

Analyzing the Requirement for Module-Based Reading Intervention for Children with Reading Difficulties in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Reading proficiency is a fundamental skill crucial for academic success. However, some children encounter reading difficulties stemming from decoding or linguistic comprehension challenges. This need analysis aims to identify the reading fluency module needs for junior secondary school students in Sri Lanka who have reading difficulties. The objectives are to find out the teachers' awareness of children with reading difficulties, to find out the teachers' perception of module needs for teaching reading to children with reading difficulties, and to find out the need for Smart Reading Module (SRM) development. An adapted questionnaire was used, involving 164 (59.8% female and 40.2% male) junior secondary teachers from the Puttalam South Division in Sri Lanka. SPSS version 29 facilitated robust data analysis. The surveyed teachers, 78.7% recognized reading difficulties as significant obstacles. A striking 93.9% supported teaching children with reading challenges, emphasizing the importance of reading fluency for academic success and the potential for effective intervention programs. Moreover, 85% found teaching reading to such children highly challenging. Additionally, 82.3% highlighted the necessity of a structured module for reading instruction. Furthermore, 90.9% advocated for Smart Reading Module (SRM) resources, including teacher guides with guidance and lesson plans for effective teaching.

Keywords: Need Analysis, Teaching Intervention, Children with Reading Difficulties, Sri Lanka.

Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill critical to a child's academic and personal development. It is a cognitive process that involves various skills working together to derive meaning from text (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). The acquisition of reading skills is a crucial milestone in a child's educational journey, often beginning in primary school (Lachmann, 2018). Reading is a complex human behavior with the ultimate goal of comprehension, which is the ability to understand and interpret written text (Westerveld et al., 2020). The ability to read is a

significant predictor of a student's future academic performance, making early literacy achievement a focal point in early childhood education (Auletto & Sableski, 2018).

Literacy, closely linked to reading, plays a vital role in individual lives and society at large. Reading is integral to education, employment, leisure, and social interactions, with literacy being highly valued for its contributions to social and economic progress (Qrquez & Rashid, 2017). Fluent reading skills serve as a foundational element for academic success, yet many children encounter challenges in the process of learning to read (Clayton et al., 2019). It is expected that children acquire reading skills at an early age, but some face hurdles due to decoding or linguistic comprehension difficulties.

Children grappling with reading difficulties confront significant obstacles throughout their educational journey. Sri Lanka, like many other nations, has a portion of its student population experiencing reading difficulties. This study offers an overview of the current landscape of reading difficulties. Moreover, it emphasizes the potential of module-based teaching interventions as a viable solution to address this pressing issue.

Literature Review

The Children with Reading Difficulties

Reading difficulty is one of the problems in learning to read. It is a common problem in reading which occurs in individuals who are of normal intelligence. Children with weaknesses in both word reading and language comprehension are referred to as generally poor readers (Colenbrander et al., 2018). Reading comprehension draws on both decoding and linguistic comprehension, and poor reading comprehension can be the consequence of a deficit in either of these skills (Snowling et al., 2019). Struggling readers struggle in both decoding and linguistic comprehension (Capin, et al., 2021). Poor readers in primary school usually have difficulties with word reading. They often fail to especially make the transition from letter-by-letter phonological recoding to recognizing words directly by lexical access (Müller et al., 2020).

Children and adolescents with reading difficulties display a range of potential difficulties related to foundational academic skills, including deficits in basic word reading, decoding unfamiliar words (i.e., using phonological processing to sound them out), reading words accurately and fluently, and comprehending written material (Ward et al., 2018).

Garden variety poor readers are not considered to have dyslexia if they have lower intelligence or have missed educational opportunities. Garden variety poor readers have underdeveloped reading circuits as a result of insufficient instruction and developmental delay (Farukh, et al., 2020). It is important to remember that when investigating reading fluency among poor readers, their reading rate and reading accuracy are lower than that of their peers. Also, poor readers tend to produce a higher number of reading errors as well as have similar difficulties with reading prosody (Ceylan & Baydik, 2018).

