

Ways to Help Students to be Better Readers

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ABSTRACT

According to Maxwell (2001) reconnaissance consists of three parts namely situational analysis, analysis of competence of the people involved, and literature. Further Grundy, (1995) “reconnaissance often consists in going backwards and forwards for a while between reflections and collecting evidence”. In this action research, we carefully examined student’s learning on reading abilities through reflection and action throughout the process. Related literature will be read, it will be put into action to see the practical result of the student’s performance. This will be followed with strategic plan for student’s improvement in reading.

Keywords: Learning, Student Performance, Competence

Introduction

I was instructed by the Dzongkhag Administration to open Kherigonpa Primary School in the academic year 2005, under Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag which is located above the road to Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag headquarter almost five kilometers away. With the downgrade of school to Extended Classroom (ECR) in the year 2015, I was posted to Tshatsi Primary School one of the remote school, under the same Dzongkhag. The distance from the Dzongkhag Head Quarter is 56 KM and from the Gewog Center is 15 KM. There are 122 students, eight teaching staff along with Administrative Assistant, caregivers, two cooks, sweeper, a care taker and school sports instructor. It has classes from PP to VI. Since most of the children were coming from the illiterate family background, I have observed that the learners are seen to be reluctant to engage in reading in the classroom. Most of the students are not able to read properly with correct pronunciation and their reading speed is very slow. In most cases when I ask them to read they hesitate and do not come forward voluntarily. Even if they are asked to read, their reading is confined to the prescribed text

books which may be either to complete their home task or to prepare for the tests and examinations as demanded by the system.

In order to achieve the nation's much valued vision and the goal of acquiring quality education, the students are entrusted to practice reading. Simultaneously educators are also equally responsible to make them more enthusiastic in making their reading activities success. Moreover, the English teachers in my school rarely discuss and share views among themselves and do less planning to create interest among the learners to read. The students are seen taking more initiative in other school activities rather than in reading. From all these observations, I have realized that this issue required immediate attention. So it is much to do with teacher's way of teaching that make impact on child's learning. Teacher cannot just blame students for not learning. In fact every child is capable of learning something. Research elsewhere has demonstrated that it is the teacher's way of teaching that fosters active student engagement. Thus, this action research was intended to examine my weakness in teaching reading and to facilitate remedial measures for the improvement of student's reading culture through discussion with other English teachers in the school.

Competence

Though I have not done any action research in the past, however, Distance Education program and attending 5 days workshop of action research has provided me an opportunity to learn about doing an action research. I have gained some knowledge on what research is and how to go ahead with this. The last twenty four years of experience as a teacher provides a good opportunity to re-examine the trend of student engagement in reading and ways to improve on it. I have the desire to improve my strategies in teaching thereby improving student's reading skills. I have also attended a number of in-country workshops and training in teaching English.

Literature Review

While there are many definition of reading, I find the definition of Richard (2009) appropriate; most people think of reading as a simple, passive process that involves reading words in a linear fashion and internalizing their meaning one at a time. But reading is actually a very complex process that requires a great deal of active participation on the part of the reader. I present the definition of reading as the piece of written prints which makes some internal meaning to the reader. In fact, the reader should know the internal meaning of the phrases and sentences so that it makes sense of what

the reader is actually reading. S. Sandra (1994) states that reading is a complex information processing skill in which the reader interact with text in order to create meaningful discourse. The reader is an active, problem solving individual who coordinates a number of skills and strategies to facilitate comprehension. Students learn aspect of the reading process through reading. Richards (2009) states that children will enjoy reading more if we give them right tools and inspirations to build their grasp and their understanding. Enthusiastic readers develop better speaking and writing skills too. Literature also indicates that without right level of books being provided to the learners to read, they find difficulty in reading. As a teacher, I am aware that students need proper care and attention to engage them in active reading learning process. I have not been able to realize whether my care and attention has been effective to the student in real classroom practice. This means I have to investigate how effective had been my action of taking care and concern with the student's reading skill.

