

## **TEACHING ENGLISH TO THE PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH PHONETIC METHOD**

**\*Mr. SIVACHIDHAMBARAM RAMACHANDRAN, M.A., B.Ed., D.T.Ed,**  
PhD scholar, Department of Linguistics, Tamil University, Thanjavur  
Contacts: 9698558047 & pearsiva@gmail.com

**#Dr. PERUMAL KITTUSAMY, M.A., M.Sc., PhD,**  
Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics, Tamil University, Thanjavur  
Contacts: 9894787978 & drperumalkittusamy@gmail.com

**\*Corresponding Author**

**# Co Author**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

There are various methods and approaches that help the students of the primary school learn English efficiently. As far as the children who are studying in Tamil medium are concerned, learning English, which is a foreign language as well as the only subject that is not in their mother tongue, is undoubtedly a difficult task to achieve. Not all the pupils in the state of Tamilnadu are at the same level in reading, writing and speaking in English. The statistics say that there is a considerable amount of difference between the students studying under C.B.S.E scheme and Equitable Education (Samacheer Kalvi) scheme in terms of knowledge, understanding, application and skill. When we analyse even deeper, we can see a lot of differences between the students studying in English medium and Tamil medium and similarly the students studying in Private schools and Government schools. To be crisp, the exposure to English will vary due to various circumstances and factors. This research deals with the current status of the students in reading and writing English, who are studying in the Government schools and who hail from the rural areas as well, the various reasons for their difficulty in reading English, how the phonetic method helps them acquire the skill of reading English without much difficulty, how this method serves as a tool to enrich the skill of reading English, and how far this will be helpful to the other schools, in other words, to the society.

It is the responsibility of the primary school teacher to teach the children English in an exciting and exhilarating method so that the children should feel fun and be active in learning English and should not show a bitter eye against English. So, one of the best

ways to teach English to the primary level kids is to employ the phonetic method, as this method does not only include mere teaching of the sounds of the English letters but also include many entertaining and playful activities such as singing rhymes to get accustomed to the English speech sounds, small conversations, role plays, spelling games, many motivational activities, reinforcing and remedial activities, etc.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

- According to Stephen Parker, *"A primary goal in this reading program is to get your child to independent reading as quickly as possible. This is especially important for a child who has already fallen behind. You'll want to keep specialized vocabulary, rules, and rote-memorizing to an absolute minimum. So while she will need to know the meaning of "vowel" and "consonant," she will not need to learn any specialized notation and she'll not be required to memorize more than a few sight words."*
- According to A.Gideon, *"In accordance with this oral basis, pronunciation is considered of prime importance. Painstaking care is necessary at the outset, since the pupil already speaks his own tongue, to have him hear the peculiarities of the foreign sounds and to enable him to utter them himself. For this purpose recourse is had to the assistance offered the schoolroom by the physiology of speech sounds, the science of phonetics. The pupil is taught the organic positions and movements requisite to produce the sounds in question. For the purpose of simplifying this task many adherents of the reform movement make a more or less extended use of phonetic symbols."*
- According to the British Council, *"Phonics is a method of teaching young learners how to read which focuses on how letters make sounds, and how these sounds make words."*

## **COMPELLING NEED:**

One of the most essential skills that a primary school pupil needs to acquire is the skill of reading. If acquiring that very skill itself seems like a huge target to achieve,

then it will certainly be the area which every primary school teacher should focus on. Because, unlike their mother tongue Tamil, there is no harmony between the letters and sounds of the English alphabet i.e. there is no one to one relationship between the letters and sounds of the English alphabet. According to the level of reading skill, the students in every English class can be divided into three kinds, viz.

- (i) those who read English words and sentences well,
- (ii) those who read English words and sentences in a medium level  
and
- (iii) those who are not able to read English words.

