

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS: MULTIMODAL TEACHING FOR FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY UNDER NIPUN BHARAT MISSION

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Abstract

Children start language learning since birth. As they grow and develop, their speech and language skills become increasingly complex. They learn to understand and use language to express their thoughts and emotions and to communicate with others. A child's reading and writing skills play a crucial role in determining how well they will perform in school and how useful they will be to society later in life. Although reading and writing skills continue to improve throughout life, the early years of childhood are the most critical for development. Strong reading and writing abilities not only allow students to explore the world of imagination and creativity, but also make understanding various subjects easier and more accessible. However, the ability to read and write does not develop naturally; it requires proper planning and implementation. Teachers and educational approaches that provide children with regular opportunities to express them in written and spoken formats, without forcing them into grammatical perfection or ideal handwriting. It enables students to truly grasp the purpose of these skills and become more valuable contributors to society.

Key Words: Language development, NIPUN Bharat, FLN, NEP 2020, Educational strategies

Introduction

Children come to school with their own language, experiences, and ways of viewing the world. The experiences they bring from home, family, and surroundings are rich and valuable. Their linguistic experiences should be used as a foundation for learning language. When a child first comes to school, they are already familiar with the meanings and effects of many words (Chandra, 2019). However, written symbols and the sounds associated with them are abstract for children, so reading should begin with meaningful content and serve a purpose. For example, the purpose could be to enjoy listening to and reading a story.

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Once children become familiar with written language, they naturally develop a curiosity for reading and understanding it, which leads to knowledge creation (Mallett, 2002; Flynn et al.,

2006). This creation is not driven by pressure or instruction but emerges from children's own experiences and needs. Therefore, it is essential to provide children with an environment where they can freely explore their surroundings according to their curiosity without restrictions. This same principle applies to their language development as well (Meitei et al., 2024; Fitzgerald et al., 2000).

When children come to school, they often find it difficult to express themselves freely because the language they are most comfortable using to express their thoughts, experiences, and emotions is usually not accepted in the school settings. Language teaching needs to be understood within a multilingual context. Children in the classroom come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Their languages should be welcomed in the classroom, as rejecting a child's language is essentially rejecting their identity. At the primary level, it is crucial that children are able to use language appropriately in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts. They should be able to write in a simple, imaginative, effective, and organized manner, using precise words to make their language expressive (Tiwari, 2021). It is also important that children, across all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), are able to construct meaning using their prior knowledge and understand the implied meanings of what is said. Reading and writing are the two main components of language learning.

Why 'Reading' And 'Writing'?

Reading, understanding, and responding are the core aspects of a rich reading process. It is not merely a book-based skill but a complex activity. In other words, reading is essentially a meaningful task. It involves deriving meaning from printed or written content based on context and inference. It's also important to understand that every piece of content has its own unique structure, and grasping that structure aids in interpreting meaning accurately.

Writing becomes a meaningful activity only when children are given the freedom to write in their own language, imagination, and perspective. They should be provided opportunities to develop their own language and style rather than merely copying from blackboards, books, or what the teacher has written (NCERT, 2017). The aim of

acquiring reading and writing skills is not merely for children to go through their textbooks or respond to end-of-lesson queries. The true purpose is to empower them to read and write meaningfully for various purposes. The process of learning to read and write should also incorporate the idea that different purposes require different approaches to reading and writing (Misquitta et al., 2023).

How one reads depend on the purpose of reading. For instance, reading an advertisement is different from reading a text book. Similarly, in writing, it's important to consider the audience (whom are we writing for?). If we are writing information about the school sports day for students and teachers, the content and language will differ from when it is meant for parents or the community (Philomina, 2015; Tiwari, 2023). In both cases, the writing style and language naturally change. Likewise, the purpose of reading determines how the reading is approached. For example, when someone reads a school notice about the annual day celebration, their focus will be on key details such as the date, venue, and time of the event.

