Elements of English Language Teaching for Dyslexics

by

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Content

Abstract

Dyslexia, a reading disability, is one of the types of learning disorder that affects many children. Most of the children will eventually become competent, indeed skilled, readers of their language. Dyslexic children are proficient in their language because of their learning difficulties. While learning English as second language they face many problems. On the basis of their disability, this paper mainly focuses on English (as a second language) language teaching for Tamil dyslexics.

Keywords: *Dyslexia, Language Teaching, Second Language*.

1. Introduction

Dyslexia originates from the two Greek words **dys** 'difficulty' and **lexia** 'language'. The term was first coined in 1887 by Rudolf Berlin in Germany and was used to describe the inability to read. Dyslexia affects 3%–10% of school children (Lerner 1989) and is associated with major educational, social, emotional, and economic repercussions (Spreen 1988). Dyslexia may be defined as a specific difficulty with language-related functions (such as reading and spelling) that is independent of general intelligence and adequate educational opportunity.

Dyslexia is best described as a combination of abilities and difficulties, which affect the learning process in one or more of reading, spelling and writing. Accompanying weaknesses may be identified in the areas of speed of processing, short-term memory, sequencing, auditory and/or visual perception, spoken language and motor skills. It is particularly related to mastering and using written language, which may include alphabetic, numeric and musical notation. Some children have outstanding creative skills, others have strong oral skills**.**

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Dyslexia occurs despite normal teaching, and is independent of socio-economic background or intelligence. Although many children with dyslexics have shown to have visual perceptual deficits, impairments in timing of sensory processing, or poor attention/memory skills, most specialists concurs that dyslexia is primarily a problem with processing the basic phoneme.

Dyslexia is an invisible disability. It is caused by a difference in brain structure which is present at birth or brain injury (acquired) and is often hereditary (developmental). Whereas children acquire their first language quite effortlessly and unconsciously, the acquisition of a second language tend to be a conscious effort and thus psycholinguistic knowledge can have a real impact in both the learning and teaching of second/foreign languages.

Traditionally, language teaching has to concentrate only on the three levels of the formal language system- pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary and the way in which they function within the sentence. Language in an important tool for effective learning of other subjects. Language teaching came into its own profession in the last century. Central to this phenomenon was the emergences of the concept in language teaching, the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and langauge learning is a powerful one and the quest for better methods was a preoccupation of teachers and applied linguists throughout the twentieth century. In learning languages, a distinction is usually made between mother tongue, second language and foreign language. A mother tongue is the first language or languages one learns (or acquires) as a child. When the child goes to the school there he/she could learn the second langauge. When immigrants come to a new country and learn the language of that country, they are learning a foreign langauge.

In Tamil situation teaching English as a second language is complicated than the others subjects. For dyslexic children it is more complicated than the

normal children. The present paper aims to explain how the English (as a second) language should be taught effectively for Tamil dyslexics and also to discuss the problems of the rural dyslexics. It also includes the remedies to solve their problems.

2. Elements of Language Teaching for Dyslexics

Teaching English to dyslexics involves three essential elements, namely

1) Teacher
2) Parents
3) Special Education

2.1. Teacher

It is observed by the Psychologist of the special education that the *"Teachers are the Second Parents"*.

Dyslexia is a problem faced by many students. Dyslexic children have difficulty in coping within a school environment. However, with the help and support of the teacher, even the dyslexic students can become successful learners. The role of teacher is to make educational adjustments so as facilitate learning and to create successful class environment. Educators ought to bear in mind that acquiring a great amount of knowledge about a dyslexic learner is the factor that may play an essential role in bringing success to the child in its later phase. Therefore, teachers should collect as much information about the dyslexic, his family, friends and environment as far as possible. Whenever the dyslexic child positively asserts that the teacher recognizes the nature of learner's difficulties and helps him/her to overcome them, the motivation gets enhanced. Consequently such motivation makes him/her to be willing to learn.

While working with dyslexic learners, it ought to be remembered that the curriculum has designed in an appropriate way to suit the need of the dyslexics. The teacher should select the textbooks and materials with the dyslexic in mind. While choosing a suitable textbook for the dyslexic student, one should bear in mind that the book selected has to be a well structured in context and vivid in presentation. Moreover, schematic layout should be provided to the dyslexics, so that he/she realizes what to expect from a particular unit. Further, one should bear in mind that, while selecting a text book he/she (teacher) should pay attention to the size of the font. That is big in size of font is relatively easier for dyslexics to perform the reading task. As far as the context of the book is concerned, it should be overloaded with new lexical items and grammatical structures. It is advisable for a teacher to choose a textbook accompanied by a workbook containing plenty of exercise to put in use by the individual practice of the dyslexic learner.

Certainly, the teacher has to introduce change in the strategy of teaching but not the context. The teacher has to bear in mind that a gradual progress in the key to successful teaching. While working with dyslexics, certainly time ought to be spent on repeating the material already familiar to the dyslexic children rather than introducing new material to them.

