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TOPIC: ENGLISH READING SKILLS OF CHILDREN IN A SLUM AREA OF GUWAHATI

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1. Acknowledgement

We express our heartfelt gratitude to all who supported during this survey on English reading skills of children in the slum area of Guwahati near GMCH. We are deeply thankful to our supervisor Dr. Bibha Devi and HoD Dr. Madhulina Choudhury for their invaluable guidance and encouragement throughout this project. Special thanks to the residents of the slum area near GMCH, especially the children and their guardians, for their cooperation and participation. I also appreciate the local community leaders and volunteers who facilitated the fieldwork. Lastly, heartfelt thanks to all of our group members for their equal cooperation and support while conducting this survey.

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2. Project overview

“A Survey on English Reading Skills, with Focus on Fluency and Accuracy among the Children in a Slum Area of Guwahati” explores how well children are able to read and understand English by living in poor areas. In today’s world, English is not just a subject but it opens doors to education, jobs, and wider opportunities. This survey tries to understand how children in the slum areas are able to learn English and what challenges they endure.

The survey was conducted in the area near Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), where many families struggle with poverty and limited access to quality education. The research involved reading test, formal as well as informal discussions and interactions with children, and conversations with their parents. It looked into the things like whether children have books at home, how often they go to school, and how involved their families are in their learning. The goal of this survey is to find out what helps these children in learning to read English. It also aims to highlight the role of schools, families, and environment in shaping their reading habits. This project may help educators, social workers, and government authorities to provide better support for the children in such areas.

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Group (Cluster) A – Class 1 to 3	Age	Initial Reading Level	Group (Cluster) B – Class 4 to 6	Age	Initial Reading Level
Sonakshi Basfor	6	Beginner	Palak Basfor	10	Developing
Poonam Basfor	7	Beginner	Kajal Basfor	11	Intermediate
Ajit Basfor	6	Beginner	Sohani Basfor	10	Developing
Saloni Basfor	7	Developing	Nirjala Basfor	11	Intermediate
Bibek Basfor	6	Beginner	Pranjal Basfor	12	Intermediate
Kuldeep Basfor	8	Developing	Saitajit Basfor	11	Developing
Keshav Mehtar	7	Beginner	Tinku Mehtar	12	Intermediate
Raju Mehtar	8	Developing	Babli Mehtar	10	Developing
Pinku Bhangi	7	Beginner	Suresh Bhangi	11	Developing

5. Rationale

In today's world, knowing how to read in English can open many doors for children, not just in school, but in life. In any part of the world English can be used as a medium of communication as well as a language for survival. However, not all children get the same chance to build this important skill. In slum areas like the one near Guwahati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), many children grow up in difficult conditions. With limited access to good schools, books, and learning support at home, they often left behind in reading especially in English. Though English is used as the official language in India but the people has very less knowledge or access to learning as compared to its uses. The government provides less privilege to English than the regional languages. As compared to other states there are very few English government schools in Assam and it's difficult for the people of lower section to learn English. Especially in areas like urban cities slum area's children struggle more to acquire even basic English reading skills. As a result, their abilities are limited compared to those of normal children.

In the slum area near Guwahati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), there are number of families living with daily financial and social hardships. For children growing up there, going to school and getting an educational environment is not always constant and also access to English books, tutors, or quiet study spaces is often limited or absent. Parents, while deeply caring and supportive in their own ways, may not always be involve to assist with homework or guide their children's learning due to their own limited education or long working hours. Many of these children are enrolled in regional language medium schools and are expected to learn English as a second language, which adds another layer of difficulty.

This survey aims to understand the realities of these children's reading experiences, rather than focusing only on test scores or academic outcomes. It seeks to explore how children learn English in everyday life at school, at home, and in their community. It tries to capture their struggles, their efforts, their small successes, and the ways they find support, whether through teachers, siblings, or even television and mobile phones.

The rationale behind this project is rooted in the belief that every child has their potential to learn and succeed, regardless of their background if given the right support. Unfortunately, most of the education policies and school curriculums are designed with the assumption that all children have

similar resources and support systems, which is often far from the truth. Without understanding the realities of children in slum areas.

