A Case Study of Engineering Graduates' Reading Skills: Reasons for Poor Reading Skills and Solutions

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Abstract:

Majority of the English Language teachers express their dissatisfaction for the poor reading skills of their students. The situation is more pathetic in case of the Engineering students who studies in government and state board schools. These students after entering into engineering education are found to be very weak in reading English in comparison to the students of CBSE and ICSE even after having studied for more than 12 years in 'English medium' schools and colleges. The present paper discusses the reasons for the poor reading skills among engineering graduate learners. An attempt is also made to etch in the possible suggestions to overcome the weakness of students in reading skill in English language. The role of Interactive Whiteboard Technology is highlighted as a great remedial measure to enhance reading skills.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the recent past few years, the world has witnessed many crucial changes in education sector. Education appended with technology is driving in the direction of 'knowledge society'. And, one of the most phenomenal transformations is the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into teaching learning practices into schools and colleges. This significant change in the use of modern technology has indisputably altered the manner in which teachers teach and means adopted to learn to teach. This has apparent advantage both to the teacher and taught. On a surface level this has drastically contributed in developing essential skills amongst of ESL students in learning English language. As English has emerged as a global language, it also plays a vital part in every profession with respect to its importance and demand. In the past, students were introduced to English by conventional methods. All these methods have their own advantages and disadvantages, where the students learned English only as a subject rather than as language. They were also unable to put their learning into practice due to lack of a favorable environment. Another limitation seen in Indian teachers is that some of the English teachers are not familiar with the latest developments in ELT pedagogy. Challenges before teachers in the use of ICT for ELT are also taken up in this paper. English is the most widely used language in the world. It is a global language. It is spoken in almost all countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language. It is taught in the schools in almost every country on this earth. Crystal (1997) estimates,

'Out of the 1.5 billion who know English, about 337 million use it as their first language (L1) about 350 million use it as a second language (L2)……….. in addition, there are about 100-1000 million people who areactively learning and trying to use English with reasonable competence' (Krishnaswamy 2006:18)

Although English is not an indigenous language, it remains as an 'Associate Language' in India, alongside Hindi, the 'Official Language of the Union of India' and twenty two 'National Languages'. (According to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_India the Government of India has given 22 "languages of the 8th Schedule" the status of official language.)

Teaching English language in such a multilingual country is really a challenging task. The demand of English is increasing day by day as it has been titled as 'International language'; other than this it has a unique place in India. Amidst the 22 regional languages and thousand of dialect it is enjoying the status of most popular and elite class language.

"English has not only continued to flourish in the educational and official network of India but has also become one of the official languages of the nation and thus continues to enjoy the patronage of the Indian elite." (http://www.waseda.jp/ocw/AsianStudies/9A-77WorldEnglishSpring2005/ LectureNotes/08_India_TejKB/Bhatia_Summary.pdf)

English teaching is based on four major skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. By listening and speaking English can be learnt easily, but one have to sit tight it by reading and writing. There are two ways of learning any language one is oral which include listening and speaking while second is written which includes reading and writing. There is a lot of difference between both the ways. Sometimes grammatical and structural rules are avoided while talking but in writing we respect grammar. In this

paper stress will be given on written form of language learning. Reading is one of the input mode skills. Learning to read is essential to success in school and outside the school too. Reading is important to understand a language in a much better way. It's true 'We write as we read'.

For better understanding of the objectives of this study, the following questions are worth pondering:

- Does lack of teaching aids in secondary schools give room to poor reading habits?

- Do the literary of parents have impact of motivation of learners?

- Does the attitude of the learner decide reading habits?

- Does low intelligence affect efficiency in reading?

- Does bad teaching methods used by teacher's lead to poor reading habits among students?

In this modern technologically advanced world, reading deficiency places one at a disadvantage as most of the information that one needs to keep oneself abreast with the professional comrades' demands good reading skills. Reading, like the other related skills- Listening, Speaking and Writing forms a part of an intricate information processing system.

2 REASONS FOR POOR READING SKILLS –

Though the general complaint is attitude of apathy towards reading, there are many integral causes that lead to poor reading skills. Thus interaction and interview with many students who came from different state boards under the aegis of one institute it was found that there were several reasons why they weak in English reading skills. These reasons were related to various aspects like environment, resources, vernacular teaching, students' attitude etc.

Following are some most said reasons by the students

• Lack of English teachers who were not equipped with sound knowledge of English.

• Limited exposure as English is not practiced at home or in environment.

• English reading is done only in school in the English period and that to seldom because teacher pays more attention to other exercises as well.

• Most of the time teachers and students are bound to remain busy in other exercises like question & answer, word & meaning, writing comprehension etc. rather than giving stress on reading and reviewing.

• The practice of treating and teaching English as a 'subject' rather than taken as language learning process • Reading is not done on the regular basis .

• The lack of practice make the students poor in reading English.

• Lack of interest of teachers in reading as they think it unnecessary for a subjective course.

• Importance of Reading skill was undermined in the government and state board course curriculum.

• Very limited exercises on reading in the prescribed 'Textbook/s'.

• Fear and hesitation of academically poor students makes them weaker in reading.

• Insufficient guidance for reading practice.

Various methods have been adopted to improve the reading skill in English but the result is not satisfactory. Students read only to pass the exams and not to cultivate reading habit or improve reading skill. It is also important for the students and teachers to realize that over dependence on the 'Notes' in the prescribed textbooks hampers the improvement of reading skill.