Early identification and Intervention play a crucial role in the reading development of children with reading difficulties. Reading intervention programs provide the foundation for the educational success of students, especially those who are considered struggling readers (Auletto & Sableski, 2018). Ideally, children who are at risk for reading failure should be identified before the onset of reading instruction and provided with special attention and support to prevent reading failure (Poulsen et al., 2017). Children with low reading skills had lower language skills than the group with high reading skills. Early intervention to develop language skills helps children to read fluently (Reikerås & Dahle, 2022). Educational

intervention can help dyslexic students to overcome their problems, otherwise, it will continue affecting an individual's life (Franklin, 2018).

Current Interventions for Reading Difficulties

The educational policies in Sri Lanka, designed to cater to the unique needs of children with disabilities, have been reinforced by right-to-education policies that aim to foster inclusive practices. However, in Sri Lanka, a notable disparity exists between the outlined policy objectives and their practical implementation, particularly among government ministries responsible for disability-inclusive education (Grimes & Cruz, 2021). Despite Sri Lanka's enduring commitment to free education since 1948, a considerable number of schools in the country encounter challenges in delivering accessible facilities and adequately trained educators to support students with disabilities, primarily due to disparities in available resources (Nanayakkara, 2022).

Sri Lanka currently lacks a national-level program for identifying and addressing reading difficulties among students, with minimal attention devoted to specific learning disorders like dyslexia (Hettiarachchi, 2021). Consequently, students with special needs receive inadequate support both from teachers and school administrations (Kasturiarachchi, 2020).

Research on inclusive education for all students in Sri Lanka has revealed that children with special needs have been overlooked due to a lack of awareness. Shockingly, 97% of teacher trainers and 94% of teachers in the country lacked a clear understanding of dyslexia. This lack of awareness, coupled with delayed identifications, significantly contributes to the struggles faced by slow learners (Indrarathne, 2019). Data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) highlights a worrisome pattern in student achievement, where 87.38% of students score below the passing mark of 40, primarily due to poor reading skills (NEREC, 2016). To address these issues, studies recommend a comprehensive focus on policy and practices in Sri Lanka. Key suggestions include developing a screening tool that is translated and validated in both Sinhala and Tamil, early identification and intervention, and awareness programs for healthcare workers and teachers (Hettiaarachi, et al., 2018).

Additionally, studies focused on special education underscore the subpar performance of special education in Sri Lankan schools. Peries et al., (2021) study on primary school teachers' readiness to identify children with dyslexia found that over half of the participants lacked adequate awareness of the tools and processes used to identify dyslexia in their context. However, they exhibited positive attitudes toward engaging in the identification of dyslexia.

Furthermore, heavy workloads have left teachers struggling to effectively address the needs of students with special needs. In the study, three-quarters of teachers reported difficulties in teaching students with special needs (Furuta & Alwis, 2017). Notably, the interventions in the Sri Lankan context have been primarily focused on Sinhala-speaking children, often failing to identify poor readers and provide research-based assistance.

The Need for Module-Based Teaching Interventions

The goal of a needs assessment is to precisely identify existing gaps, evaluate the associated costs, and determine which gaps require immediate attention. Needs analysis, as an integral component of this process, delves into the gaps identified during the assessment (Matusky, 2018). A needs assessment serves as the systematic documentation of the disparities

between current outcomes and desired outcomes. Professionals can overcome challenges and enhance the effectiveness of their organization's needs assessments, thereby improving performance and adding measurable value both within and outside the organization (Kaufman & Christensen, 2019).

In the realm of language teaching, identifying needs takes center stage in course design, especially when adopting a learner-centered approach (Ozdemir, 2018). Needs analysis, as the initial phase, focuses on recognizing learners' requirements and desired outcomes. Consequently, a needs analysis has been conducted to ascertain the necessity of module-based interventions for junior secondary children encountering reading difficulties in Sri Lanka.

This needs analysis aims to discern the level of awareness among teachers and their need for module-based instructional interventions tailored to Tamil-speaking children with reading difficulties in Sri Lanka. Surprisingly, no prior studies have explored the prerequisites for interventions specifically designed for Tamil-speaking children grappling with reading difficulties. As a result, there exists a compelling and immediate demand for the identification and development of module-based teaching interventions that cater to the unique needs of this group of children in Sri Lanka.