Reading and Writing at the Preparatory Stage

At the preparatory stage, children are expected to respond and ask questions based on what they hear or write. Their use of language reflects whether they understand grammar well. However, to develop this grammatical understanding, it is necessary to help children identify various aspects of language through relevant texts and connections to their surroundings (NCERT, 2017). Their attention should be directed toward different language usages so they can grasp nuances and apply them appropriately in their own language. In terms of language learning and classroom environment, it's important to recognize that strategies used at one level can also benefit students in higher grades. Engaging and age-appropriate content should be selected to help children become familiar with different styles and tones of language and use them effectively. In this regard, diverse and interesting children's literature plays a vital role.

All language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are interconnected and support each other's development. They should not be treated as separate skills (Rose, 2008; McLachlan, 2013). For example, listening to or reading a piece of literature and then discussing it, expressing one's thoughts, or asking questions is linked to reading comprehension as well as listening and speaking abilities. Thus, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are integrally

connected.

Review of Literature

The foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) in India are critical components of the country's educational development, with recent literature emphasizing both the current status and the multifaceted challenges involved. Kumar & Behera (2022) highlighted the significant influence of the home environment on children's foundational skills, indicating that socio-economic and familial factors play a vital role in early literacy and numeracy acquisition. This underscores the importance of contextual factors in shaping foundational learning outcomes.

The national policy framework, particularly the NEP 2020, aims to prioritize foundational literacy and numeracy as core objectives within a broader educational reform agenda. Bhardwaj and Bamrara (2023) described how NEP 2020 envisions universal access to quality education, with specific emphasis on achieving foundational skills for all children by 2025. The policy advocates for curriculum reforms, pedagogical innovations, and strengthened teacher training to support this goal, reflecting a systemic approach to addressing FLN challenges. Practical pedagogical approaches aligned with these policy directives are explored and emphasized play-based and experiential learning strategies in early childhood education (Meitei et. al., 2024). These approaches are designed to enhance engagement and facilitate foundational skill development, aligning with the policy's emphasis on holistic and child-centered pedagogy.

Despite these initiatives, studies reveal persistent gaps in FLN achievement. Inadequate skills hinder not only current learning but also future academic progression, with assessments indicating that many students, especially in rural government schools, struggle with basic tasks like subtraction (ASER 2024). Efforts to address these issues are supported by initiatives like NIPUN Bharat, which emphasizes foundational learning as a national priority. The recent reports underscore that progress is evident but uneven, with ongoing challenges related to resource allocation, teacher preparedness, and curriculum implementation. The state of FLN in India remains a concern, with research highlighting the need for targeted interventions to bridge learning gaps and ensure universal foundational skills (Bhardwaj et al., 2023).

Overall, the literature indicates that while India has made substantial policy commitments and implemented innovative pedagogical

strategies, achieving universal foundational literacy and numeracy remains a complex challenge. Addressing socio-economic disparities, enhancing teacher training, and adopting contextually relevant pedagogies are essential for advancing FLN in India (Kumar et al., 2022; Meitei et al., 2024).

Objectives

The following are the objectives of this research study:

1. To improve reading and writing skills, as these enhance the brain's ability to connect with events, thereby increasing attention span and focus.
2. To enhance regular reading practices among students, enabling them to strengthen their skills in sentence construction, correct word usage, and spelling. An expanded vocabulary empowers children and boosts their confidence.
3. To strengthen a child's creativity, analytical skills, and imagination, which helps students, express their thoughts more effectively in public settings.

Activities Used in The Research

Various activities were conducted with students in the classroom through both digital and in- person modes to enhance literacy skills at the preparatory level. These interactions were conducted with fifteen students from Grade 3, Grade 4, and Grade

Story Completion

This activity fosters a strong sense of creativity among the students. Typically, we had narrated a story or discussed a concept. However, in this activity, after presenting a partial story or concept, we asked the students to complete it on their own. This provided ample scope for self-expression and exploration. The idea sparked healthy brainstorming sessions. There was noticeable enthusiasm among the students to participate in this activity. It promoted both self-directed learning and collaborative learning. Additionally, it catered to all three types of learners auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. This activity was conducted with students among Grades 3, 4, and 5.