Technology has also been incorporated in the schools to improve the reading skill of the students. But the main problem is related to their right guidance from teacher side. If teacher can make reading interesting then only students can take interest in reading. IWB is such a tool which makes learning interesting and innovative, in this respect it can enhance the reading skill of students.

3 ICT

In order to introduce ICT in ELT, a number of methods and strategies are suggested. Many of these strategies employ commonly used tools such as word processing, data base, and spreadsheet or browser applications. Internet-ready phones, handheld computers, digital cameras, MP3 players, wired rooms with cameras for photographing whiteboards, so students can receive the images as digital files etc. Research has recurrently confirmed that students learn better when they are fully engaged and that multisensory, hands-on learning is the best way to engage them.

English language teachers are facing difficulty in almost every country to make their student learn how to read a language effectively to give better result. Teaching English language in a multilingual country in India is a challenging task. Much has been done by the educationist to improve the reading of the students in the schools but the result is not satisfactory. Most of the students who passed their senior secondary are not able to read out simple instructions which are generally written on the forms which they need to fill to register in any entrance exam or college. Recently, much has been said and promised about the potentiality of IWB in language teaching in different countries. Teaching reading English language is the demand of the hour and the aim of this research is, too, study the impact of IWB Technology in enhancing reading skill in English language learning and to help teachers to find a solution to enhance reading English when they leave school. This research investigated the way in which IWB attracts students to read more.

4 INTERACTIVE WHITEBOARD

IWB is not very new to some parts in India but mostly it is in infant stage in the country. It has entered the education sectors at a rapid pace, especially the private educational institutes and schools. This technology, in language learning, is in fast growing phase in the entire country. This technology works on touch screen technology. A big whiteboard is

connected to a computer and a projector either via wires (USB) or wirelessly (blue tooth). This giant white screen becomes live when projector projected the desktop of computer on it.

Anything that can be done on a computer monitor can be replicated on the interactive white board. A teacher can fashion engaging lessons in multiple ways. Image size and placement can change with a simple touch to the screen. This technology makes the one-computer classroom a workable instructional model.

One can control the computer through touch sensitive board. Commands can be given either by finger or a special pen called stylus. This board is called interactive as it is attached with audiovideo equipments as well as multi user sensitivity technique in it. It is really nice to work on IWB with your students as it facilitates both the teacher and student to find new ways of learning. It has been designed for business purpose (Griffon, 2002) but later is has been recommended by the educationist in the education field. Later various subjects have been benefited by this technology and language teaching is not an exception. It is found that it is useful in English language teaching as it has some salient features which make it:

• Interactive (BECTA, 2003), (Higgins, Beauchamp and miller, 2007) www.the-criterion.com The Criterion: An International Journal In English ISSN: 0976-8165 Vol. 7, Issue VI 302 December 2016

• Flexible to topic presentation and versatile (Austin 2003; Jamerson 2002)

• Revolutionary (Arnott, 2004) • Fascinated and efficient (Boyle 2002; Thomas 2002)

• Multitasking and multi sensory presenter (Thomas 2003).

• Motivator (Levy 2002)

• Time saver (Latham 2002), & (Beauchamp and Parkinson, 2005) and so on.

Due to above mentioned and many more other qualities IWB has set its position in language classrooms. Teachers and students both appreciated it for its versatile nature and flexibility in presenting data, text, and pictures, PPTs, in addition to audio assistance. It gives novelty to classroom and creates longer effect on students due to video impact in the mind of the receiver. IWB is helpful in practicing all the skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in learning a language.

5 IWB IN READING

Improvement in reading can be brought by motivating students to read extensively and for that we need to make them interesting in reading. IWB can be helpful to the English teachers. They can bring attention of learners in the class to the content on the white giant board. Once the reader is in the class attracted by the colorful screen he starts taking pain of reading in the class. IWB can support the reading skill in many ways –

• Can present the text in no time. Reduce the tension to bring text to class.

• Can annotate the difficult word for the whole class

• Can highlight the difficult words

• The difficult words highlighted throughout the exercise remain long in the mind of the student.

• Reading text can be easily relate to any picture to make reading a fun

• Group exercise can give them confidence

• Peer discussion before reading will give them support to read in the class

• Motivation from their group members will improve their morale

• Teacher can pay more attention to weak group

• Audio player helps them to pronounce the word correctly and confidently

• Certain grammar point can also be highlighted.

• In later stage mike can also be supplied.

Teachers should act as facilitators, and should observe how well students organize their thoughts while speaking with their fellow members. Though eclectic methodology has to be practiced, the use of ICT/IWB should be encouraged to the fullest. As argued by Atkinson (1987:245), 'Teachers should not opt for the contemporary methods in language teaching just to demonstrate the knowledge possessed by them in order to justify their position as educationists, but should adopt or use other methods according to the condition and situation they face'.

6 CONCLUSION:

The advent of ICT has brought about significant change in the ELT. The paper supplies excellent resource materials for not only enlightening young language teachers about the worth and effectiveness of numerous teaching methods, but also for leading them to a wise decision in the choice and use of a suitable method. The combination of audio- visual presentation with text helps the learners grasp and store the word in their memory for a longer time. As it is a well known fact that motivation, attention, and behavior represent an overall student attitude in the classroom, and IWB motivates students, catch their attention through audio-visual aids and bring a change in their behavior not to see the reading as a boring exercise but do it passionately to enhance their language competence. The role of a teacher is equally important in inculcating the sense of appreciation and absorption, especially in the initial phase of implementing IWB.

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