Study Objective

The primary objective of this research is to assess the need for module-based reading interventions for children facing reading difficulties in Sri Lanka. The specific goals are

- To find out the teachers' awareness of children with reading difficulties,
- To find out the teachers' perception of module needs for teaching reading to children with reading difficulties, and
- To find out the need for Smart Reading Module (SRM) development.

Methodology

With permission from Peries et al. (2021), the survey questionnaire was modified, validated, and translated into Tamil to identify the module's need for teaching intervention. Then the researcher prepared the Google form in four pages with instructions. The survey questionnaire was sent to randomly assigned contact of the 164 teachers of junior secondary classes in Tamil medium schools of the Puttalam South Educational Division. Participants were given access to the Google form via email and WhatsApp. The researcher confirmed the participants' participation via WhatsApp message and instructed them to complete the online survey and save it with their phone numbers. Moreover, they were encouraged to respond to the survey with small remuneration for the mobile top-up.

The need analysis questionnaire was computed in SPSS ver. 29 for analysis. The questionnaire's Part 1 basic biographical data and Part 2 survey questions on teachers' general knowledge of reading difficulties were both analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Cross-tabulation analysis was used to examine how Part 3 teachers perceived module needs and Part 4 teachers' needs for module development.

Results

Background Information

Part I of the need analysis questionnaire encompassed essential biographical inquiries aimed at gathering respondents' background information. These inquiries encompassed gender,

school type, current main grade/class of instruction, primary subject of teaching, classroom student count, highest educational attainment, and teaching experience.

A total of 164 teachers actively participated in this study, offering their insights into the module requirements for enhancing reading fluency among junior secondary students grappling with reading difficulties in Sri Lanka. The participant demographics showcased a gender distribution, with 59.8% being female and 40.2% being male junior secondary educators. Notably, many of these teachers work in crowded classrooms. The majority of respondents identified as Tamil language teachers, while social sciences and teachers of other subjects constituted the secondary respondent group. Approximately one-third of the participants held university degrees, with the remaining teachers being trained in their respective fields. It's noteworthy that 39.9% of teachers represented the younger demographic, possessing 1 to 5 years of teaching experience, while 40.1% were seasoned educators with 11 years of experience or more.

Teachers' General Knowledge and Awareness of Children with Reading Difficulties

The first objective is to find out the teachers' awareness of children with reading difficulties. Part 2 of the need analysis questionnaire is about the teachers' general knowledge of reading difficulties which is analyzed with descriptive statistical methods. This part included 12 questions that were separated into two sections. Question 1 to 3 are on the teachers' knowledge of children with reading difficulties and Question 4 to 12 is on the teachers' awareness of children with reading difficulties. Table 1 shows the teachers' general knowledge and awareness of reading difficulties.

Table 1

The teachers' knowledge and awareness of children with reading difficulties

		Frequency	Percent
Teachers' Knowledge of Children with Reading Difficulties	Disagree	2	1.2
	Neutral	33	20.1
	Agree	112	68.3
	Strongly Agree	17	10.4
	Total	164	100.0
Teachers' Awareness of Children with Reading Difficulties	Disagree	1	.6
	Neutral	9	5.5
	Agree	98	59.8
	Strongly Agree	56	34.1
	Total	164	100.0

Table 1 presents noteworthy findings regarding the teachers' awareness of children facing reading difficulties. Notably, a substantial percentage of teachers displayed a strong level of awareness, with 10.4% strongly agreeing and 68.3% in agreement. Additionally, 20.1% expressed a neutral stance, while only 1.2% disagreed. This data underscores that the majority of teachers (approximately 94%) demonstrated a positive level of awareness concerning children with reading difficulties. Furthermore, nearly 60% of teachers were in agreement, with an additional 34.1% strongly agreeing, indicating a confident and informed level of awareness regarding these students' challenges.

