?	74.28%	14.28%	11.42%
5	Do you complete home work that is given by the English teacher?	34.28%	37.14%	28.57%
6	Does your physical disability hinder you to study English?	11.42%	82.85%	5.71%
7	Do your parents help you in studying English?	48.57%	45.71%	5.71%
8	Do you feel difficult to understand the English grammar?	40%	17.14%	42.85%
9	Do you have interest to study English?	34.28%	51.42%	14.28%
10	Do you feel nervousness while learning English subject?	74.28%	25.71%	0%

From the above table, it can be concluded that 91.42% slow learners agreed that English subject is important for them while 8.57% of slow learners remained undecided.

It can be said that 57.14% slow learners agreed that they spend more study time with other subjects than English. While 34.28% slow learners were of the view that they don't give emphasis to other subjects which means they give equal time to English subject like other subjects, 8.57% students were not able to say anything.

The question regarding the practice of the subject, 48.57% slow learners agreed that they do regularly exercise English in their home while 37% students denied about studying English regularly. And, 14.28% students were not able to say anything.

The table throws light on the fact that 74% slow learners were of the opinion that they regularly go to school while 14.28% slow learners agreed that they rarely come to school for study. Also 11.42% were undecided.

The above table reveals that 34.28% agreed that they do homework given by the English teacher and the slow learners denied to do the same were 37.14%. also, 28.57% slow learners felt reluctant to say anything. So, they gave their tick mark on the undecided option.

The table depicts that 11.42% slow learners were of the view that physical disability hinders their progressive steps towards English language learning. The slow learners who denied were of 82.57%. 5.71% slow learners couldn't decide about their physical characteristics.

The above table shows that 48.57% slow learners reflected that they have all types of support from their parents and home. The students who disagreed to have parental support were 45.71% and 5.71% students remain undecided. The table discloses that 40% slow learners have problem relating to English grammar. 17.14% students denied having any difficulty in English grammar and 42.85% remained undecided.

Viewing serial no.9 of the table, it can be said that 34.28% slow learners revealed that they like to study English as a subject. 51.42% pupils said that they do not have any interest in the subject and 14.28% slow learners did not want to reveal their interest in English.

Analysing serial no.10, the researcher found that, 74.28% slow learners agree of facing difficulty in learning the subject and 25.71% pupils agreed of not facing any difficulty in learning the subject.

Academic Dimension-

Sl.no.	Aspects	Yes	No	Undecided	Total
1	Is there any teaching learning material related to English subject in your school?	2.85%	60%	37.14%	99.99%
2	Is there English subject teacher in your school?	100%	0%	0%	100%
3	In your classroom, does the English subject teacher use appropriate teaching learning material?	37.14%	51.42%	11.42%	99.98%
4	In your school, is there any trained English subject teacher?	42.85%	0%	57.14%	99.99%
5	Does your English teacher regularly do formative assessment in English subject?	68.57%	28.57%	92.85%	99.99%
6	Do you think that in your school, there is enough scope for the spread of English language?	40%	40%	20%	100%
7	Is remedial teaching given by the English teacher for the development of English language?	45.71%	25.71%	28.57%	99.99%
8	Does the English subject teacher regularly give you homework?	71.42%	17.14%	11.42%	99.98%
9	Is English teaching given proper attention in your school?	71.42%	14.28%	14.28%	99.98%
10	In English period, do you interact with your teacher frequently?	40%	51.42%	8.57%	99.99%

From the above table, it can be said that only 2.85% agreed that they have teaching learning material in their classroom while 60% of the slow learners said the actual fact that no TLM is used while teaching in the classroom. Also, 37.14% slow learners failed to decide anything.

The table clarifies that 100% slow learners declared about the presence of English teachers in their school.

Regarding having trained English teacher, 42.85% said yes, nobody gave tick mark on no and 57.14% students responded that they don't know whether they have trained English teacher in their school or not.

About formative assessment, 68.57% slow learners said yes, 28.57% said no and 2.85% pupils were undecided.

Viewing serial no. 6 of the table, it can be said that 40% slow learners agreed that they have congenial environment in the school for the spread of English language. While 40% pupils denied it, 20% slow learners remained undecided.

Analyzing serial no. 7, the researcher found that 45.71% pupils said yes about remedial teaching for the development of English subject, 25.71% slow learners disagreed with it and 28.57% pupils remained silent regarding the remedial teaching given by the English teacher.

Considering serial no. 8, it is found that 71.42% slow learners agreed that their English teacher give them home work regularly and only 17.14% pupils disagreed with it. Only 11.42% slow learners failed to decide anything.

Referring the serial no. 9 of the above table, it can be said that 71.42% slow learners were of the opinion that English teaching is given much more importance in their school. Only 14.28% pupils said that their school doesn't give importance to English language and 14.28% slow learners didn't arrive at any conclusion.

It can be concluded that all the five schools facilitated English language education for the improvement of the students.

Considering the seral no. 10 of the above table, the investigator found that 40% slow learners do interact with the English teacher in the classroom during teaching learning process. 51.42% slow learners denied. Also, only 8.57% slow learners could not decide about the interaction with the English teacher in the class.