By conducting this survey, informal interviews, and reading assessments within the children of the slum. This survey hopes to present a clearer picture of what learning English truly looks like for these children. The ultimate goal is to create awareness and hopefully, contribute to more inclusive and effective educational strategies. Education is not just about schools and textbooks but it's about people, their stories, their environments, and their dreams. This study is a small attempt to bring those elements together and remind everyone that improving literacy isn't only about teaching better, but also about understanding deeper.

6. Project Objectives

To understand the current English reading abilities of children living in the slum area near Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) and to see how they engage with basic reading materials in school.

2. To explore the everyday challenges these children face in learning English, such as irregular school attendance, limited access to books and lack of academic support at home.

3. To examine how their emotions affect their learning, including feelings of anxiety, low confidence or motivation. This draws from Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which highlights that a child's emotional state can either help or block language learning.

4. To study the influence of both school-based teaching and informal exposure, like media, conversations or everyday experiences on their English reading development.

5. To understand the kind of learning environment these children need by looking at what truly helps them feel supported, motivated and ready to grow as readers in their own context.

7. Methodology:

- The survey was conducted in a slum area located nearby GMCH.
- The target group included children studying in primary school, mainly from Classes 1 to 3 and Classes 4 to 6.

Data Collection Method:

- Face-to-face reading assessments using age-appropriate English texts.
- Observation of reading abilities like accuracy, pronunciation, fluency etc.

Tools Used:

Reading short stories, poems, word recognition, fruit charts , questionnaires and basic vocabularies.

8. Literature review:

Reading is one of the most important skills that a child requires to learn. It helps them to succeed in school, understand their surroundings and build confidence. But there are many children growing up in slum areas, like those near Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH). For them living in such area and learning to read, especially in English is not easy. They face many challenges in day to day lives, not just in school but also in their homes and within their own communities.

Research shows that often these children from economically weaker backgrounds struggle with reading and learning because they have fewer or much like no resources. They may not have books at home, quiet spaces or study environments at their place to study or someone to help them with studies when they get stuck or do mistakes. In most of the cases these children face social discrimination and financial hardships. According to Nag and Snowling (2012), even when these children attend school, the instruction they receive may not be enough to help them catch up with

their peers. Often, the classrooms are overcrowded and teachers may not be able to give individual attention to those who are weak in reading and learning.

Stephen Krashen's theory of Second Language Acquisition helps explain why some children still struggle to read in English, despite attending schools. One of the key idea from his theory is the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which explains that when a child is anxious, scared of making mistakes or not confident, his/her ability to learn a language gets blocked, they can't easily understand the language. Especially, in a slum environment, these emotional barriers can be strong where children may be dealing with hunger, stress or neglect. Even if English is taught at school, it becomes difficult to understand and leaning when a child is not feeling safe or supported. Therefore, in a slum area's children , it's way more harder to read and learn English as compared to other areas.

Reports like ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) have shown that many children in rural and urban. Specifically, slum areas in India are not able to read even a simple English sentences or words by the time they reach higher classes.

This is not because they are not smart or capable, it is often because they have never had a chance to practice or grow in a supportive environment or to get better opportunities to learn.

Studies also suggest that children do not only learn from textbooks but also everyday experiences, like listening to stories, watching TV or hearing songs in English can help. Researchers like Street (2005) and Barton & Hamilton (1998) talk about "Everyday Literacy" practices, which means that even outside school, children are learning in small ways that matter.

However, very few studies focus specifically on small poor slum arras like the one near GMCH. Each people has their own story, their own struggles and their strengths for survival. This project aims to understand what reading really looks like for these children in their real-life setting, rather than only through test scores or reports.

In short, reading is shaped by many factors, such as - school, home, emotions, and environment. While there are many challenges, there are also hidden possibilities to overcome these problems. By listening to the children and seeing their world more closely, this study hopes to share their experiences and struggles in a way that feels real and meaningful.

9. Language need analysis:

The survey conducted in the slum area near Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) aimed to understand the English reading skills of children living in such poor area. The responses collected through slum area visits, simple reading tests and friendly talks with the children to give a clear picture of how poverty, environment, emotions, and education intersect to affect language learning, particularly reading in a second language like English.

