UNDERSTANDING THE ENGLISH TEXTBOOK FOR EFFICIENT USE OF E-RESOURCES FOR QUALITY TEACHING OF THE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Employment and societal status are equated with knowing English. There was a whooping figure of 274% increase in enrolment in English medium schools in India between 2003 and 2011. However the quality of teaching the language is abysmal. Teachers' proficiency in English and teaching skills are looked at, as major problems in teaching English as a second language in India. Considering the linguistic diversity of the country and issues concerning language proficiency, most of the government of India has made provision for innovative e-resources in regional languages or with bilingual audio recordings. DIKSHA mobile app was launched in 2017. It is a digital platform with resources to teach English as a second language for schools functioning in 14 media of instruction. This paper intends to test the teacher's understanding of the English textbook and check its impact on their use of DIKSHA app. 80 teachers teaching English in the Hindi belt state of Chhattisgarh in the district of Dhamtari were the sample for the study. The location was chosen based on the linguistic diversity and a mix of tribal, rural and urban population residing here. The teachers' responses based on their pedagogical awareness and proficiency levels which are prerequisites to understand the textbook showed an interesting impact on their use of the app. Though the app seems to lend support to the most vulnerable teacher audience, it needs to work on its content to better the quality of teaching the language. The study highlights the possibility of literal consumption of information on pedagogy from various sources including the app but without the conceptual knowledge and proficiency needed to deliver the textual matter. However focus group discussions inverted these results to an extent making it evident that the teachers who spoke more of technology had been using other innovative pedagogy in class already. DIKSHA was only additional. Their seating arrangements interestingly threw light on how a compulsion or technological interventions on using DIKSHA in school had created a hierarchy among the teacher community. The more they spoke on the use and knowledge of DIKSHA in the text-book during the discussion, the higher they would be raised in the group present there. Their talk on DIKSHA decided their seating arrangements and their position in the hierarchy that nonetheless got created during the discussion and seems to exist generally also.

Thus the understanding of the textbook does impact the teachers' use of the app but the idea of understanding of the text-book in itself has changed to integrate now the understanding of codes and other directions for the simultaneous use of app. More than the actual use of the app, talking of the app got highlighted here.

English teaching & learning- The Problem

English, as a medium of education, and as a language of aspiration reigns the educational space in India at present. Employment and societal status are equated with knowing English.

There was a whooping figure of 274% increase in enrolment in English medium schools in India between 2003 and 2011 (Rahman, 2012).

However a majority of government schools are Hindi medium or teach in the regional language. The state governments are now looking forward to having more English medium government schools. One of the reasons that calls for government English medium is also the recent splurge of 65% in enrolment in private schools from 2006 to 2014 that offer English at an early stage. (Rao, 2018).

However the quality of teaching the language is abysmal.

Only 27.2% of grade III students in rural India in 2018 could read a text in their regional language meant to be read at their grade level (ASER, 2018). The introduction of English as a language to be learnt in schools at the primary level has a major impact on student's learning outcomes. Though there is a general preference for private English medium schools; a study conducted by an NGO, Stones2Milestones in urban private schools in 20 states in India indicated that only 12.5% in grade 4 showed an understanding of their textbook while only 2.7% in grades 5 & 6 recorded good comprehension skills (Thomas, 2018).

Teachers' proficiency in English and teaching skills are looked at, as major problems in teaching English as a second language in India. Only 9% of 7, 30,000 teachers could pass the National Eligibility test in 2012 (Rahman, 2012). The state of English teaching is worse in the Hindi belt states in India where even English is taught in Hindi (Rao, 2018).

Teacher being an important stakeholder and at the front of the chain of stakeholders affecting students' learning, it is crucial to equip the teachers with the required aid for effective teaching and learning processes in the classrooms.

DIKSHA, an EdTech innovation in English teaching in India

The government of India has initiated a number of online and e- platforms for teachers to access open educational resources to improve the quality of the teaching-learning process at scale. Considering the linguistic diversity of the country and issues concerning language proficiency,

most of the resources are available in regional languages or have bilingual audio recordings. The National Repository of Open Educational resources (NROER) in 29 languages and DIKSHA mobile app for schools functioning in 14 media instruction are innovative initiatives. DIKSHA i.e. 'digital infrastructure for knowledge sharing' was launched in 2017. It consists of lesson plans, worksheets and activities that support the teacher in easy and interactive execution of the lessons. It is not only a repository of digital tools but it also allows government as well as private organizations to upload and share data for their own initiatives and to set their own goals. The resources range from in-class resources to assessment tools which are ready to be used in the classroom. This material can be accessed in different languages. Every uploaded material has four tags, namely, state, medium, class and subject. The app follows a bilingual approach. The material is explained in the language of the textbook as well as the medium the user has made a choice of.

