



EXAMINING READING COMPREHENSION AND FLUENCY AMONG GOVERNMENT ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN NAGALAND: A STUDY

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Abstract

The fundamental objective for language education is to develop the four language skills—Listening, Speaking, Writing and Reading also known as LSWR. The present paper delves into understanding the reading skill levels of elementary students in Nagaland. The study was impelled by researches showing persistent gaps in reading proficiency among students in government schools. To understand and assess reading comprehension and fluency levels of elementary students in government schools in Nagaland the research adopted a descriptive research approach was adopted, with a sample of 200 Class V students and 15 teachers from government schools in Kohima district. For this study, the researcher developed a Reading Comprehension Scale aligned with SCERT learning outcomes, an adapted Reading Fluency Scale, questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The findings indicate wide variation in students' reading abilities, with the majority performing below grade expectations in both fluency and comprehension. The study highlights the need for contextually appropriate assessment tools, improved instructional practices, and targeted interventions to strengthen foundational reading skills.

Keywords

Reading Assessment, Elementary Education, Reading Comprehension, Government Schools, Nagaland, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Reading is one of the most essential skills that children develop in the early years of schooling. As emphasized in the National Education Policy 2020, the ability to read with understanding must be firmly built during the elementary stage. It is during these formative years that children learn not only how to read words on a page but also how to make sense of them. This ability becomes the foundation for learning across all subjects and significantly shapes a student's future academic journey.

Language learning generally aims to develop four fundamental skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Among these, reading holds a particularly important place because it supports learning in every other area of education. An effective reading is not limited to recognizing words but it involves two closely connected sub-skills that are reading fluency and reading comprehension. Reading fluency refers to the ability to read text accurately, smoothly, and with appropriate pace and expression. Comprehension, on the other hand, involves understanding the meaning of the text, interpreting ideas, and connecting them with prior knowledge. When students develop both fluency and comprehension, reading becomes meaningful and purposeful rather than a mechanical activity.



Preliminary observation suggests that elementary students in Nagaland display weak skills in English reading fluency and comprehension. This struggle in their reading skills has serious consequences that extend beyond the language classroom. All prescribed textbooks and written materials are primarily written in English language and the impact can be felt in the other entire subject's comprehension. The National Education Policy 2020 also recognises such challenges found across the country and advocates achieving universal Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) in the early years of schooling. The policy acknowledges that unless children acquire basic reading skills that are inclusive of fluency and comprehension by the end of the foundational stage, their future learning may remain significantly hindered.

In line with this national concern, the present study examines the reading abilities of elementary students studying in government schools in Nagaland. It particularly focuses on their levels of reading fluency, comprehension, and overall reading proficiency. By exploring the nature and extent of these challenges, the study also seeks to identify the factors that hinder the development of effective reading skills among these learners, thereby contributing to a better understanding of literacy development in the region.

Initial observation as mentioned earlier suggest that despite sustained efforts and multiple interventions by government agencies, reading comprehension continues to remain a major challenge for both teachers and students in government schools. A particularly alarming trend observed especially among government students is the decline in students' academic performance as they progress to higher grades is a possible indication that foundational literacy skills were not being adequately developed at the elementary level. To substantiate this observation, the present study assessed the reading levels of students at the elementary stage in government schools. A total of 200 students and English language teachers participated in the study. Data were collected using a self-construed Reading Comprehension Test and a Reading Fluency Test, and a questionnaire to capture students' reading habits, attitudes, and classroom experience.

Objectives of the Study:

- ❖ To assess the Reading Fluency level of the selected participants.
- ❖ To evaluate the reading comprehension level of the selected participants.
- ❖ To identify the major causes of poor Reading Comprehension among elementary students in Government schools in Nagaland.
- ❖ To examine the reading methods employed by teachers.
- ❖ To propose remedial measures to address the identified issues.

Research Questions:

- ❖ What is the level of reading fluency among the selected elementary students?
- ❖ What is the level of reading comprehension among the selected participants?
- ❖ What are the major factors contributing to poor reading comprehension among elementary students in government schools in Nagaland?
- ❖ What reading methods and instructional strategies are employed by teachers in teaching reading?
- ❖ What remedial measures can be suggested to improve reading fluency and comprehension among elementary students in government schools in Nagaland?

Significance of the Study:

Reading with comprehension remains a persistent and widespread challenge among students in government schools in Nagaland, largely because English is the medium of instruction in schools, which is neither the mother tongue of students nor teachers. In addition, only a limited number of studies have been conducted that specifically contribute to educational policy or provide clear



guidance for effective teaching methods in the context of Nagaland. This gap makes it necessary to undertake research that reflects the realities of the region's classrooms and learning environments.