During our visit to the slum area of Guwahati near GMCH, on 3rd, 4th and 10th of April, 2025. We first interacted with the parents of the children and informed them about the motive of our survey on the ability of reading English language. Then, we interacted with several children and introduced ourselves to the children. Initially, we asked them to introduce their selves in English with the questions like, “What is your name?”, “What is your father’s name?”, “How old are you?”, etc. Then we observed that some of the children were able to answer the questions and some of them hesitated while answering. According to their age group and class we divided them into two groups, i.e.: I-III and IV-VII. One of the most noticeable findings was that children’s exposure to English was minimal outside school settings. There were no basic English reading materials available at their home for the lower primary and less resources for upper primary which they even got from government schools. Most of them have no access to newspapers, storybooks, or age-appropriate educational resources. Many families shared a single textbook among siblings, and in some cases, textbooks were missing altogether, even the clothes they wore were dirty and ripped.

Next day, we provided them with some basic activities based on their groups. For the first group (I-III) we gave them some handouts of “Alphabets and Word recognitions” and similarly for the second group (V-VII) we provided them with some poems and stories to read it out.

By watching how they read, we learned a lot about their reading skills and the problems they face in learning English. Many children were able to recognize letters and small words, but they had trouble reading full sentences smoothly. Some read slowly and hesitated, especially when they saw new or difficult words. Their pronunciation was also affected by their home languages like Assamese or other regional tongues.

When we asked them questions about what they had just read, many couldn’t give clear answers. This showed that even if they could read the words, they didn’t always understand what the text

was saying. So, both reading and understanding need to be improved. We also noticed that most of these children don't get much exposure to English outside school. At home, they usually don't have English books or anyone to help them read. In school, overcrowded classrooms make it hard for teachers to give individual help.

Once again, our second time visit on 19th May of 2025, for peer teaching in the slum area, we begin to teach the children with some of the age appropriate texts. As per the group division the texts are given such as for group A- fruit, vegetables and object charts to pronounce the name with correctly and for group B- stories and reading passages to read the sentences correctly as well as fluently. On 20th, 21st and 22nd May of 2025, we continued to teach them the previously mentioned texts and allowed them to read by themselves. Group A, even lacks proper words recognition and pronunciation (cucumber, cauliflower), Group B was quite similar to A, although they were studying in higher classes but they cannot pronounce or read easy words, even by doing mistakes they still lack the ability to read the whole sentence. It was more difficult to teach the group B than Group A because Group A were learning these words or names slowly as per their ages but Group B has already grown up and reached the higher classes to be able to read and pronounce words, since they couldn't, so we had to teach them the same passages everyday again and again. However, one positive thing was that the children showed a lot of interest and curiosity. They were eager to read and learn when we spoke kindly and gave them encouragement. This shows that they want to learn and can do better if they are given the right support.

Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory is especially relevant here, especially his Affective Filter Hypothesis, which states that learners with high anxiety, low motivation, or low self-confidence are less likely to acquire or learn a second language effectively.

Many children were shy and afraid to speak in front of us. They even shared that they were afraid to read aloud in class for fear of being scolded or laughed by other students. Similarly, they were being afraid to read the books or passages were given them to read, even some of them escaped. In some schools where teachers used harsh tones or focused only on good exam performance, children admitted to feeling embarrassed or anxious during English lessons. These feelings create a mental block that stops them to enjoy or engage with reading activities. For the children of slum areas, it is way more different and difficult, the children has no resources or support at their home

and the teacher cannot provide them proper education due to overcrowded classrooms and also their absence in the schools. It creates great stress on these children's growth and future lives.

In contrast, children who mentioned supportive teachers, friendly classroom environments, or encouragement at home showed higher confidence and better reading outcomes, even if their actual fluency was modest. Similarly, during our visits when we encouraged them with rewards such as chocolate, pen and pencil, they showed way more interested in learning than before. Children called us sir and ma'am, sang songs and dance with us for which they could connect freely with us and it helped a-lot to teach them. This proves how important it is to create emotionally safe learning spaces, especially for children in poor areas.

While doing the survey on children's reading skills in the slum area near GMCH, we faced many challenges. These difficulties came from the environment, the children's daily lives, their families, and the limited resources available. Despite our best efforts, these issues made the study a bit harder to carry out.