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the individual items of the teachers' knowledge and awareness of children with reading difficulties. According to Table 2, reading difficulty is a common difficulty involved in reading (M= 3.91, SD= .686), reading difficulties

can be minimized (M= 4.49, SD= .669), and reading difficulties can be minimized significantly with more practice (M= 4.55, SD= .649). It is evidence of the significant level of the teacher's knowledge of children with reading difficulties. Furthermore, the teachers' awareness of children with reading difficulties is explored. The rating for almost all the children with reading difficulties has a common set of problems (M=4.18, SD= .658), children with reading difficulties have difficulty with spelling (M=4.02, SD= .669), children with reading difficulties have difficulty learning letter names (M=4.00, SD=.674), and children with reading difficulties have difficulty in learning letter sounds (M=3.88, SD= .699) are high.

Table 2

The descriptive statistics of the individual items teachers' knowledge and awareness of children with reading difficulties

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Reading difficulty is a common difficulty involved in reading	164	2	5	3.91	.686
Reading difficulties can be minimized	164	1	5	4.49	.669
Reading difficulties can be minimized significantly with more practice	164	1	5	4.55	.649
Children who can't read properly are usually having low intelligence	164	1	5	1.83	.819
Children with reading difficulties have difficulty with spelling	164	2	5	4.02	.669
Children with reading difficulties have difficulty learning letter names	164	2	5	4.00	.674
Children with reading difficulties have difficulty learning letter sounds	164	2	5	3.88	.699
Children with reading difficulties can read correctly only if read slowly	164	1	5	3.49	.763
If a child reads around a one-grade level below, there is a very high chance of having reading difficulties	164	1	5	3.31	.803
Almost all children with reading difficulties have a common set of problems	164	2	5	4.18	.658
Valid N (listwise)	164				

Meanwhile, the rating for children who can't read properly usually having low intelligence (M=1.83, SD= .819) indicates the teachers' disagreement with the statement which proves that the teachers can differentiate the children with low intelligence and normal children.

Teachers' Perception of Teaching Reading

The second objective is to find out the teachers' perception of module needs for teaching reading to children with reading difficulties. The need analysis questionnaire part 3 included 14 questions on the teachers' perception of module needs for teaching reading to children with reading difficulties. The need analysis questionnaire part 3 has four sections namely Question 1 –3 is about teachers' perception of teaching reading, Question 4 and 5 challenges in teaching reading, Question 6 and 7 is about the development of systematic module, and Question 8 to 14 is about the skills of reading in reading development. The teachers'

perception of teaching reading, challenges, systematic modules, and skills of reading development are cross-tabulated with gender preferences. Table 3 shows the cross-tabulation of the teachers' perception of teaching reading with gender preferences.

Table 3

Teachers' perception of teaching reading with gender preferences.

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Teachers' perception of teaching reading	Disagree	1	0	1
	Neutral	7	2	9
	Agree	58	40	98
	Strongly Agree	32	24	56
Total		98	66	164

According to Table 3, the cross-tabulation of the teachers' perception of teaching reading with gender preferences shows high ratings. The teachers agree for teaching reading agree (n=98) (female=58, male=40), strongly agree (n=56) (female 32, male =24), neutral (n=9), and disagree (n=1). 154 teachers out of 164 recommend teaching reading. This indicates the teachers' perception of the teaching of reading is significant for children with reading difficulties. They agree that reading fluency is important for academic success, remedy programs can help children with reading difficulties to develop reading fluency, and teaching to read can help children with reading difficulties develop fluency. Table 4 shows the teachers' agreement on challenges in teaching reading.

Table 4

Teachers' agreement on challenges in teaching reading.

		Female	Male	Total
Teachers' perception of challenges in teaching reading	Disagree			
	Neutral	3	2	
	Agree	7	4	1
	Strongly Agree	7	3	0
Total		8	6	64

According to Table 4, teaching reading to children with reading difficulties is challenging. Teaching reading is a challenging task for 141 teachers. 50 teachers (f=27, m=23) strongly agree, and 91 teachers agree (f=57, m=34). However, 22 teachers were neutral about the challenges of teaching reading. This explicates that up to 85 percent of the teachers face challenges in the classroom teaching children with reading difficulties and 15 percent of them have no challenges.

Table 5 presents the teachers' perception of the systematic module's need for teaching reading. 135 out of 164 teachers demand the systematic module for the teaching reading that includes agree (n=114 (f=71, m=43)), and strongly agree (n=21 (f=14, m=7)). 26 teachers hold neutral and 3 teachers disagree with the module-based teaching reading to children with reading difficulties.