The present study seeks to address this need. The researcher has designed reading fluency and comprehension assessments that are contextualized to the learning experiences of students in Nagaland. In doing so, the study takes into account the state's unique multilingual environment and backgrounds of students. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of literature on reading development and literacy education in the region. The study can also contribute to educational policies, teaching strategies, and classroom practices, particularly in improving reading fluency and comprehension among elementary students.

Methodology and Procedures:

To achieve the objectives of this study, a descriptive research design employing random sampling was adopted. The sample comprised 200 Class 5 students of government schools in the Kohima district of Nagaland, along with 15 teachers from 15 schools.

Sr. No.	Government School	No. of Students	Sr. No.	Government School	No. of Students
1.	Government Middle School, Meriema	14	9.	Government Middle School, L Khel	13
2.	Government middle school, Chandmari	14	10.	Government Middle School, Chuziema	13
3.	Government Primary School, AG	14	11.	Government Middle school, Forest Colony	13
4.	Government Primary School New Secretariat	14	12.	Government Middle school, New Market	13
5.	Government Middle School, P Khel	14	13.	Government Primary School, Garuzou	13
6.	Government Middle School, BSF Camp	13	14.	Government Primary School, Ruziezou	13
7.	Government Middle School, D Khel	13	15.	Government Middle School, Lerie	13
8.	Government High school, PWD	13			
Total number of schools: 15					
Total number of students: 200					

Data Collection:

Data were gathered through school visits, classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires, along with two tests developed specifically for this research: a Reading Comprehension Test and a Reading Fluency Test.

The Reading Comprehension Test (Test 1), based on an extract from a Class 5 English textbook, aimed to assess students' ability to understand written text. Each student was given 15 minutes to complete the test, which included eight comprehension questions evaluating understanding and interpretation.

Following the test, students completed a questionnaire capturing their background, learning attitudes, and reading habits, supplemented by short informal interviews. A teacher questionnaire was also administered to collect information on teachers' professional profiles and reading



practices. Both the researcher and class teachers were present to assist students during this process.

The Reading Fluency Test (Test 2) involved each student reading a passage aloud individually, without any external assistance or correction, to measure natural reading fluency. Each reading session was audio-recorded for detailed analysis.

Parameters for Assessing Reading Fluency and Comprehension:

Reading Fluency Parameters:

The table presented below has been developed to reflect the educational realities of government schools in Nagaland through a systematic review and adaptation of established reading fluency scale. For this study, an adapted version of the Rasinski Reading Fluency Scale was employed to assess the reading fluency of elementary students in government schools, with due consideration given to students' diverse linguistic backgrounds, prevalent pedagogical practises and classroom conditions. During data collection, it was observed that a number of students could not be classified under level 1 of the original Rasinski fluency scale. Consequently, an additional category, level 0, was introduced by the researcher to accurately capture the reading abilities of these learners. This modification was necessary to ensure that the assessment tool was contextually appropriate, valid, and reliable for measuring reading fluency within government schools in Nagaland, thereby enabling more meaningful insights into students' literacy development.

Reading Fluency Scale:

Domain	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Expression and Volume	No expression; struggles with decoding and recognition.	Minimal expression; reads quietly and mechanically.	Partial expression; attempts natural rhythm inconsistently.	Near-natural expression and volume; occasional lapses.	Expressive and enthusiastic reading with appropriate variation.
Phrasing	Reads letter by letter.	Reads word by word, monotone delivery.	Short, hesitant phrases; frequent pauses.	Moderate phrasing; some run-ons or misplaced pauses.	Natural phrasing with correct stress and intonation.
Smoothness	Frequent pauses, hesitations, and repetitions.	Regular disruptions and restarts.	Some rough spots; extended pauses on difficult words.	Occasional pauses, mostly self-corrected.	Smooth consistent reading flow.
Pace	Very slow and laboured	Slow and effortful.	Moderately slow.	Consistent but uneven pacing.	Conversational, natural speed.

The Reading Comprehension Scale:

The Reading Comprehension Scale was developed in alignment with the learning objectives and expected learning outcomes prescribed by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Nagaland for government schools in Nagaland. In the absence of any standardized

reading comprehension assessment currently in use within Nagaland context, the scale was independently developed by the researcher to address the gap.