Statistics show that in every Tamil medium school in fifth standard in the state of Tamilnadu, there are 25% of students in the second kind and 25% of students in the third kind in an average, whereas, in the Private schools where the medium of instruction is English, the level of achievement in reading and writing English is comparably high. So, gradually, year by year, the total strength of Government schools has begun to decrease and the total strength of Private schools has begun to increase. In many districts of Tamilnadu, there are many Government Primary schools which have less than ten students in total. Though most of the parents realize that qualitative teaching is provided to the students through their mother tongue in the Government schools, owing to their desire that their children should speak and write fluently in English, they join their children in private schools where the medium of instruction is English. So, what needs to be done in the Tamil medium schools without fail is that emphasis must be shown on teaching and learning English. But the exposure to English is very low since English is the only subject which is taught in English medium and the time the students spend to learn English happens only in the English period and in the rest of the periods they will be influenced by their mother tongue. Thus, a permanent solution should be found to enhance the skill of reading and writing English in the primary schools in which the medium of instruction is Tamil.

**SCOPE:**

The scope of the phonetic method is, first of all, to help the students read English in a systematic and proper way. The primary focus is on decoding the sounds of the English words and to read the words with correct pronunciation. In this method, the sounds of the English language are made known to the students, ever since they start schooling i.e., from first standard itself, so that understanding the sounds of the English alphabet and decoding the sounds will be easier to the students and they will be able to read English without much difficulty. Systematically, the students will achieve the desired target, which generally is not achieved as per the studies. The other aim of this study is to create zeal among the primary school students in learning English and to cast away their fear in learning English. Following the phonetic method in teaching English to the primary school students will definitely show progress in the achievement level of the students in learning English and therefore the strength of the Government schools will also increase as a result, which will certainly be a boon to the society.

#### **LIMITATIONS:**

The primary school students from the whole state of Tamilnadu cannot be taken as samples as they are large in number and the time required will be high to take all of them as samples. So, the researcher has taken students from the primary school students of the Thiruvavur district as the samples. As reading and writing English is a challenge to the students, it is not appropriate to take materials having hard and polysyllabic English words. So, the prescribed textbook would serve as an apt material for them.

#### **DELIMITATIONS:**

The researcher opted to select the students from first standard to fourth standard as they would be the pertinent group of students for this research. Among the four basic skills, the main focus is shown on the skill of reading.

#### **UNIVERSE AND SAMPLING:**

The primary school students studying in Tamil medium from the whole state of Tamilnadu is the universe of the researcher. But, the samples that the researcher has

chosen is a number of 60 primary school students who are studying in Tamil medium in Panchayat Union Middle school, *Vizhalkottagam* in Thiruvarur district of Tamilnadu. The sampling technique used was "Simple Random Sampling".

### **HOMOGENEITY:**

As per the study, the students having their primary education in Panchayat Union Middle School, *Vizhalkottagam* who are taken as samples for this research, hail from various family and social backgrounds and most of their parents are illiterates. Half of them are below the poverty line and one of the main reasons why their parents send their children to school is in order to get the free midday meal served in the school. Most of their parents are daily wages and they spend most of their time in working, drinking and quarrelling with each other. The students, too, are very much influenced by their genetic behaviours and only a few students are interested in Education. Most of their parents do not know the significance of education and as a result the attendance rate of the students is always low.

As far as the personal hygiene of the students is concerned, most of the students from and from the surroundings of *Vizhalkottagam* are not that better. There is hardly anyone in the home of the students to help them in their studies. Half of the pupils do not do their home works and follow up works. Some students are psychologically affected and influenced by their family backgrounds. At the same time, it is undeniable that there are some students who are perfect in their studies and in their behaviours. There are some parents who render their support and cooperation very much to the school. Although there are so many diversities among the students in economic, social, physical, psychological, political, behavioural aspects, the homogenous nature of the samples taken is that they are all studying in the same school and the environment and situations within the school campus is alike. So, this is the common feature found among the samples.