An effective way a learner can develop active reading habit is through reading much material in prints and in digital formats and availing those resources in different ways. Phuntsho Lham, (2003), has reported that, "reader's fluency depends on lot of practice in reading. Therefore, it is mandatory for children in the school that reading must be a major focus of the English lesson. Through my teaching experience, I have observed that reading differs from person to person. Some good readers read with understanding to the content of the book while few just skim the pages and few readers read only for the test and examinations. A good and effective reading comes when one's spirit and book's spirit come together. Reading should not be forced upon but develop interest so that students have positive attitude towards reading in or outside the classroom. (Gardener, 1983). Making reading an adventure helps to build and develop skills that will last a lifetime" (Richard, 2009). In this context, if the reading material is interesting, learners take initiative to read with enthusiasm and retention will be quicker and more permanent to the reader. The language teacher should make a bookmark to check student's reading. It's fun for children to bookmark with their own name on it. Another idea is to make a bookmark to match the book or series that is being read. The bookmark practice gives ownership to a book and another connection for a young reader (Richard, 2009). In this context, it is important for the teachers to maintain the reading profile for each student. It provides teacher and students with information about the book each student has read. This indicates the teacher need to extend the learning experiences of the learners or to step back to the point where students need to read again.

Kara (1970) states that students should be involved most of the time in understanding what they are reading. Students should know the meaning of the words to make sense to what they are reading. This helps them to connect the words and sentences with clear meaning. A positive attitude towards reading can be achieved if teachers place greater emphasis on positive classroom environment and ongoing reading experiences (Serra. & Wangmo. 1999, p.5). As per the statement, teacher should make available of different kind of books to read as per the learners level and interest like simple magazines, picture stories and library books so that students get motivated to read. Teachers can make the class room environment supportive where students have opportunities to gain self confidence and enhance learning. The language teacher can take initiative to make news bulletin board, reading corner with appropriate materials and display reading materials at the prominent place in the classroom where students can freely practice to read and write as well. Reading aloud is a useful way of introducing students coming from non reading culture to reading, in that it fits in well with the oral tradition of the student's culture (Serra, & Wangmo, 1999, p.16).

The teacher can read the materials which are challenging for students to comprehend. The students can follow the teacher's model reading. The reading beginners will be motivated and find enjoyable by allowing them to read the books aloud. All students, even the young need to be given regular or daily opportunities to read independently. Teachers can initiate independent reading, so that the child has time to enjoy reading for pleasure. Seera, & Wangmo (1999) suggest that reading must be developed and can only be developed by means of extensive and constant practice. Students learn to read, and read better by reading.

Research Questions

Any individual taking up an action research or planning to present an action research must try to identify the real situation at the very beginning to make the research successful to bring change. So, to undertake an action research towards how can I help grade four students read better English, I have sincerely taken into concern of finding the right responses through the following questions.

- ✓ **How can I help class four students read better English?**
- ✓ **What can I do to make my class four students reads effectively?**
- ✓ **How can I make classroom reading environment better?**
- ✓ **How can I improve my practice to motivate my children read more efficiently?**
- ✓ **What comment should I adopt in teaching reading?**

- ✓ **How can I overcome student’s reading barrier?**
- ✓ **What can I do to make my students develop active reading culture?**
- ✓ **What different reading materials will I use to teach reading?**

Action research plan

Although, there are no specific formats for designing action research plans. Some teachers use to provide a detailed account as of how to go about doing the research. So owing to my own convenience I have developed the plan, purposefully to bring change for the students.

Action plan for my research

Plan	May 2021	Remarks
	Week I – Week II	
1. Baseline data	Discuss and identify about the reading problem faced in class iv with the class teacher and the students.	Keep diary notes on the reading made by each student.
	<p style="text-align: center;">Week III - IV</p> Prepare questionnaire for the baseline data for diagnosis of the situation of student’s English reading.	
	June 2021	Remarks
	Week I - IV	
2. Analysis of baseline data	Collect baseline data and analyzed to plan for the intervention strategies. Implement changes. Collect field notes and the comments from critical friend.	Field notes and the comments from my critical friend
3.Intervention Strategies	July 2021	
	Week I - II	
	Carry out research work. Record collected data. Use and apply intervention strategies for reading	Critical friend’s comments,

	Week III - IV	survey questionnaire and through self observation.
	Make decisions on what to do next. Execute changes in required. Talk with learners and find out reason for reading problem.	
Collect additional data	August 2021	
	Discuss with critical friend and colleagues. Reflect and plan a review for next term.	