One of the first problems we noticed was that there were no clean or quiet places where children could sit and study. The homes were very small, crowded, and often dark. In some places, the smell from nearby drains or garbage made it hard to stay indoors. Because of this, we had to take the children outside into the open field or by the roadside to do reading activities. But even these places were not always calm. There were many distractions like noise, other children playing, or people passing by, which made it hard for the children to focus.

Most of the parents were struggling with financial problems. Many of them worked as daily laborers or did small jobs to earn a living. They did not have enough money to buy books, notebooks, pens, or other study materials for their children. Also, many parents were not educated themselves, so they could not help their children with reading or schoolwork. Some parents were busy the whole day and did not have the time to ask their children about studies. A few parents even seemed less interested in whether their children were reading or not. This lack of support at home made it more difficult for the children to improve their reading skills.

Most of the children we met were more interested in playing than studying. For many of them, reading was not a part of their daily routine. When we went to talk to them or ask them to read, some were excited at first, but many quickly lost interest. We had to search for the children, call

them from the streets or playgrounds, and sometimes even request them to stay. A few children kept running away or avoided sitting with us. They found it hard to sit still or pay attention, especially during longer reading tasks.

Because many families in the slum area move often or live in temporary shelters, it was difficult to find the same children again for follow-up. Sometimes, children we had worked with were not at home the next day. Some had gone to work with their parents or were sent to stay with relatives. This made it hard to complete all parts of the study as planned.

In short, we faced many real-world problems while doing the survey in this slum area, these included poor living conditions, lack of interest or support from families, very few learning resources, and emotional barriers in the children themselves. However, these challenges also helped us understand their situation more deeply. With the right kind of support, care, and attention, many of these children can improve and grow. They have the interest and energy, we just need to give them the right tools and encouragement.

During our last day visit on 23rd May 2025, we brought all our learning sessions to a close and tried to review what the children had learned. To understand their progress, we conducted a simple test for both groups of children.

For Group A, we gave an exercise where they had to read the names of common things like fruits, vegetables, and objects. Then they had to match each word to the correct picture by drawing a line. This was done to check if they could recognize English words and connect them with real things they see in daily life. Most of the children were able to do this task with little help. Some were even excited to show that they remembered the words we had practiced earlier. A few children needed a bit of support in reading out the words, but they still tried their best and completed the task.

For Group B, we gave a short passage written in simple English. After reading it, they had to answer a few questions based on the passage. This test was used to check how well they could read with understanding and how confidently they could answer. Many children read the passage with confidence and gave the right answers. Some read slowly but were still able to understand the story and respond well to the questions. A few children struggled with pronunciation or needed help in understanding certain words, but they made an effort and did not give up.

Overall, the results were very positive. We saw clear signs of improvement in both groups. The children had become more comfortable with reading in English compared to the first few days. Their interest and willingness to try had grown, and they seemed more confident and happy while reading. Although some still needed practice, they showed potential and a strong desire to learn.

This small test helped us see that with the right support, even children in difficult living conditions can learn and grow. They just need a little attention, simple learning materials, and encouragement. It was heartening to see their smiles and excitement when they got the answers right. It proved that learning is possible anywhere, as long as we create a friendly and supportive environment.

At the end, we found that the children have the basic foundation, but need help with pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and understanding what they read. If we give them age-appropriate books, fun reading activities, and better teaching support, these children can become confident in English and open up more opportunities for their future.

10. Project Findings

Through our visits, reading activities, and observations, we found several important things about the reading skills of the children living in the slum area near GMCH.

1. Basic Reading Skills Were Limited

Many children struggled with basic reading tasks in English. Some could read a few simple words, while others had difficulty recognizing even common letters or sounds. Only a small number of children could read full sentences or short passages with confidence.

2. Lack of Reading Habit

Most of the children did not have a regular reading habit. They were not used to reading at home, mainly because they had no access to English books or storybooks. For many, our reading sessions were the first time they tried reading English outside school.

3. Home Environment Was Not Supportive

The home environment was not always helpful for learning. Most parents were not able to help their children with studies, either because they were not educated or too busy with work. There were very few study materials or quiet spaces in the homes for children to focus on reading.