Students as Authors

Stories are a powerful medium of expression that provides students with opportunities to expand their vocabulary, sentence structure,

and flow of ideas. As part of this exercise, learners were encouraged to compose a narrative at the start of each week. Their stories were inspired by the themes covered during lessons. We encouraged them to write short stories inspired by their everyday experiences. During the project duration, students maintained a notebook dedicated to writing such stories. The feeling of being an author empowered them to write more and to further develop their writing skills. This activity was conducted with Grades 4 and 5 students.

Audio-books

Using the library and reading books are fundamental activities for students. To assess what they read and learned from a book, students were typically asked to present a book review. Through this activity, students were not only encouraged to become enthusiastic readers but were also motivated to share the most interesting and important facts they encountered during their reading. Students maintained a notebook to write down significant quotes, phrases, etc., and would read the noted content aloud in front of the class. We recorded their readings on our phone and saved the files as audio recordings. The objective behind this activity was to cultivate a reading habit among students and to enhance their speaking and expressive skills. When students listened to their own audio stories, they felt more excited about reading and learning. Evaluation was based on both written and oral presentation. This activity was conducted with students of Grades 3, 4 and 5.

Predicting the Climax

This activity served as a creative and innovative way to re-imagine traditional stories. It broadened students' thinking and helped them develop a problem-solving approach to various real-life situations. Additionally, it contributed to the enhancement of their language skills and vocabulary. Traditional stories were shared with students through online platforms, and they were encouraged to imagine and create a different climax based on their own creativity. This activity was conducted with students of Grades 4 and 5.

Data Analysis

Assessment is a key component of learning as it supports students in their learning process and enables educators to adapt instructional strategies according to learners' needs. In the present study, assessment was conducted using a structured tool developed in alignment with the "Learning Outcomes (Elementary)" document published by NCERT, New Delhi. For each identified learning outcome,

a test comprising 10 questions was designed to assess specific reading and writing competencies. The same structure was maintained across all three phases to ensure uniformity and comparability. Each correct response was awarded one mark, making the maximum score 10 for each learning outcome. Students were systematically assessed in three phases: Phase 1 (baseline, before the start of the study), Phase 2 (midline, in the 14th week), and Phase 3 (end-line, at the end of the 28th week). The scores obtained were converted into percentages, and improvement was calculated by comparing baseline and end-line scores using the formula:

$$\text{Percentage Improvement} = \frac{\text{End-line Score} - \text{Baseline Score}}{\text{End-line Score}} \times 100$$

This method enabled objective measurement of growth in students' reading and writing skills over time.

Learning Outcomes for Grade 3

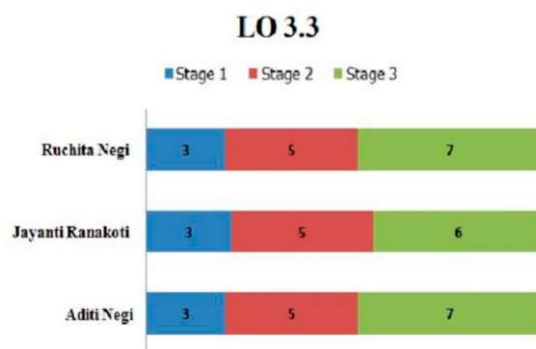
The research study found that Learning Outcome 3.1 (Listens to and responds to oral communication, stories, poems, etc., with attention and gives feedback) was progressively achieved. All three students showed an improvement of up to 57.1% in their learning levels.



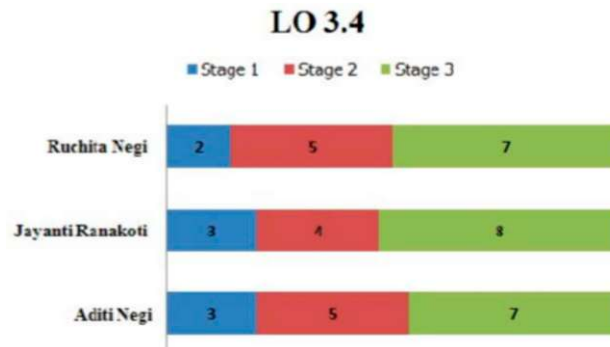
The research study found that Learning Outcome 3.2 (Narrates stories, poems, etc., with appropriate intonation, expression, pace, flow, and voice modulation) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 57.1%, 66.7%, and 50%, respectively.