Intervention strategies: Based on the feedbacks from the critical friend, survey questionnaire data and reflections from my diary notes and also based on my literature review I will use intervention strategies to help grade four students read better English. Students will be made available with the reading materials as per their level and interest. The impacts of the teaching strategies will be observed through friend's critical comments, survey questionnaire and through self observation. The strategy mentioned for intervention will be applied practically with the students. I cannot guarantee the form of intervention strategies that I use may contribute for bringing changes to the learners. However, the following intervention strategies were used to help students read better English.

Phonemic Awareness: Some students demonstrate difficulty with decoding words because they are not alert to the individual sounds that make up spoken words, otherwise known as phonemic awareness. When students exhibit these types of pre-reading skill problems, phonemic awareness skills need to be targeted for instruction. Phonemic awareness instruction activities may involve identifying beginning, middle, and ending sounds as well as blending, segmenting, and categorizing sounds. Mastery of these skills is a strong predictor of basic reading performance (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Bentin & Leshem, 1993; Bryne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1991).

Prompting and Error Correction: Verbal prompts can be used to help students read words correctly. Verbal prompts can often be used as a way to scaffold (i.e., providing assistance and gradually removing that assistance as skills are independently executed) appropriate reading behaviors (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, & Tarver, 2004). For instance, when a student encounters a word he or she does not know how to read, the teacher may verbally prompt the student to attempt to read the word by saying, "now, let's examine the word carefully. The word begins with the letter m and the m makes the sound of ____." Then the teacher allows the student to articulate the sound.

Verbal prompts like this are provided until the students can read the word correctly. Verbal prompts of this nature are usually faded when the student becomes more proficient at reading words and using word attack strategies for attempting to read unknown words to him or her. Prompting can lead students to not only attempt content that is unknown to them but also can help correct their mistakes.

Helpful Reading Materials: As is the case with most learners, slower readers learn most comfortably with materials that are written on their ability level (Clark et al., 1984). The reading level is of primary concern, but parents can help their reader select helpful materials in other ways. Choose stories or books with (1) a reduced number of difficult words; (2) direct, non-convoluted syntax; (3) short passages that deliver clear messages; (4) subheads that organize the flow of ideas; and (5) helpful illustrations. Older problem readers often find that the newspaper is a good choice for improving reading comprehension (Monda, et al., 1988). Slow readers can succeed with the same frequency as faster readers as long as the parent or teachers maintains a positive attitude and selects materials and approaches that accommodate the child's learning speeds.

Different reading strategies for reading: Use of different strategies would be another ways of helping the students to read the materials. Different strategies like moral reading, shared reading, peer reading, echo reading, independent reading and buddy reading can be encouraged so as to improve the reading habits in my students. Such strategies really help the students to accelerate their skills in reading. The focus of the reading activities will be to teach children how to develop reading strategies with meaningful text. They can then use these strategies independently to read new text. Text selections have been made carefully to provide students with opportunities to practice reading strategies on increasingly complex text with teacher support and modeling.

The Action Research Tools

The purpose for carrying out action research is actually to improve the system and practices to the problem. Therefore, in order to collect the right kind of information and data, I will be using different tools. For my action research I would judiciously use the following tools to make my proposal significantly bring change to my student.

Simple Survey Questionnaire: will be developed and distributed to the students to collect right data of evidences on the situation.

Quantitative

Q. Do you all love reading books? (Yes/No)

Q. Which method do you like to improve your reading skills? (Lecture, cooperative, etc)

Qualitative

Q. Do you like reading books? Why do you like reading?

Q. In what way your English teacher teaches you reading?

Q. What problems do you have while reading?

Q. What makes you feel difficulty in reading?

Q. What methods would you like the most in learning to read?

Observation and maintaining diary: Careful observation and record detailed information to make data rich. Researcher will take extensive field notes by playing the role of participants.

Observational: In the second step I will be adopting observational techniques where I will be plainly observing my students without asking any questions whereby I will dig out the accurate information, as I personally believe that this observation method will provide me with enriching ideas and elicit data which actually is very essential in finding out about the children's reading. I will observe the children while the children are reading in the classroom, library or in any places they read and accordingly I will be noting down some of their problems which would help me in analyzing my research.

Interview: The third step that I am going to do research is through an interview where I will have a direct confess with the students to obtain reliable and suitable measures in the form of verbal responses from one or more respondents. I will be interviewing some of my students and English teacher. I will group the students into two. One group with the good readers and another with the poor readers and accordingly will be interviewing the children on their reading.