For the subject of English, the resources are available for schools that fall under 14 media of instructions in different states across India. The resources are in the Roman script like their textbooks but it has an audio explanation in vernacular.

The access to DIKSHA was made more convenient for teachers in 2019. A chapter wise QR code was created which is available to the teachers in the textbook itself. The teacher can now scan the QR code when teaching a particular chapter or doing an exercise from the textbook and get the material uploaded for it online. There is also provision for the teacher to download the required resources on their devices and use them offline.

Intent of the Study

I. Textbook & technology

The researcher considers the teacher's understanding of the textbook as an important factor that affects the teacher's use technology in the classroom. Since DIKSHA is an innovative attempt to support teachers teaching in classroom using bilingual media, the researcher feels the need to investigate the use of the app for teaching English as a second language.

This paper intends to test the teacher's understanding of the English textbook and check its impact on their use of DIKSHA app.

II. DIKSHA in Chhattisgarh

DIKSHA was officially launched in Chhattisgarh on 26th June 2019 (DIKSHA CG). The material has been uploaded in Halbi, Sargujia, Kururkh, Dantewada Gondi, Kanker Gondi

along with Chhattisgarhi which is their regional language. The QR Code linked educational materials are also multilingual (Reporter Raipur, 2019).

III. Teachers of Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh

The sample for the study is 80 teachers teaching English in the district of Dhamtari in Chhattisgarh. The teachers in the sample teach English from grades 1 to 8 in government Hindi medium schools. The state has 87.5% government schools with 1309 schools in Dhamtari. Currently, Dhamtari has only 1 government English medium school. The teachers' qualifications and years of teaching experience vary from teacher to teacher. The teachers were not asked to disclose these details for the sake of anonymity and to get an honest response on their use of the app.

IV. Chhattisgarh & Dhamtari

Chhattisgarh is situated in the east-central part of India. It being surrounded by Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra and has a multi-lingual population (Britannica).

Dhamtari is one of the smaller districts in the state. Dhamtari comprises of four blocks namely, Dhamtari, Nagri, Kurud and Magarload. Its diverse demography with Nagri being tribal, Magarload more rural and Kurud and Dhamtari being urban makes it an interesting terrain for the study of English teaching and the use of technology in these schools.

Method

The researcher reviewed the SCERT English textbooks of grades 1 to 8. Based on the textbook review, the researcher created a questionnaire to get basic quantitative response from teachers. Considering the fact that the individual responses on the questionnaire could have been copied or been filled with no actual understanding of the questions, the researcher arranged for focus group discussions on the teachers' experiences of using the app for English teaching.
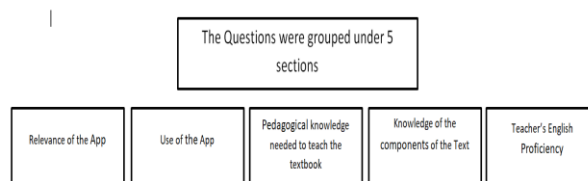
I. Book Review

Grade 6 textbook was considered for a review first, considering the grade to be a point of transformation from primary to upper primary. A list of concepts that appeared in the textual content was prepared. The following topics were enlisted:

Rhyming words, Nouns, Adjectives, synonyms, opposites, and pronunciation based, punctuation marks, dialogues, picture reading, spelling based, paragraph writing, simile, adverbs, prepositions, translation based and sentence sequencing.

The number of times these concepts appeared in the other textbooks was recorded through a simple tally method. It was found that rhyming words, nouns, adjectives, tenses and exercises based on vocabulary appeared for the most number of times through the chapters and the exercises.

II.   Questionnaire

Based on the results of the book review, a questionnaire was prepared to check the teacher's understanding of the textbook. It consisted of 5 sections with a set number of questions grouped under each section as below: .