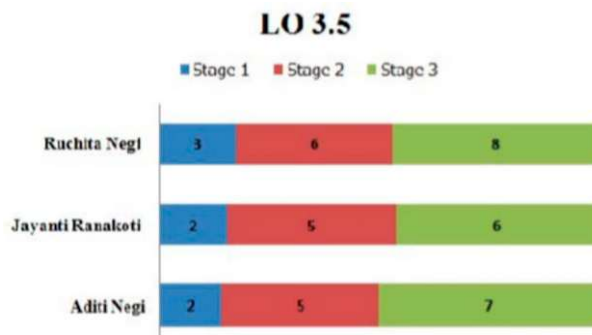
The research study found that Learning Outcome 3.3 (Describes, discusses, and asks questions about activities/events happening around them and their experiences in various situations) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 57.1%, 50%, and 57.1%, respectively.



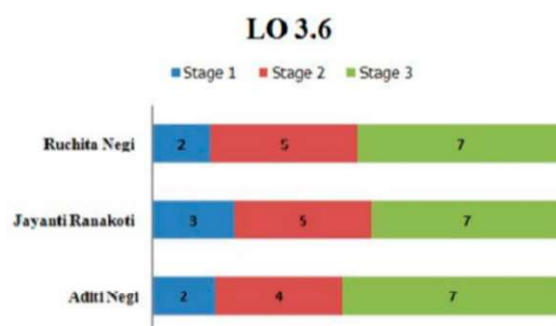
The research study found that Learning Outcome 3.4 (Reads and understands various types of texts/materials such as newspapers, children's magazines, etc., asks questions based on them, expresses opinions, and answers questions both orally and in writing) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 71.4%, 62.5%, and 57.1%, respectively.



The research study found that Learning Outcome 3.5 (Uses punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, and question marks consciously while writing for different purposes) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 62.5%, 66.7%, and 71.4%, respectively.

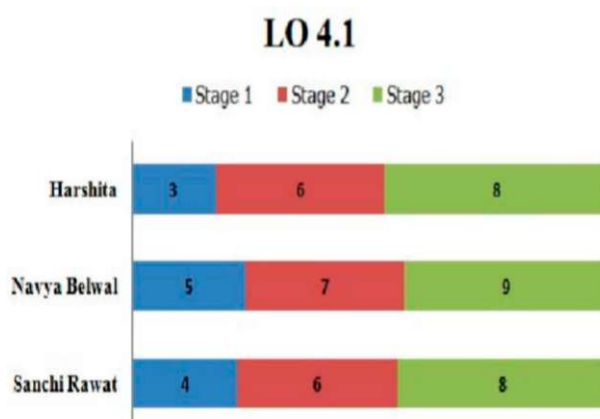


The research study found that Learning Outcome 3.6 (Writes self-regulated texts with conscious attention to spelling, either voluntarily or as part of teacher-assigned activities) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 71.4%, 57.1%, and 71.4%, respectively.



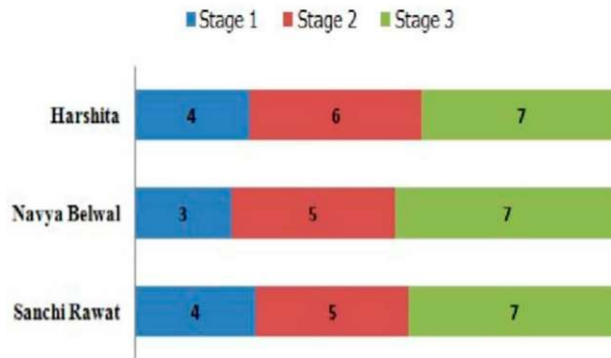
Learning Outcomes for Grade 4

The research study found that Learning Outcome 4.1 (Listens carefully to what others are saying and responds by expressing opinions and asking questions) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 50%, 44%, and 62.5%, respectively.



The research study found that Learning Outcome 4.2 (Retells stories, poems, or other content in their own words and adds their own story or ideas) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 42.9%, 57.1%, and 42.9%, respectively.