Anecdotal Record: Significant incidents or specific, observable behaviors can be recorded by teachers in anecdotal records. These records provide cumulative information about students' development in the learning objectives of the language arts as well as their physical and social growth and development. By systematically collecting and analyzing anecdotal comments, teachers can evaluate students' progress and abilities to use language and then plan appropriate instruction. The

main purposes of anecdotal record are to provide information about students’ development over an extended period of time and also it helps the teacher to identify the instructional needs of the students. So in order to find out the development of my students, I will be using the anecdotal record whereby I will be noting down each and every child’s performance in their reading. I will be also recording their drawbacks in their reading as well as their improvement in their reading. This anecdotal record would really help me in collecting the data or the information and accordingly I will be in a position to solve the problems of reading in my students.

The following is the sample of anecdotal record that I will be using to record the performance of the students of class IV during their reading.

Sample of Anecdotal Record

<i>Class level: IV</i>		<i>Focus of observation: Reading</i>
<i>Name of the student</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Observation/ remarks</i>
Karma Tshering		
Kezang Wangchuk		
Sherub Dorji		
Kinley Pema		
Karma Yangzom		
Karma Yuden		
Pema Zangmo		

Critical Friends: Critical friends are those who help in enhancing the action research by providing new ideas and sharing the comments for further improvement. So I have selected Mrs. Dechen Wangmo and Ms. Phuntsho Wangmo, Teachers as my critical friend as they are teaching English in the school. Further, they have completed the 4 Years teacher training from Paro College of Education and completed B.ED course. Further they have taken a module on Action Research while undergoing the training. With their support I think my AR will have lots of impact for the student in reading English.

Research Ethics: When most people think of ethics (or moral), they think of rules for distinguishing between right and wrong, such as Golden Rule (“ Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”). Ethics are norms for conduct that distinguish between or acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Therefore, following are some of the ethical standards I would take care should support my action research;

1. **Honesty:** My action research strives for honesty in communications. Honestly report data, results and the respect for students is valued.
2. **Openness:** The proposal ensued to keep away from all unpleasant and unhealthy practices of emotional sufferings and is base on openness and new ideas.
3. **Respect for intellectual property:** The proposal also looked into to give credit where credit is due and integrity is maintained.
4. **Confidentiality:** Transparency of Action Research is made through proper channel, with the discussion with critical friends, parents and learners and also confidentiality is maintained.

Findings and Recommendation

The finding from the AR has showed that students lack interest in reading as they had difficulties with decoding words and demotivate them from reading. This AR revealed that the overall students reading skills have improved after students phonemic are considered in the intervention strategies. Thus, the language teachers in general are encouraged to put more effort on students' phonemic awareness. Therefore, the further recommendation are to use the activities like practicing songs and nursery rhymes to build phonemic awareness and make simple word cards to build essential decoding skills at school and as well as in their homes as they plays a causal role in the acquisition of beginning reading skills. The findings of this AR confirm that to achieve success in reading, the focus on prompting and error correction are utmost important for improving students reading skills. Thus, the teacher need to put in the extra effort and are recommended to design various activities for prompting and error correction especially during the skill acquisition phase.

Further, this AR exhibited that that the students' motivation level towards reading was found to be increasing with the use of helpful reading materials for struggling readers. Students developed their interest in reading when I used the materials like picture books and audio books as most of the students like audio-visual materials and its illustrations, thereby improved their reading skills for academic achievement. Accordingly, the teachers are suggested and recommended to come up with helpful reading materials to create more interest on reading. Also from the AR finding, the use of

different reading strategies has greater impact on the students reading skills. This research proved that there are drastic changes found in the students' reading and students are now more fluent in reading after carrying out the different reading strategies. Hence, after knowing its benefits, the language teachers are further recommended to practice different strategies like: Paired/reciprocal reading, Choral Reading, Jigsaw Reading, Echo Reading, Reader Theater and Content Raps Read aloud.

Conclusion

Considering from the above findings through questionnaire, interview and observation. I am confident that I had made some differences in students reading. Though the research has incorporated action method, however, it is difficult to say it as informative as there were some loopholes in conducting the research. How far it is justifiable to pacify the issue when there was less number of students in the class, are the students, teacher colleagues and critical friends satisfied with these findings? We need to ask those question ourselves and draw insightful conclusion. Nevertheless, the issue about students not showing interest in reading in rest of the upper primary class might be the discussion point from this study and way forward for further, AR to be carried out in the school.

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