Table 5

Teachers' perception of systematic module need for the teaching reading

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Teachers' perception of systematic module	Disagree	3	0	3
	Neutral	10	16	26
	Agree	71	43	114
	Strongly Agree	14	7	21
Total		98	66	164

Teachers were asked to provide their perception of teaching reading skills and their contribution to reading fluency development. Table 6 shows the teachers' perception of reading skills.

Table 6

Teachers' perception of reading skills

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Teachers' perception of teaching reading skills	Disagree	1	0	1
	Neutral	6	10	16
	Agree	73	48	121
	Strongly Agree	18	8	26
Total		98	66	164

According to the table 6, 121 teachers agree (f=73, m=48) and 26 teachers strongly agree (f=18, m=8) that phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology instruction, syntactic instruction, semantic instruction, and reading comprehension help children with reading difficulties to develop reading fluency. However, 16 teachers (f=6, m=10) hold neutral positions and one teacher disagrees on the skills of reading fluency development.

Need for Smart Reading Module (SRM) Development

The third objective is to find out the need for Smart Reading Module (SRM) development as part of the teaching intervention for children with reading difficulties in Sri Lanka. The need analysis questionnaire part 4, comprises three sections the skill to be considered in SRM development, strategies considered in SRM development, and the need for teachers' guide and student's exercise book in SRM development. The teachers' need for SRM development was analyzed with measures of variability to describe the diversity in the distribution of the skills, strategies, and need for teachers' guides and student exercise books in SRM development. The histograms are used to visually compare the data and to illustrate the major features of the distribution of the data. Table 7 shows the teachers' agreement on the skills for SRM development.

Table 7

The teachers' agreement on the skills for SRM development.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	.6
	Neutral	12	7.3
	Agree	126	76.8
	Strongly Agree	25	15.2
Total		164	100.0

According to Table 7, the teachers agree to the reading skills to be included in the Smart Reading Module. 92.1 percent of the teachers (strongly agree =15.2%, agree =76.8%) recommend the reading skills to consider during the module development. 7.3 percent hold the neutral position and 0.6 percent of the teachers disagree with the skills. They agreed on the reading skills of phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax instruction, semantics instruction, and reading comprehension. Moreover, 92.1 percent of the teachers' agreements support teaching readers to connect readers' background knowledge to develop reading comprehension. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the data.

Figure 1.

The teachers' agreement on the skills for SRM development.

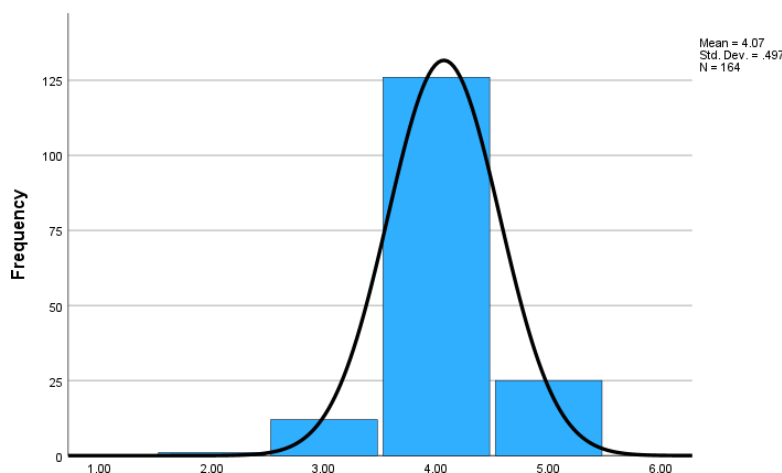


Table 8 shows the teachers' agreement on teaching reading strategies to be included in the Smart Reading Module. 88.4 percent of the teachers (strongly agree =21.3%, agree =67.1%) recommend the teaching reading strategies to consider during the module development. 11.0 percent hold the neutral position and 0.6 percent of the teachers disagree with the teaching reading strategies.