The Questions were grouped under 5 sections				
Relevance of the App	Use of the App	Pedagogical knowledge needed to teach the textbook	Knowledge of the components of the Text	Teacher's English Proficiency

## III.   Focus group discussions for qualitative response

The researcher travelled to the location and made arrangements to meet the teachers in groups. Her questions and discussions were based on teachers' willingness to use the app and their experiences of using it, if they have used it until now.

Analysis & Findings

The analysis was primarily done based on the percentage of correct answers for the questions in 5 sections of the questionnaire.

It helped understand the teacher clientele for the app and in what areas could the resources in the app be developed to support the teachers.

1. It was found that the teachers performed well when it came to their pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of the textbook but their performance was poor in English proficiency and only 60% agreed to having used DIKSHA app.
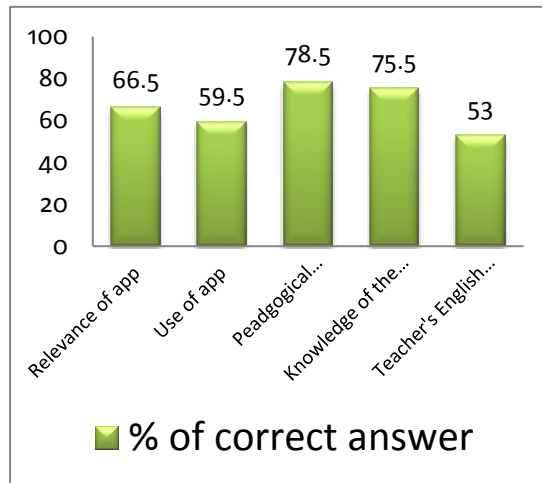
The glaring difference between the pedagogical knowledge and proficiency levels of the teachers led to a comparative question based analysis of the data.

The researcher compared the performance of the teachers on two specific thematic questions namely, rhyming words & parts of speech across the two sections in the following way:
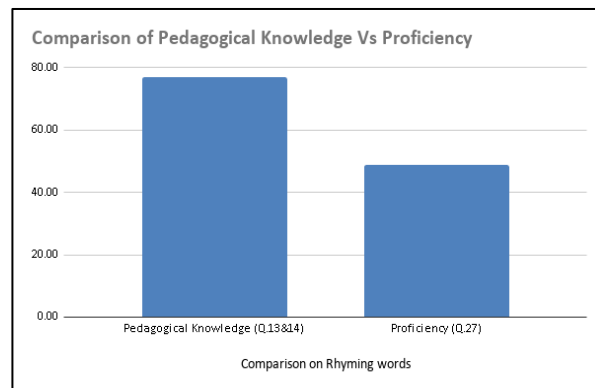
Rhyming words

Pedagogy based Questions
Q. 13 Rhyming words can be nouns or pronouns or verbs or adjectives
Q. 14 Rhyming words have the same spelling

Proficiency based Questions
Q. 27 The words 'way' and 'weigh' both mean different things but sound the same. They can still be called rhyming words


Parts of Speech

Pedagogy based Questions
Q. 11 Sound and spelling repetition can help in learning to read and write English
Q. 18 Colors can be used as nouns as well as adjectives
Q. 19 Word puzzles can be used for all parts of speech

Proficiency based Questions
Q. 28 The word black in both sentences is an adjective-
Black is a good color
I have a black jacket
Q 29 Can you make 6, 4 letter words from alphabet 'k'? List them.

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Comparison of Pedagogical Knowledge Vs Proficiency
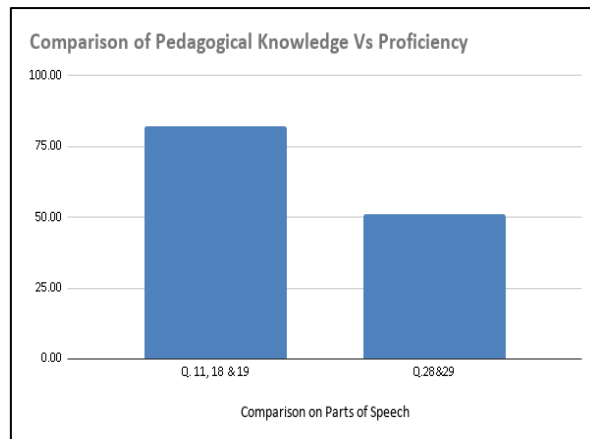
2. The discrepancy in the responses point at gaps in the conceptual understanding needed for the language and a non- functional pedagogical knowledge.

