

Review

Modern civilization that necessitates communication between different peoples and cultures has made reading an indispensable skill, for its welfare and progress. High achievers and great leaders are often good readers and fast readers. Proficiency in reading is important to every individual for adjustment, for learning, for leisure time activity and for personal growth. Achievement at various levels and in various fields is significantly related to reading ability along with intelligence and aptitude. However Indian teachers do not seem to be serious for developing reading skills of their students for the concerned subject and as a general ability. Moreover both in research and practice more attention is given to reading interest, habits, correlated factors and assessment of reading readiness but hardly to reading speed.

Jnana Prabodhini (JP) did not ignore this factor and made 'Reading class' a part of curriculum in the school for intellectually superior. It was a wise step because 'high intelligence does not guarantee faster reading'. When we started the programme in the class of Vth std. in Jnana Prabodhini Prashala (JPP) we found the reading speed ranging from 19 w.p.m. to 300 w.p.m. So the experiments in improving reading speed were undertaken immediately. Teaching and research proceeded hand-in-hand. Since this field was not much explored previously, experiments were conducted with appropriate research designs controlling different factors contributing to reading speed. Some of the experiments in regular classroom sessions as well as two more in-depth analytical studies have been reported in this volume.

The first such systematic study was conducted to verify the effect of sequential developmental programme in improving reading among students from grades Vth through VIIIth in JPP (1). It was a follow-up study spaced over 3 years. The training that included various factors in reading resulted into stability of improvement. Reading ability as a whole was found to be correlated with scholastic ability and also personality traits. In another experiment factors contributing to reading ability were introduced one-by-one in the programme spaced over 25 weeks (3). Skills as perception, comprehension and interest were found to be more decisive factors.

The problem of speed reading was then attacked more aggressively. In an experiment focusing on speed reading variety of methods were used in a very short intensive programme and experimental group showed remarkably higher performance as compared

to control group (2). The results were not analysed statistically but were encouraging. These explorations with intellectually superior students revealed the need for more analytical studies also with normal student population through laboratory methods as well as class-room situation. As a forward step in this direction two experiments were conducted for doctoral research. In the first experiment for comprehensive reading skill a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design was used with intelligence, gender and training as the independent variables (5). The effect of training was analyzed for components of reading ability. In the second experiment only intellectually superior children were selected and training focused on critical reading skill. In both the experiments improvement in reading was not dependent on intelligence and gender.

In another in-depth study the usual book-centered class-room method and laboratory method in which different gadgets were used were compared for their effectiveness (4). A 3 x 3 x 3 factorial design was used having independent variables as initial reading ability, grade level and method of training. Though improvement was seen in all groups the effectiveness of method varied with initial reading ability. Book centered method was more useful for Below Average and Average groups while combination of Book and Laboratory methods favoured Above Average groups.

Reading should not remain restricted to school education. It should be a hobby, a leisure activity which helps personality development. Role of reading magazines was investigated in this respect (6). It was a series of small experiments to investigate students' reading preferences and the effect of reading on development of mental abilities and inculcation of values. Interest in reading and satisfactory reading skill are conducive to learning in the school. Difficulties in reading can be the main reason of poor scholastic achievement. It was verified in a small study when low and high achievers were compared for reading speed, and lacunae in reading habit of low achievers were identified (7).

Importance of reading will not be denied by lay persons as well as professionals and experts. But whether our education system puts proper emphasis on reading skill and provides instructions for developing reading skills appropriate to grade level, have to be evaluated. When reading skill of students in Marathi and English medium schools were studied (8), the results revealed a discouraging fact about development of reading skills. There was no improvement from std. Vth to VIIth, on the contrary a slight decrease was noted. Even in English medium school though reading skills showed improvement there was a drop at grade VIIth level.

All these researches emphasize that reading skill as a whole and reading speed have to be and can be improved with training. Perception, comprehension and interest are the main components of reading skill. They contribute to scholastic ability as well as to reading speed. However reading speed is more correlated with personality variables and very less with scholastic ability.

Research put to use

The methodology and findings in all these studies provided the foundation for designing the intervention programmes for school children. More over a large variety of reading exercises produced in these studies served as an asset for many other experiments and training programmes for a long time.

Since reading is a part of study skills more educationists than psychologists have been attracted towards it and more for training than for research. There are frequent programmes in improving reading skills. Such programmes are conducted for students, teachers and officers.

JP experts often contribute to producing articles and chapters on reading in the books for teachers and students of open education. A comprehensive book on reading giving a suitable programme and various exercises in reading has been published. It serves as a valuable guide for teachers and adult readers. Realizing the significance of reading skill, State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) produced a special issue on the subject written and edited by JP experts.

What is needed ?

After initial experiments and preparation of hundreds of exercises in different programmes, research in reading has been neglected at Jnana Prabodhini. Reading readiness, stability of reading skills and domain specific critical reading are some of the topics for research that need attention. The effect of computer on reading and writing is obvious, and has to be investigated at the micro level because the basic S-R mental processes involved in two situations are not the same; it may have implications for readers at all age levels.

Training in reading may have more specific objectives such as improving scholastic ability, inculcation of specific values or personality development for leadership. Assessment and training of reading are needed at the adult level too, for professional progress and personality development. Recently a battery of tests measuring Reading Ability has been standardized for grades V through IX. It is noted in the last Section VIII; more such tests of graded difficulty level are essential.

Readings in Reading