Reading Comprehension Scale:

Level	Descriptors / Indicators
Level 0	Limited knowledge of alphabets and letter sounds. Struggles to identify letters and read even basic words. Lacks fluency in reading.
Level 1	Can read simple or familiar words. Displays minimal interest in reading. Unfamiliar with letter sounds to pronounce unfamiliar words. Can only scan for very specific information with significant assistance.
Level 2	Reads aloud slowly. Unfamiliar with punctuation in text. Capable of locating very specific information only. Able to relate simple ideas to prior knowledge with help. Makes simple connections between words and sentences and able to transfer simple information from text to writing.
Level 3	Able to relate simple ideas to prior knowledge with help. Responds to questions directly from the text. Fluent in reading aloud and silently. Recognizes the main theme or author's purpose in a text. Uses punctuation appropriately.
Level 4	Reflects on and responds to questions. Can guess meaning of unfamiliar words from context. Expresses personal opinions, likes, and dislikes about a text. Able to infer meaning from text. Applies reading strategies effectively to comprehend text. Reads between the lines and beyond.

Presentation and Interpretation of Data:

Reading Comprehension Assessment:

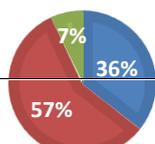
The results show a wide range of comprehension abilities, with 34% (68 students) scoring below 1 out of 10, 58% (117 students) scoring below 5 out of 10, and only 7% (15 students) scoring 5 or above, indicating that many students struggle to grasp textual meaning, suggesting reliance on rote memorization rather than true understanding.

Reading Fluency:

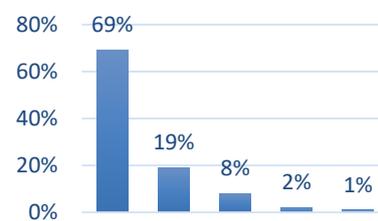
Analysis of the reading fluency test, adapted from Rasinski's scale with an added Level 0, showed that 69% (139 students) were unable or unwilling to read, 19% (39 students) demonstrated emerging fluency, 8% (16 students) had moderate fluency, 2% (5 students) showed good fluency, and 1 student was proficient, indicating that most students are at lower fluency levels and highlighting the need for targeted reading interventions.

READING COMPREHENSION SCORES

■ Below 1 ■ Below 5 ■ 5 & above



Reading Fluency Levels



Level 0 Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Level 4



Teachers' Questionnaire Interpretation:

An examination of teacher's profiles in government schools in Nagaland revealed that majority of the teachers held graduate-level academic qualifications while one teacher possessed a postgraduate degree. All participating teachers have professional teaching qualifications (B.Ed.) in compliance with teaching requirement. Teaching experience varied from 14 of them at 0-9 years to 1 teacher having more than 16 years of teaching experience. In addition to this, all the participating government school teachers had received in-service professional training and have also participated in 1-5 workshops or training programmes.

Despite this professional qualification, classroom observation and interviews indicated that while all of them were aware of language and its sub-skills, the practical application of these subskills in classroom practice remained limited. Pedagogical practices in the classroom remained largely traditional and teacher-centred, with emphasis on direct instruction and minimal opportunities for student participation in the classroom. Activities such as guided or independent reading aloud were infrequent. Finding shows a notable gap between teachers' awareness of language skills and their classroom implementation underscoring the need for more practice-oriented professional development and pedagogical support for the teachers.

General Classroom Observations:

- ✓ Student–Teacher Ratio: The student-teacher ratio varied widely across schools, ranging from a low of 3:1 to as high as 42:1, indicating considerable disparities in classroom composition.
- ✓ Teacher Attention: In classrooms with higher enrolment, opportunities for individualised teacher attention were limited, impacting students' motivation and engagement.
- ✓ Student Attentiveness: while most students appeared attentive during class, overall engagement inside classroom remained generally low.
- ✓ Reading Activities: Classroom reading activities were minimal, with reading aloud typically limited to a few selected students. No explicit or systematic instruction in reading skills was observed.
- ✓ Teaching Pedagogy: Instructional practices were predominantly traditional and teacher-centred, with limited interaction; students mostly passively copied notes.
- ✓ Teacher Preparation: Teachers appeared comfortable due to familiarity with subjects.
- ✓ Student Engagement: Participation was observed among only a small proportion of students with few students asking questions or contributing to classroom discussion reflecting a predominantly passive learning environment.
- ✓ General Motivation Towards Learning: In government schools in Nagaland, the majority of the students come from disadvantaged socioeconomic background and face heavy domestic responsibilities, leading to irregular attendance, incomplete homework, and very limited study time at home. Despite teachers/ professional training, low student engagement and lack of reading practice is negatively affecting motivation to learn.