LO 4.2



The research study found that Learning Outcome 4.3 (Reads and comprehends their textbook as well as other materials such as children's literature, newspaper headlines, children's magazines, hoardings, etc.) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 62.5%, 42.9%, and 62.5%, respectively.

LO 4.3



The research study found that Learning Outcome 4.4 (Connects the read material with personal experiences and expresses the resulting feelings and ideas through original/oral or written expression) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 50%, 62.5%, and 42.9%, respectively.

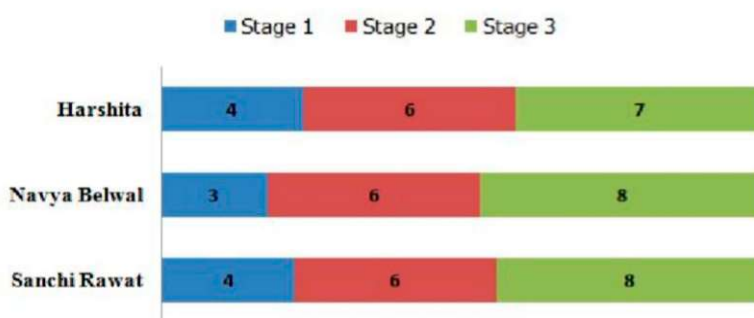
LO 4.4



The research study found that Learning Outcome 4.5 (Writes with awareness of language nuances such as word repetition, pronouns, adjectives, gender, number, etc.) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 62.5%, 50%, and 37.5%, respectively.

The research study found that Learning Outcome 4.6 (Uses punctuation marks such as full stop, comma, and question mark consciously while writing for different purposes) was progressively achieved. All three students showed improvement in their learning levels by 50%, 62.5%, and 42.9%, respectively.

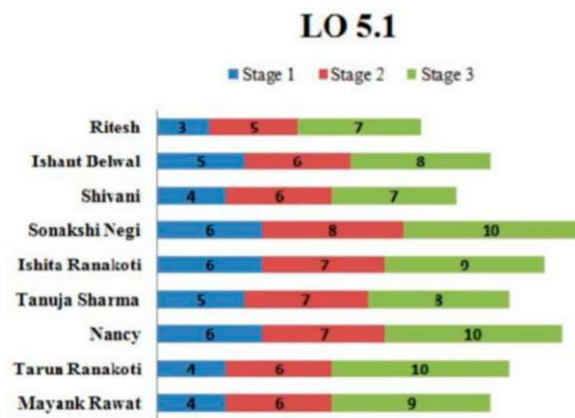
LO 4.6



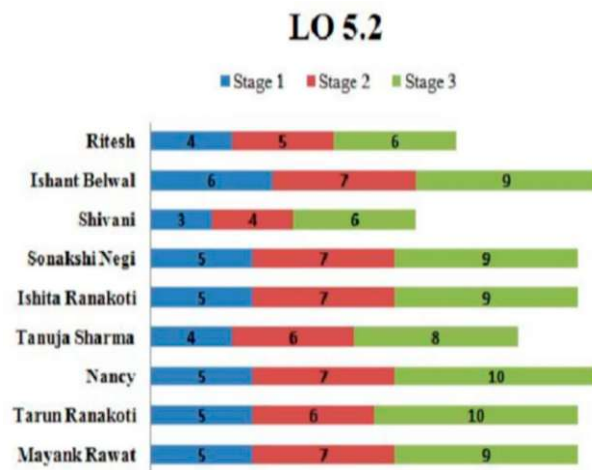
Learning Outcomes for Grade 5

The research study found that Learning Outcome 5.1 ("Engages in discussions/questions/gives independent comments/justifies their views/draws conclusions about listened or read compositions, subjects, events, pictures, characters, titles, etc.") was progressively