Table 8

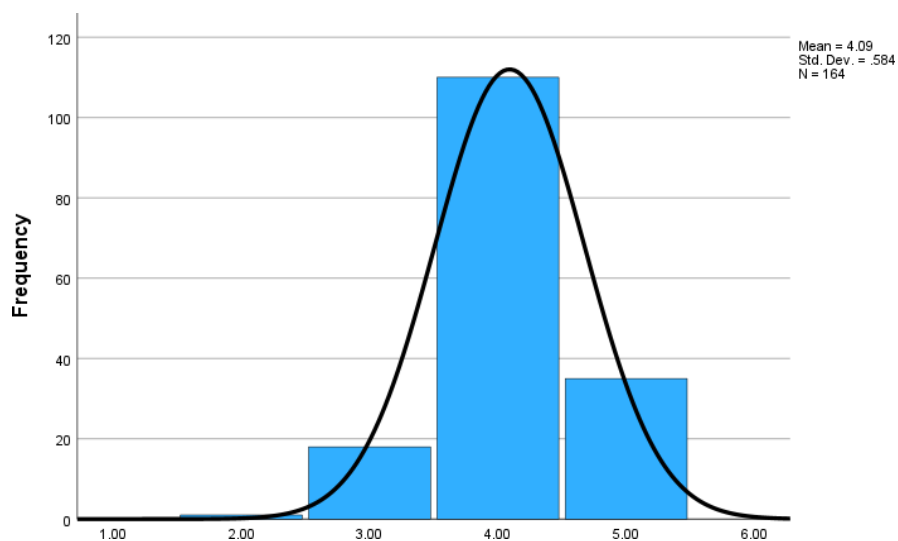
The teachers' agreement on teaching reading strategies to be included in the Smart Reading Module

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	.6
	Neutral	18	11.0
	Agree	110	67.1
	Strongly Agree	35	21.3
	Total	164	100.0

They recommend using multi-sensory teaching and learning methods, and systematic and explicit teaching methods in the teaching intervention. In addition to that they believe that the interactive kit media is appropriate to attract and motivate students to get involved in a variety of cognitive and linguistic activities in teaching intervention. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the data.

Figure 2

Strategies to be considered in SRM development



The primary aim of the teaching reading intervention is the development of the teacher guide and students' exercise book. The need analysis questionnaire included five questions to obtain the teachers' ratings. Question 12 – 14 is about the guidance and lesson plans, the teacher guide, and the length of lessons in the teacher guide teaching intervention. Question 15 and 16 is about the students' exercise book that includes exercise worksheets for pupils, and provide suggested activity pacing for the activities in a lesson, using a range of minutes. Table 9 shows the need for teacher guides and student exercise books in module development.

Table 9

The need for a teacher guide and students' exercise book

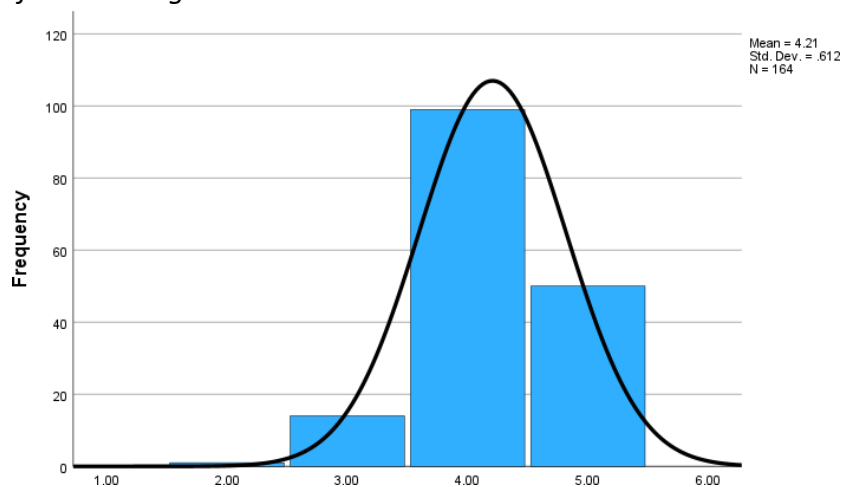
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	.6
	Neutral	14	8.2
	Agree	99	58.2
	Strongly Agree	50	29.4
	Total	164	96.5

Table 9 illustrates the need for teacher guides and student exercise books in SRM development. 60.4 percent of the teachers agree and 30.5 percent of the teachers strongly agree with the teacher guide and students' exercise books. 8.5 percent of them hold neutral and 0.6 percent of them disagree with the module.