Summary of Key Findings:

- ✓ The findings reveal that a large number of students struggle to read texts appropriate for their grade level. The reading fluency assessment shows that 69% of the students (139 out of 200) were either unable or unwilling to read the given passage. Only 2% (5 students) demonstrated good fluency, and just one student reached the proficient level. During the assessment, it was observed that many students attempted to read letter by letter or word by word, which slowed



down their reading and made it difficult for them to understand the text. In several cases, students hesitated or refused to read aloud, suggesting a lack of confidence and limited exposure to regular reading practice. These patterns reflect weak foundational reading skills and point to a serious concern regarding literacy development at the elementary level in government schools.

- ✓ The comprehension test results further highlight the challenges students face in understanding written texts. The data show that 34% of the students (68 students) scored below 1 out of 10, while 58% (117 students) scored below 5 out of 10. Only 7% (15 students) were able to score 5 or above. These results indicate that a majority of students find it difficult to grasp the meaning of what they read. In many cases, students may be able to recognise or pronounce words, but they struggle to interpret the ideas conveyed in the text. This suggests that reading in many classrooms may still be focused more on memorisation than on meaningful understanding.
- ✓ The high number of students who were unable or unwilling to read also reflects a broader issue of weak reading habits. When students are not regularly engaged in reading activities, they miss important opportunities to develop vocabulary, become familiar with sentence structures, and strengthen their thinking skills. Over time, the absence of regular reading practice makes it more difficult for students to improve their fluency and comprehension, which can widen the learning gap as they progress to higher grades.
- ✓ The fluency results also show that only 19% of students (39 students) demonstrated emerging fluency, and 8% (16 students) showed moderate fluency. This suggests that many students may not be receiving enough opportunities for guided and consistent reading practice in the classroom. Although facilities such as reading corners and school libraries are expected to support reading development, they often remain underused. Regular and structured reading sessions could play an important role in improving both fluency and comprehension by allowing students more frequent interaction with texts.
- ✓ Another important observation from the study is the low level of motivation among students towards reading. The reluctance shown by many students during the reading assessment indicates that reading may not yet be seen as an engaging or enjoyable activity. In addition, students appear to have limited awareness of useful reading strategies, such as predicting meaning, asking questions, summarising information, or using context clues. Without these strategies, students often struggle to make sense of the text they read.

Answering the research questions:

1. What is the level of reading fluency among the selected elementary students?
The findings show that reading fluency among the majority of students is low. About 69% of the students were unable or unwilling to read the passage, while only a small proportion demonstrated moderate or good fluency with only one student from the selected participants reached a proficient level.
2. What is the level of reading comprehension among the selected participants?
The results indicate weak comprehension levels among many students. 34% scored below 1 out of 10, 58% scored below 5, and only 7% scored 5 or above, suggesting that most students struggle to understand the meaning of the text they read.
3. What are the major factors contributing to poor reading comprehension among elementary students?

Poor reading comprehension was found to be influenced by several factors, including low reading fluency, limited exposure to English, weak reading habits, lack of reading strategies, limited access to reading materials, and disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.



4. What reading methods and instructional strategies are employed by teachers in teaching reading?

The study found that teaching practices remain largely traditional and teacher-centred, with emphasis on textbook-based instruction and limited use of guided reading, independent reading, or strategy-based learning activities.

5. What remedial measures can be suggested to improve reading fluency and comprehension among elementary students in government schools in Nagaland?

The study suggests strengthening teacher training in reading instruction, adopting learner-centred teaching strategies, providing regular opportunities for guided and independent reading, effectively utilising school libraries and reading corners, and encouraging parental and community support to promote reading habits.

Conclusion:

The findings of this study show that many elementary students in government schools in Nagaland continue to struggle with reading fluency and comprehension, which significantly affects their ability to learn across subjects. Limited reading practice, traditional classroom methods, lack of exposure to English, and students' socioeconomic challenges all contribute to this problem. The study highlights the need for stronger support systems within schools, including improved teacher training, more learner-centred reading instruction, and greater use of libraries and reading spaces. Encouraging regular reading practice in classrooms and strengthening support from parents and communities can also help build better reading habits among students. By addressing these issues and strengthening foundational literacy, government schools in Nagaland can help students read with confidence, understand what they read, and ultimately improve their overall academic learning.

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