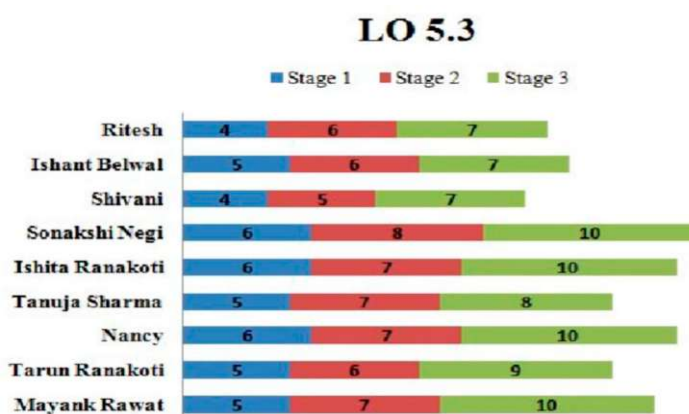
achieved. All nine students showed improvement in their learning levels by 57.1%, 37.5%, 42.9%, 40%, 33.3%, 37.5%, 40%, 60%, and 55.6%, respectively.



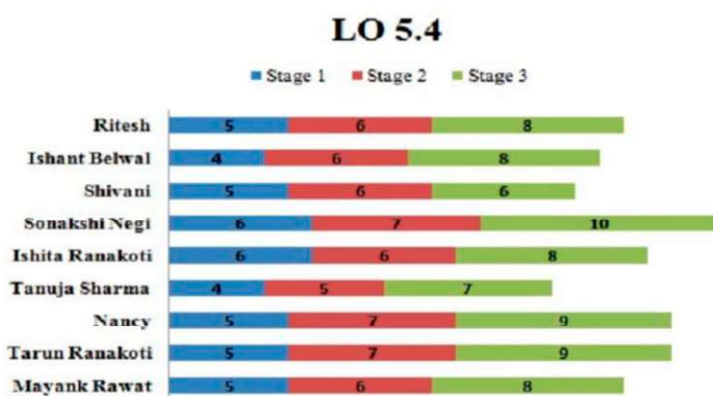
The research study found that Learning Outcome 5.2 (“Develops their oral language by paying attention to the nuances of language”) was progressively achieved. All nine students showed improvement in their learning levels by 33.3%, 33.3%, 50%, 44.4%, 44.4%, 50%, 50%, 50%, and 44.4%, respectively.



The research study found that Learning Outcome 5.3 (“Expresses verbally or in writing the sensitive points found in various types of language materials such as newspapers, children’s literature, posters, etc.”) was progressively achieved. All nine students showed improvement in their learning levels by 42.9%, 28.6%, 42.9%, 40%, 40%, 37.5%, 40%, 44.4%, and 50%, respectively.

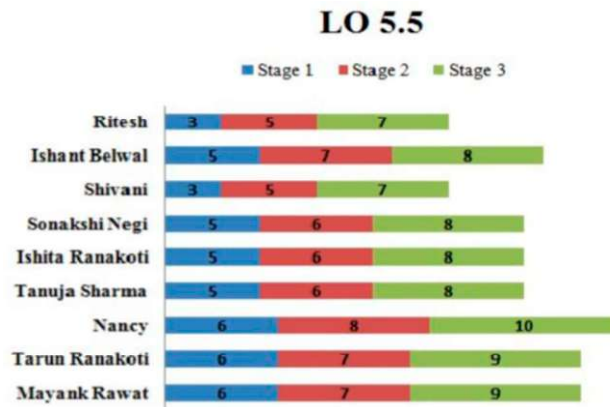


The research study found that Learning Outcome 5.4 (“Reads and comprehends materials other than the textbook (such as newspapers, children’s magazines, hoardings, etc.) and talks about them”) was progressively achieved. All nine students showed improvement in their learning levels by 37.5%, 50%, 16.7%, 40%, 25%, 42.9%, 44.4%, 44.4%, and 37.5%, respectively.