### **DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND DURATION:**

The major tools used for data collection are Voice Recorder, Flash cards having a letter or a cluster of letters of the English alphabet on each side and the other tools are

Textbooks, Projector, Laptop and some real objects. The time taken to implement this method and to get good result is an average of 30 days.

### **METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION:**

The method of data collection is Simple Random sampling and the elucidation of data analysis is done by recording the students' voices while they read with the help of a voice recorder.

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS METHOD:**

In this research, every English class is scheduled with three activities viz.

- (i) Rhyme time,
- (ii) Teaching learning activities  
and
- (iii) Conversation.

### **Rhyme time:**

The first section of the implementation of phonetic method in teaching English to the primary school students is Rhyme time. Generally, it is one of the best methods to sing rhymes in order to fascinate the children and to gain their attention. An interesting rhyme is sung by the teacher with proper pronunciation, rhythm, pauses and most importantly with actions or the rhyme in the form a video is displayed on the screen with the help of a projector and the students are asked to sing the rhyme with actions. By singing the rhymes, the children will easily grasp the speech sounds of the English language without much difficulty and this definitely serve as a motivation to them. An example for a rhyme is as follows.

*"Baa, baa black sheep,*

*Have you any wool?*

*Yes sir, yes sir,*

*Three bags full:*

*One for my master;*

*One for my dame,*

*One for the little boy*

*Who lives up the lane."*

### **TEACHING LEARNING ACTIVITIES:**

This is indeed the most crucial step in teaching English to the primary school students through Phonetic method. Flash cards are prepared in such a way that a flash card should contain one letter (both upper and lower cases) of the English alphabet on one side and another letter (both upper and lower cases) on the other side. Some flash cards should contain cluster of letters. Among the 44 sounds of the English language, the consonant and vowel sounds are taught individually to the students with the help of the flash cards containing letters.

- The flash cards containing the letters Pp on one side and Bb on the other side, Tt on one side and Dd on the other side, Kk on one side and Gg on the other side are shown one by one to the students and the teacher has to teach them only the respective sounds of those letters. The teacher has to show the letter Pp and has to produce the sound /p/ and by turning that very card to its another side has to show the letter Bb and has to produce the sound /b/ by keeping his/her palm on the throat to make the students understand the difference between those two confusing sounds. For the sound /p/ the teacher should not keep his/her palm on the throat as it is a voiceless consonant and it should be done only for the sound /b/ as it is a voiced consonant. After enough teaching, the teacher has to practise the students to produce the sounds by showing one side of the card and asking the students to produce the sound /p/ and by turning to the next side of the card and asking the students to produce the sound /b/. Similarly, the letters Tt, Dd, Kk, Gg are taught and practised to the students. The teacher should not forget to not keep the palm on the throat while teaching the sounds of Tt and Kk

(/t/ and /k/ respectively), and to keep the palm on the throat while teaching the sounds of Dd and Gg (/d/ and /g/ respectively).

- Similarly, the sounds of all the consonants are taught and practised to the students with the help of the flash cards containing letters.
- The teaching of the sounds of the vowels of the English alphabet needs to be shown much care, because each of the 5 vowels has more than one sound and on a whole there are 24 vowel sounds. We should not confuse the students by differentiating some vowel sounds which are only subtly different. For example, as per the study, the students from the rural areas hardly find any difference between the sounds **/ɒ/** , **/ɑ:/** and **/ɔ:/** . So, when the students are not able to differentiate between the minutely different sounds while teaching the sounds of the vowels of the English alphabet using the flash cards, the teacher has to be flexible and should not insist perfection as it can be perfected in due course of time. The various sounds of the vowels Aa, Ee, Ii, Oo, Uu and the semi-vowel Yy have to be taught very clearly.
- The letter Aa has 8 sounds. They are as follows:
  1. **/ə/** as in ago, about, above, abnormal
  2. **/ɑ:/** as in father, answer, car, mark
  3. **/æ/** as in apple, ant, plan, cap
  4. **/eɪ/** as in table, gate, change, base
  5. **/ɪ/** as in what, want, wrath, wander