In western countries, they revised the curriculum as well as introducing new materials for practices. Due to the impact of the globalization in India this type of introducing new material and revising the curriculum are possible only in the majority of towns and cities that too in Private schools. This type of system is not introduced in government schools. So the poor and rural children are affected more.

2.1.1.Objectives of Language Teachers

Concepts and terminology used in English language teaching for describing form and meaning in language and language use, language used by the teachers and learners, language select for teaching programmes, reference materials for language awareness, learner development and motivation, evaluating and selecting resources and materials, using supplementing adapting and creating materials, effective use of teaching aids, technical support and self-access materials, teacher and learner language, identifying learner needs, monitoring learner's progress and giving feedback, evaluating teaching and learning.

The following criteria should be followed by English language teacher.

a. Accuracy

    i. Understand and identify main ideas and implication of the source text.

    ii. Use clear, generally accurate English for oral presentation and discussion patterns.

b. Range and Flexibility

    iii. Employ sufficient lexical range and flexibility to convey the content of the source text.

    iv. Use appropriate professional to – professional discourse.

c. Pronunciation

    v. Ensure that pronunciation and the use of stress and intonation maintain a reasonable level of intelligibility and are helpful in emphasizing key points.

d. Audience Awareness

    vi. Select and present relevant information to facilitate understanding.

vii. Adapt and adjust information effectively to meet the needs and responses of the audience.

viii.   Use appropriate and relevant question to initiate peer group discussion.

2.2.Parents

The Psychologist concerned as a special educators observer rightly that the "*Parents are the Second Teachers*".

Children begin to learn which entering formal schooling at the age of four. During the first four years of their lives, young children learn to a rapid face. They need continuous and intensive learning from the moment of birth. By the time they reach the age of schooling, they should have mastered many kinds of learning. Parents and others who involving with young children need to be actively engaged in promoting learning during the preschool. Watts (1944) suggest that the average child enters elementary school with recognition of vocabulary about 2,000 words that at the age of seven this has reached some 7,000 words, by fourteen the child should be recognize 14,000 words.

The role played by the parents in helping the child(ren) who deal with the difficulties associated with dyslexia is far reaching importance. Infact, the role played by the parents' association in helping to bring attention to the needs of young people with dyslexia has been considerable. Frederickson and Cline (2002), suggest that the steps indicated in this legislation could prevent many cases of despite from going to a tribunal is given towards parent partnership, particularly in the area of dyslexia.

Dyslexic children need the practical experience in reading. Parents provide the chances and situation to them. For example, the parents go to the beach with their children, initiate in teaching their children by raising the question such as *how the waves are formed*? Consequently vocabularies by creating words pertinent

to that occasion (e.g. boat, ship, fish, crab, fungi, what are minerals are found in the sea etc.).

Learning through such realistic life situations the dyslexic children stored usually verbal repertoire on long – term memory. These are all possible only in the case of parents hailing from educated. On contrary this is not possible with parents hailing from rural areas. In short, we could pay that the dyslexics in the rural area suffer relatively to a great extent.

2.3.Special Education

By the term, the special education, we mean education which is specially designed so as to the usual needs of an exceptional child. Special schools are imperative to the children with learning disability. To achieve such special school education we use in need of special materials, teaching of techniques or equipments and/ or facilities. The following methods and materials are following in the special school, they are;

1) Phonics
2) Common phonograms
3) Reading Fluency
4) Vocabulary
5) Comprehension

Phonics

The phonics method is probably the best known and widely used method of teaching, reading, and writing in the target (English) language. Essential teaching phonics combines together the sounds of letters (alphabet) and their spellings. The aim of phonics instruction is to teach dyslexic children in the most common method to differentiate the sounds of the letters and their spelling.

The children with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) can find the alphabetic stage and also Tamil dyslexics while learning English as second language having difficulties in sound-symbol correspondence. In the special school we start for those children in letter-sound system. Based on rules which appear to be somewhat more regular than others, textbook writers organize the words into groups, and then teach the words group by group. For example, the letter **'c'** is pronounced as **'k'** before **a, o, u** or a consonant: *cat, cold, cute, cream*. It is pronounced as **'c'** (se **:**) before **e, i, y** in words such as *cease, cinema, cylinder*. Before **e, i, y** it is pronounced as **'k'** also in words such as *keep, kiss, sky*. It is also as **'k'** at the end of a word after a diphthong: *seek, make, strike*. It is pronounced as **'k'** also at the end of a word after a consonant: *ilk, honk, bark*. The phonic method, which has been very popular with the teachers and parents for a long time, in the western world, follows this arrangement for dyslexics' children. There are many such rules, not only for the consonants but also for the vowels. Exploiting such rules to understand and create sensitivity to the underlying spelling system is the focus of all the textbook writers in English. Sometimes explicit rules and explanations are also offered in these textbooks. Spelling continues to be one of the basic issues and problems in teaching and learning English to the Tamil dyslexic children.