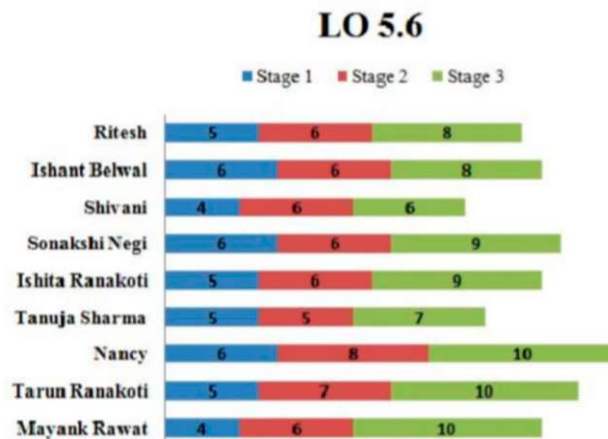


The research study found that Learning Outcome 5.5 (“Consciously use punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, question marks,

and quotation marks in their writing for various purposes”) was progressively achieved. All nine students showed improvement in their learning levels by 57.1%, 37.5%, 57.1%, 37.5%, 37.5%, 37.5%, 40%, 33.3%, and 33.3%, respectively.

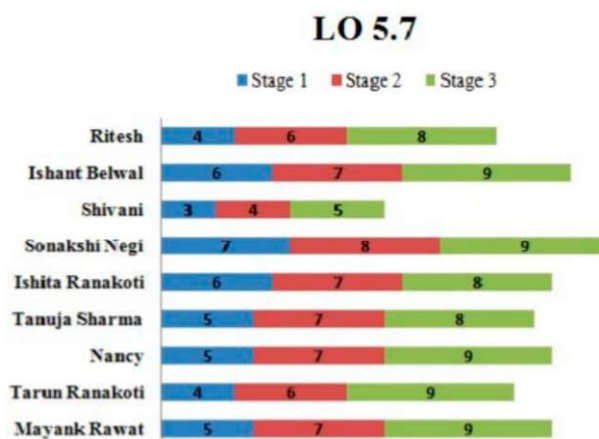


The research study found that Learning Outcome 5.6 (“Voluntarily or under teacher-assigned activities, students review their writing with a better understanding of the writing process and make changes according to the purpose of writing and the audience”) was progressively achieved. All nine students showed improvement in their learning levels by 37.5%, 25%, 33.3%, 33.3%, 44.4%, 28.6%, 40%, 50%, and 60%, respectively.



The research study found that Learning Outcome 5.7 (“Students write stories, poems, letters, etc., using their imagination. They also continue

writing by extending poems or stories”) was progressively achieved. All nine students showed improvement in their learning levels by 40%, 33.3%, 40%, 22.2%, 25%, 37.5%, 44.4%, 55.5%, and 44.4%, respectively.



Conclusion and Implications

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four fundamental components of language learning. In the early preparatory stage, reading and writing become more prominent skills compared to listening and speaking. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) outlined clear educational objectives (LOs) that learners are anticipated to accomplish by the conclusion of every academic level. During the study, six learning outcomes for Grade 3 and Grade 4, as well as seven learning outcomes for Grade 5, were identified and mapped to the learners' reading and writing skills.

Before starting the study, learners' levels were assessed, and innovative activities such as story completion, students as authors, audio-books, and predicting story endings were conducted both inside and outside the classroom. Students participated enthusiastically in all activities because there was no pressure to complete them, and learners could engage in the activities according to their own interest. Most activities were either unrelated or only minimally related to the textbooks, which encouraged learners to complete them independently or with assistance.

The audio-book activity was highly appreciated by parents because the audio clips created by their children were presented during Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs), instilling a sense of pride in the parents. All students brought 15 to 20 new stories they had written, which empowered them to write more in the future and also improved their vocabulary. These self-written stories were sent for publication in renowned children's magazines and newspapers' children's corners.

Furthermore, there was an average 50% improvement in students' learning levels aligned with the identified learning outcomes related to reading and writing skills. These innovative activities enhanced learners' concentration and strengthened their brain's ability to focus. The activities attracted students and motivated them to read and write, as these habits had declined due to more digital engagements at home. Regular reading practice helped students develop better sentence formation and correct use of words and spelling. Vocabulary expansion empowered children and improved their academic performance.

Reading strengthened the students' creativity and imagination, which laid a strong foundation for concepts like coding and programming. These skills helped students communicate and speak publicly more effectively, which also led to improvements in memory and analytical abilities.

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