Major Findings-

➤ Most of the slow learners agreed that they have English teachers in their schools. But 57% of the students do not know whether they are trained or not.

➤ The study revealed that more than half of the students gave importance to other subject than English.

➤ Nearly half of the slow learners do study English regularly while others do not practise this at home.

➤ It was found that more than half (74%) of the slow learners are regular in attending school while few of them do not prefer to turn up their schools.

➤ Most of the students do not have physical disability which could hinder their learning. Only 3 students are vision impaired.

➤ Less than half of the students have parental assistance in studying the English subject.

➤ The investigator found out that more than half of the slow learners denied having teaching learning materials in the school.

➤ The study depicted that the English teacher regularly assesses the students.

➤ The students couldn't decide clearly about having smooth and supportive environment for the boost in English language.

➤ The study illuminated that the English teacher gives home work to the students.

➤ The research says that English teaching is given more importance in the school.

> ➢ The researcher found from the students' response that 51% of the slow learners do not have interest in English subject.

> ➢ Finally, the present study concludes that English subject is difficult for all the slow learners.

DISCUSSION

The present study depicted the problems of slow learners due to lack of teaching learning materials and lack interaction with English subject teacher. The teachers in English subject should interact with the slow learners and use electronic media to make their English classes active and alive. According to the findings, most of the students have English teachers in their school who do regular assessment and give home work to the students. In this case, home work session should be short (Borah, 2013). But the concerned teachers don't have proper teaching learning materials for the classroom transaction which would be affecting the slow learners' English learning as TLMs give concrete knowledge to one's mind. Also, almost half of the slow learners' parents regard about English learning of their children but parents of the remaining slow learners don' give support to their children. In this case, the English subject teacher should take a leading role in awakening the parents about the importance of learning English.

The slow learners are low achievers. They don't get benefit from the regular classes. They need extra classes, time and attention to get their doubts clarified. They need some concrete concepts which can be provided by using aids related to English language. Here, the experiment of Krishnakumar, Geeta and Palat (2006) could be applicable where they have proved how individualised education program is effective for the slow learners. Proper use of TLMs and teaching methods would create interest and motivate them as most of them don't have interest in English subject though they think that English subject is important for them.

Though the concerned schools give much more importance to English learning yet according to slow learners' views, there is not enough scope for the spread of English language. This matches with the findings of Ponnuchamy (2012). Regarding remedial teaching, no clear response could be made as some were in favour of it while others were not. It is a matter of concern that most of the students don't take participation and they don't have opportunity to interact with the English teacher during teaching learning process which is similar with the findings of Daga & Jain (2022) and Ponnuchamy (2012). In this case, adding a variety of tasks to the learning even if not assigned, such as painting a picture of a reading assignment and allowing the slow learners to have success may be influential for them to be active in the classroom (Borah, 2013).

There is also need of the attention of the English teacher regarding the matter that most of the students think that English language is difficult for them. More than half of the slow learners agree that they don't have interest to study English. Here, CLIL (content and language integrated learning) that refers to the use of a second or foreign language (FL) as a vehicle to learn the content of a school curricula subject, can be employed by the English subject teacher in order to motivate them (Verma, 2005). Also, Intrinsic motivation needs to be coupled with conscious efforts for success in language learning. Considering the power of motivation, English subject teachers could act as role models and speak about job prospects for applicants with high levels of English proficiency and (Ponnuchamy, 2012). They can also use comic as a learning technique to raise the interest of slow learners in learning (Arini, Choiri & Sunardi, 2017).

This study was a step to reveal the personal and academic problems of slow learners in English subject at secondary school level. Study can be conducted at elementary and higher education level. The study can be extended to district, state and national level. Study can be enlarged to the problems related to their socioeconomic status to get more authentic information. Researches can be undertaken on the slow learners with special reference to other subjects such as History, Mathematics and Science. A comparative study can be done between Government and private schools. Researches can also be conducted taking the sample of other classes. Sample size can also be increased to get more reliable data.

The present study explores the need and requirement of slow learners. This study is helpful in designing of adequate plan and strategies for teaching English subject to slow learners. This study guides the English subject teacher to design innovative teaching methods and tactics to motivate the slow learners who think English subject as a difficult one and do not have any interest in the same. This study established valid and reliable data regarding the problems of slow learners in regards to English subject on the basis of which the subject teacher will plan appropriate actions.

The findings of the present study and the data obtained from the slow learners are crucial for perfect implementation of existing educational programs and also for introducing new educational policies. This study leads to awareness among the English subject teachers about the problems of the slow learners. For the slow learners to be effective learners, prevention of the barriers is the need of the day. The English subject teachers should come up with treatment plans so that the slow learners can perform up to their best potential. As most of the students disagreed to have an effective interaction with the language teachers during classroom transaction, this will create consciousness among the teachers and they will take all necessary steps to improve the relationship between the slow learners and them and to provide judicious exposure to the subject. This study makes the teachers focused towards another important group of human resource of the country.

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