4. Children Showed Interest When Encouraged

Even though many children struggled at first, we noticed that they became more interested when we used fun methods, games, or pictures. With encouragement and friendly guidance, several children were eager to learn and improved quickly during the sessions.

5. Some Children Lacked Confidence

A few children were scared to make mistakes and felt shy while reading. This made it harder for them to try. However, with a little patience and support, they slowly opened up and began participating more actively.

6. Group Learning Helped

We found that group learning was effective. When children sat together, they learned from each other and felt less afraid. They also became more motivated when they saw others reading or answering correctly.

7. Need for More Support and Resources

The biggest need we saw was for regular support and basic learning materials. If these children had access to simple books, trained teachers or volunteers, and a peaceful place to study, their reading skills could improve a lot more.

11. Feedback from the Elder and Experienced Members of the Slum Area

During our visits, we had the chance to speak with a few elderly and experienced members of the slum community. Their feedback gave us valuable insight into the lives of the children and the challenges they face in education.

Many of them shared that they were happy to see young people like us taking an interest in the children's learning. They said that no one usually comes to ask about the children's education, and

they appreciated the effort we were putting in. Some elders even helped us gather the children and encouraged them to take part in the reading sessions.

They also shared their concerns. Most of them said that the children are growing up in a very hard environment, where education is not a priority because families are struggling to survive each day. Some said that parents do not understand the value of education because they themselves never had the chance to go to school.

One elderly man mentioned, “These children are sharp and active, but they need someone to guide them regularly. If no one pays attention to them, they will fall behind.”

A few elderly women said they were happy to see their grandchildren trying to read in English. They felt proud and wished that such learning activities would continue in the future.

In general, the elders welcomed the project and said they would like to see more such efforts to support the children’s education. They hoped that with time, more people would come forward to help and that their children might have better chances in life.

12. Recommendations

Based on our observations and findings from the survey, here are some suggestions to help improve the English reading skills of children living in slum areas:

1. Create a Friendly Learning Space

Children need a quiet and clean place to study. Even a small community corner or open classroom in the area can help them focus better.

2. Use Simple and Fun Learning Materials

Colorful books, picture charts, flashcards, and storybooks in English should be made available. Fun tools make learning enjoyable and easier for young learners.

3. Encourage Group Learning

Children enjoy learning with friends. Group reading sessions, storytelling circles, and learning games can help improve reading skills while also building confidence.

4. Involve Local Volunteers or Teachers

Local college students, retired teachers, or trained volunteers can be requested to take weekly reading classes. A little regular guidance can make a big difference.

5. Raise Awareness Among Parents

Parents should be made aware of the importance of education. Small meetings or street plays can help explain how learning can change their children's future.

6. Offer Basic Study Materials

Providing children with simple tools like notebooks, pencils, storybooks, and worksheets will encourage them to read and write more at home.

7. Organize Regular Reading Camps

Short reading camps once or twice a month can refresh children's interest. It gives them something to look forward to and builds a routine around reading.

8. Give Emotional Support and Motivation

Many children are scared of making mistakes while reading. Encouraging words, patience, and appreciation can help them feel safe and more confident.

9. Incorporate Krashen's Theory in Practice

Following Stephen Krashen's idea, children should be exposed to simple and interesting English content that is just a little above their current level. This helps them learn naturally through understanding.

13. Conclusion

This study has given us a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by children living in the slum area near GMCH when it comes to learning English reading skills. We found that most children had limited exposure to English, very few learning materials, and almost no guidance at home. Yet, despite these difficulties, many of them showed curiosity, energy, and a real desire to learn.

Through fun, friendly activities and patient support, even the shyest children began to respond positively. This proves that with the right tools, encouragement, and care, every child—no matter their background—can learn and grow.

The findings also remind us that improving education in such areas requires a community effort. Schools, families, volunteers, and local leaders all have a role to play. When we work together, we can make learning more joyful and meaningful for these children. This project may be small, but it is a step toward a larger goal: to bring light, hope, and opportunity to children who need it most. With continued efforts, we believe many of these children can go on to build brighter futures for themselves and their families.

14. Project Team / Group

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