Next, it was important to see which category of teachers is actually using the app. For this the researcher broke down individual teachers' responses for their pedagogical awareness and proficiency levels into above average, average and below average and checked it against their use of the app.

It was found that:

3. A majority of teachers who had below average proficiency in English were using the app

Usage of Diksha Apps vs Proficiency Level
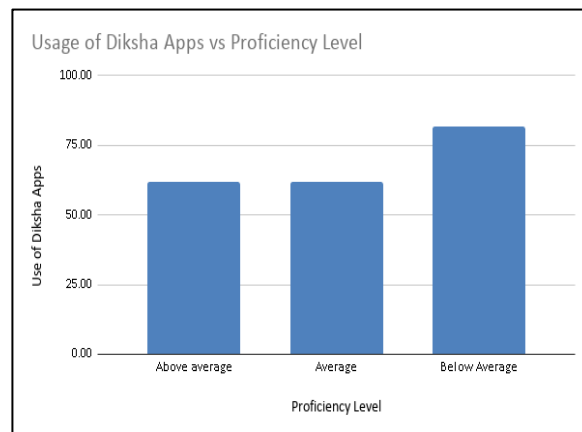
4. A majority of teachers who were either average or below average in pedagogical knowledge for teaching English were using the app.

Use of Diksha Apps vs Pedagogical Knowledge
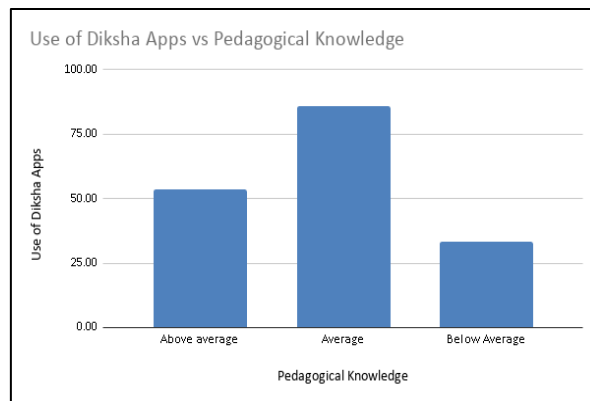
Implications of the study based on quantitative analysis

Clientele of the app:

- It was a positive observation that the app is providing the much needed support to the teachers who are poorer in their pedagogical knowledge & proficiency needed to teach English

- It is however important to innovate the app to encourage teachers who have the needed skills to teach the language.

Content of the app

- Bilingual content is a requisite for teachers teaching English

- Teachers understand the pedagogy explained to complete exercises in the textbook

- There is a possibility of teachers consuming too much material on pedagogy without having the proficiency needed for its effective execution

- The content needs to focus on improving the proficiency levels of the teachers

- The app needs to provide an explanation to why a certain pedagogy is being applied to a particular exercise

- The assessment on the app needs to explain the responses instead of just giving the correct response

Focus Group Discussion analysis

On the experience of the use of app:

- The choice of seating of the teachers spoke about their knowledge of the textbook and the app. The teachers who sat at the front spoke most, except for one teacher who sat at the back and had the app on the phone already.

- However, the understanding of the textbook was now equated with knowledge of the QR code and the directions on using the app with the textbook more than the language

- The talking on the QR code and directions in the textbook created a new hierarchy among the teachers present there. Those who spoke more were raised higher in hierarchy. This was evident from how the other teachers turned to them to strike a general conversation.
- Most of those who spoke were in the front.

On the willingness to use the app:

- All the teachers who were active in the discussion showed their willingness to use the app
- However, their willingness to use the app came with conditions on the government providing them with more devices like a projector, smart TV etc. to use the app effectively
- Having the app on their mobile phones was not considered an asset but more a hassle. Most teachers spoke of the files needing too much space on their phones.

Implications on qualitative feedback:

- Devices provided by the government are symbolic of efficient use of technology against teachers having access to educational apps on their personal device
- Teachers do not associate the use of personal devices for the purpose of use in classroom, especially when it comes in government packaging and labels like DIKSHA
- Mere knowledge and awareness of technical words like QR code associated with the app give confidence to the teachers to talk about the use of technology
- The idea of understanding of the textbook has changed from knowing about pedagogy and proficiency in the language to understanding of technology related words in the textbook
- Technology and use of the word DIKSHA in itself has created a hierarchy among teachers imposed over and above an already existing hierarchy on the content knowledge in English

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