Almost 90.9 percent of the teachers welcome the teacher guide and students' exercise books for the SRM-based teaching intervention for children with reading difficulties. They recommend the SRM-based teacher guide be produced with guidance and lesson plans, and limited lessons. Moreover, their agreements support the creation of a student's exercise book with exercise worksheets and activities targeting reading fluency development. Figure 3 provides clear visualization of the data on the needs for teacher guides and students' exercise books.

Figure 3

The need for teacher guides and students' exercise books



Findings

In this study, 164 teachers were involved in assessing the essential factors for improving reading skills in junior secondary students with reading difficulties in Sri Lanka. Among them, 59.8 percent were female teachers, while 40.2 percent were male. These teachers often worked in overcrowded classrooms, with many specializing in Tamil language instruction and other subjects. About one-third had university degrees, and the remaining teachers had specialized training. The participants included both early-career teachers (39.9 percent) and experienced educators with over a decade of teaching experience (40.1 percent).

This study revealed the remarkable awareness of junior secondary teachers regarding students with reading difficulties. A significant 78.7 percent of these teachers demonstrated a profound understanding of these challenges, considering them prevalent obstacles in the

field of reading. They firmly believed that practice could significantly mitigate these obstacles. Furthermore, an impressive 87.3 percent of these educators astutely recognized that students facing reading difficulties possessed average intelligence, highlighting their ability to distinguish between these students and their peers without such challenges.

The findings also highlighted teachers' deep understanding of various aspects of reading skills. They recognized that students with reading difficulties often struggled with spelling, recognizing letter names, and mastering phonetics. Moreover, teachers understood that these students might need to read slowly for better comprehension. They were also aware of the increased risk of reading difficulties among students with below-average reading abilities. These insights showcased teachers' readiness to effectively address these challenges.

The study delved into the need analysis questionnaire, specifically its third part, which explored teachers' perceptions of teaching reading, the challenges they faced, the development of systematic modules, and the essential skills required for reading development. Gender preferences were considered in cross-tabulation analysis of this data. These findings illuminated the substantial emphasis teachers placed on teaching reading to children with reading difficulties. Out of 164 responses, an impressive 93.9 percent, including 90 females and 54 males among junior secondary teachers, strongly advocated for instructing such children in reading. They believed reading fluency was pivotal for academic success and that intervention programs could significantly enhance reading proficiency in these students. However, 85 percent of teachers expressed that teaching reading to such children was one of the most challenging aspects of their professional duties, highlighting its complexity.

Furthermore, a remarkable 82.3 percent of junior secondary teachers passionately underscored the need for a systematic module tailored to the teaching of reading. Their recommendations encompassed a comprehensive spectrum of reading skills, including phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology instruction, syntactic instruction, semantic instruction, and reading comprehension. These components, in their view, were indispensable for nurturing reading fluency in children facing reading difficulties. In essence, these findings underscored the teachers' recognition of the critical role of reading fluency in academic achievement, their acknowledgment of the challenges intrinsic to teaching reading to children with difficulties, and their fervent advocacy for the development of systematic modules encompassing a comprehensive array of reading skills.

The study also explored the fourth part of the need analysis questionnaire, which delved into crucial skills for module development, strategies for module development, and the necessity of teacher guides and students' exercise books. Impressively, 92.1 percent of junior secondary teachers passionately supported the inclusion of specific reading skills in the SRM-based module. These skills encompassed phonological awareness, sound-symbol association, syllable instruction, morphology, syntax instruction, semantics instruction, and reading comprehension. The primary aim was to connect readers' background knowledge effectively, enhancing reading comprehension—a fundamental goal of the teaching intervention. Additionally, 88.4 percent of teachers emphasized multi-sensory teaching, systematic and explicit approaches, and the use of interactive kit media for engaging students in cognitive and linguistic activities within the intervention.