Common Phonograms

The phonograms come under the rule based system. A phonogram, or rime, is a spelling pattern of a words family. There are 37 most frequently used patterns are available. From these patterns, a child could master over at least 500 primary words.

For example,

b
c
f
m
r   ◆at
t
v
p
s
h
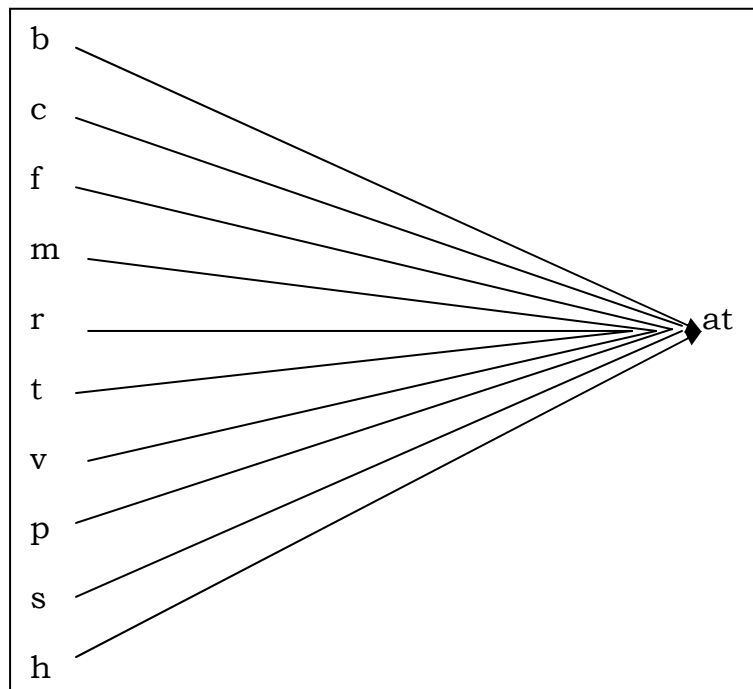
Reading Fluency

Reading fluency is ability to read connected text rapidly, effortlessly and automatically (Hook & Jones, 2004: Meyer 2002: National Reading Panel, 2000). Readers must develop fluency to make the bridge from recognition of words to reading comprehension (Jenkins, Fuchs, Van den Broek, Espin and Demo, 2003). In this component, the following three major parts are included.

a) Sight Words

b) Automaticity

c) Repeated Reading

a. Sight Words

Many poor readers have difficulty in reading fluency, because they do not identify words in the reading passage. With theirs energies focused on recognizing words, their reading is filled with long pauses and many repetitions. Fluent reading requires selection of sight words within the stock of vocabulary. When a selection contains too many difficult (non sight) words, the reading material will be too arduous and frustration for the readers. (Burns, Roe & Smith, 2002: Jenkins et al. 2003). The following sight words are read by whole-word recognition.

For example,

i	and	away	funny
a	big	blue	little
is	for	down	three
it	one	find	pretty
in	red	help	where
me	run	jump	white
my	the	play	yellow

b. Automaticity

Automaticity is the fast, accurate and effortless identification of words at the single word level. The speed and accuracy with which single words are identified is a key predictor of reading comprehension.

c. Repeated Reading

Guided oral reading procedures such as repeated reading will clearly improve reading fluency and overall reading achievement (National Reading Panel, 2000). The repeated reading method is single and straight forward, emphasizing practice and repetition so as to improve the fluency and accuracy.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary occupies a central position in learning to read. The vocabulary of the student has a significant effect on reading achievement and is related strongly to be reading comprehension.

Comprehension

The purpose of reading is comprehension that is gathering meaning from the printed page. All reading instruction should provide for the development of reading comprehensions. For many students with dyslexia, reading comprehension is a major problem. Comprehension skills do not automatically evolve after skills of word recognition.

Although most of the students with dyslexia eventually learn the basic of words, recognition skills may continue to have great difficulty with tasks that require comprehension of complex passage.

The foresaid materials are used in the special school to teach effectively the target (English) language. Children who are studied in the special school came from educated family, as well as financially high status family. Here the poor and

rural children are not able to receive the special education. Dyslexic children expectations are fulfilled and also motivated properly in special schools only.

3.Conclusion

The early childhood is very crucial for all children, but for the child with special needs in terms of mental, physical, behavioral, development or learning characteristics. It is suggested that, to use proper materials for language teaching to dyslexic children. The teacher should ask the management of the school (whether public/private) to provide modern tools and or materials for teaching dyslexic students. Further it is suggested that the *Ministry of Education* may take up necessary steps to diagnose the learning disability present in the children. They may be put up in special schools, because "those children are technologically well minded", says an American study. Every linguists and language teacher expected to report to the government about the cases of the school children having the problem of learning disability (difficulty).

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