6. /ɔ:/ as in call, fall, all, water

7. /ɪ/ as in message, luggage, baggage, passage, village, homage

8. /eə/ as in care, bare, share

- By showing the flash card containing the letter 'Aa', the teacher has to teach and practise the first four sounds to the students as those are the sounds which are mostly used.
- The places where a same letter changes its sounds are also taught and practised to the students. For example, the letter 'a' has the sound /æ/ when it comes in between two consonants. For instance, words like can, fat, bad, man, rat, etc. has the afore-mentioned sound of 'a'. But, when the letter 'e' is added in the end, the sound of the 'a' becomes /eɪ/ as in the words cane, fate, bade, mane, rate, etc.
- Similarly, the sounds of the other vowels Ee, Ii, Oo, Uu and the semi-vowel Yy are taught and practised.
- Then, the consonant clusters are taught and practised using the flash cards having the consonant clusters on them. For example the sounds of the consonant clusters 'sc', 'sl', 'sm', 'sn', 'sp' and 'st' are taught and practised to the students as /sk/, /sl/, /sm/, /sn/, /sp/ and /st/. Similarly, often used consonant clusters are taught and practised to the students.
- After making the students get accustomed to all the important sounds of the English language, the teacher has to train the students to decode the sounds of a given word and to read that word. Words with two letters are practised first. For example, an, as, us, in, on, go, do, to, etc. Then gradually words with three letters, four letters, five letters will be practised to read. Then, monosyllabic words, disyllabic words, trisyllabic words, polysyllabic words will be taught. For example, the word "cat" is pronounced as

/k/ + /æ/ + /t/ = /kæt/

- Rhyming words are also taught to enrich the students' understanding of the sounds of the English language. For example, bat, cat, mat, pat, rat, sat, etc.
- When reading gets better, then writing also gets better. In every class, writing practice is also given in the form of dictation.

### **Conversation:**

At the end of each English class, a small conversation is practised in order to increase the exposure given to the English language. For example,

Teacher: Can you give me your pencil, Siva?

*Siva: Yes, sir! Here it is, sir!*

*Teacher: Thank you, Siva!*

*Siva: You're welcome, sir!*

### **ELUCIDATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS:**

After enough of training through the phonetic method in reading English, the textbooks of the students are used as an evaluative tool and the students were asked to read the sentences and paragraphs and were evaluated and their performances were recorded in a record sheet. All their voices are recorded using a voice recorder. The students who decode the sounds and read the sentences easily were appreciated.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

Out of the 60 students who were taken as samples, 49 students were able to read the English words without difficulty and 41 students were able to write the English words. Many students read the English words quite easily and with proper pronunciation. Some people got confused in reading the words like 'said', 'through', 'our', 'clue', the past form of the word 'read', etc. Then, the exceptions and rare cases were

instructed to the students. Most of the late bloomers were from the first standard, who certainly need some more time to get acquainted with the skill of reading and writing English. Reinforcement and remedial teaching would develop those students, too.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Hence, every primary school in which the medium of instruction is Tamil can use the phonetic method to teach English to the students to get the desired achievement within the desired time. However there are certain limitations, too, in using this method. For instance, this method is aimed only in reading and writing and not in decoding the meaning of the words. Moreover the pupils may get confused between the names and sounds of the letters, as the sounds are taught first before the names are taught in this method. But, through repeated and consistent efforts, the afore-mentioned problem will be rectified.

## **REFERENCES:**

1. Parker, Stephen. *The Reading Disability Crisis: How Parents Can Reclaim Control*. Boston: Royce-Kotran, 2018.
2. Calkins, Lucy. *The Art of Teaching Reading*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 2001.
3. Gates, Arthur. "Studies of Phonetic Training in Beginning Reading." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 18 (1927): 52-69.
4. Gates, Arthur. "Studies of Phonetic Training in Beginning Reading." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 18 (1927): 52-69.