The primary focus of the teaching reading intervention is centered around the development of teacher guides and students' exercise books tailored for junior secondary children with reading difficulties. Remarkably, 90.9 percent of junior secondary teachers

advocate for the incorporation of these resources in the SRM-based teaching intervention for children with reading difficulties. Their recommendations include the production of an SRM-based teacher guide equipped with guidance and lesson plans, ensuring concise lessons for effective teaching. Moreover, they emphasize the creation of students' exercise books, which should feature exercise worksheets and activities designed to target the development of reading fluency.

In essence, these findings underscore the critical role of specific reading skills, teaching methods, and educational resources, such as teacher guides and students' exercise books, in the development of effective teaching interventions for children with reading difficulties.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study involving 164 junior secondary teachers in Sri Lanka, a comprehensive exploration was conducted to understand the needs for enhancing reading fluency among children with reading difficulties. The participants consisted of approximately 60% female and 40% male teachers, most of whom worked in overcrowded classrooms, with many specializing in teaching the Tamil language. The teachers' qualifications were diverse, with about one-third holding university degrees and the rest having specialized training. In terms of experience, the distribution was fairly balanced, with around 40% being early-career teachers and an equal percentage having over a decade of teaching experience.

The study unveiled a remarkable level of awareness among these teachers regarding children with reading difficulties. The majority recognized these challenges as pervasive and believed that they could be improved with consistent practice. Moreover, the teachers exhibited a keen understanding of the specific reading challenges faced by children with difficulties, including spelling, letter recognition, and the need for slower reading. This indicated their profound comprehension of these issues and their readiness to address them effectively.

The research also emphasized the teachers' strong emphasis on teaching reading to children with reading difficulties, acknowledging its pivotal role in academic success. Despite the perceived challenges, teachers advocated for systematic modules encompassing a comprehensive range of reading skills. They recognized the importance of specific reading skills, teaching methods, and educational resources, such as teacher guides and students' exercise books, in developing effective interventions for these children. Overall, the findings underscore the pressing need for tailored support to nurture proficient and confident readers among struggling students.

The results of this need analysis provide contemporary insights from junior secondary teachers in Sri Lanka. Previous studies by Grimes and Cruz (2021) and Nanayakkara (2021) had highlighted the absence of practical and accessible standards in Sri Lanka's special education policy. Similarly, research by Hettiarachchi (2021) and Kasturiarachchi (2020) underscored the inadequacies in identifying and accommodating poor readers within schools, a concern validated by the current study. Up to 90% of junior secondary teachers in this study emphasized the imperative need for systematic module-based identification and intervention practices for children with reading difficulties.

In contrast, Indrarathne's (2019) research had revealed teachers' lack of awareness regarding children with reading difficulties and delayed identification. However, the findings of the present need analysis diverge from her study. Here, 78.7% of junior secondary teachers demonstrated a strong awareness of children with reading difficulties. They firmly recognized the significance of reading fluency for academic success and made earnest attempts to

identify struggling readers through conventional methods like reading textbooks and classroom activities. However, they encountered challenges due to the absence of research-based tools for identifying children with reading difficulties. Their belief in the potential of remedial programs to enhance reading fluency underscores the importance they attribute to teaching reading as a vital component of fluency development among children facing reading difficulties.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the needs and perspectives of junior secondary teachers in Sri Lanka regarding children with reading difficulties, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the study's sample size was relatively small, consisting of 164 teachers from specific regions. This might limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of teachers in Sri Lanka.

Secondly, the study primarily relied on self-report data from teachers, which can be subject to social desirability bias, where participants may respond in a way they perceive as socially acceptable. This bias could influence the accuracy of their responses.

Recommendations

To address these limitations and build on the study's findings, several recommendations can be made. Future research should aim for a larger and more diverse sample of teachers from various regions in Sri Lanka to enhance the representativeness of the findings. Additionally, a mixed-methods approach that combines surveys with classroom observations or interviews could provide a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' practices and challenges in teaching children with reading difficulties.

Furthermore, efforts should be made to develop research-based tools and interventions to assist teachers in identifying and supporting students with reading difficulties effectively. Collaborative initiatives between educational researchers, policymakers, and teachers can help bridge the gap between research and practice, ultimately benefiting struggling readers in Sri Lanka.

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