

ENGLISH LECTURERS' ATTITUDE TOWARD TEACHING READING SKILLS IN ENGINEERING COLLEGES – A SURVEY

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Abstract:

In the present day context, an engineering student's success in the "On or Off Campus Recruitment" is mostly based on their demonstrations of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills. Even though English is the medium of instruction in the field of engineering education, the language ability is not enough for them to communicate effectively as large number of engineering colleges are located in rural areas and most of the students are first generation learners. To overcome this problem and make the students competent and suitable to the industry, JNTU Kakinada has introduced two new text books for R16 batch students of , first Year .B.Tech "English for Engineering and Technologists" in first semester and in the second semester "English Encounters". Both text books are based on ESP i.e English for Specific purpose and also consist of soft skills topics like "Goal setting, Team work, Attitude, Self Management ,Body Language, Being Assertive, etc. Apart from these, emphasis has been given to improve reading and writing skills. To improve reading skills, comprehension strategies such as skimming, scanning, intensive reading, and extensive reading, are penned and for writing skills topics like letter writing, email writing, report writing, essay writing etc were given emphasis .The purpose of these skills is to make the learners proficient users of English(Padmamma, 2013. Both processes should develop as a natural extension of the child's need to communicate (Wilson, 1981). As the old saying goes "teachers are born not made" many English faculty members who are employed in various engineering colleges are working finger to bone to enhance reading skills and make the students confident and industry ruddy but unable to get fruitful results.

Hence the researcher has selected a topic to collect opinion of lecturers on reading skills and also the strategies they apply in the classroom to teach reading skills. The present study is entitled as "English Lecturers' Attitude Towards Teaching Reading Skills in Engineering Colleges – A survey".

Importance of Reading and Writing

Reading is a complex, dynamic and multi dimensional skill that students develop and practice in the language learning and teaching process. It is important to note that reading is an active process. Reader has to apply strategies that will enable him to make sense of what he reads. Thus language learners have to be trained to be good readers. The art of reading is a skill. One has to master this skill by applying various strategies or approaches both at surface and deeper level.). Along with reading, writing activities are essential to the learners who are learning to read and write. Reading and writing should occur naturally to construct meaning everyday situations (Miller,1982, Wilson,1981). Reading and writing are interdependent processes that are essential to each other and mutually beneficial (Holt and Vacca, 1984). As writing is improves through daily communication use, reading is enhanced (Goodman, 1983). The relationship between reading and writing is based on communication. To develop the art of reading, lecturers and the strategies they use in the class room play vital role.

Engineering- Elite course:

Engineers plays crucial role in shaping the society. Being an engineer he or she has to identify the problems or the needs in the society and solve them by applying his or her technical knowledge. Like medical students, engineering students have to update their knowledge with the latest developments in the technological world and also enhance their skills. They need to read books and research articles published from time to time. They require high order thinking skills to resolve problems and conflicts and also comprehending large amount of written matter, strategic thinking and basic reading skills: decoding, fluency and vocabulary. Unless decoding is automatic and reading is fluent, comprehension suffers. So another way to understand the reading process is to see it as a hierarchy of skill (Pressley, 2001). Beginning with letters and sounds, moving to identification of words, fluent use of those skills and understanding of the meaning of the words and sentences, comprehension is the culmination of a serious of processes.

As Jacqueline Amaral(2007) has pointed out that engineers have analysing and problem – solving skills and are good at oral communication, they need training in reading skills. Lecturers have to introduce innovative methods to teach reading skills.

English Language Teaching In Andhra Pradesh:

In Andhra Pradesh, English is introduced in class one in the regional and English medium schools and students are exposed language and subject classes in English medium schools, thereby increasing the quality of exposure to it. However, despite the difference in the amount of exposure to the language, the quality of English teaching remains more or less the same except a few schools in the cities. Most of the schools English is taught using

translation method. In most of the schools English teacher reads the text and explains it to the students in English and regional language while the students remain passive. The students are not allowed to ask questions in the middle of the lesson as the teachers feel it might disturb the class. Most of the students from regional medium background are first generation learners and they do not get any academic guidance from families. The students from English medium background are driven by marks and their parents are equating academic success with the percentage score. English is taught like subject with focus on content, rather than on development of skills. The schools setting some exceptions aside have large classes ranging from 40 to 60 even more especially in government schools making it difficult for the teacher to interact with all students, thus affecting learning process.

Even at intermediate level the focus is completely on scoring marks and preparing exams like IIT, EAMCET, NEET, AIEEE relegating English to the background. As a result when students join the undergraduate programmes, they have poorly developed reading skills and struggle to cope with the reading demands at this level. Also there is no support offered to them in colleges by way of bridge or short term academic reading courses to enhance their skills and competence. In other words, the students are under pressure to develop their reading skills to better their academic performance in the content subject with little or no guidance. In the case of engineering student it is heinous as they have to face global competition.

It is important for engineers, as it is for those working in other technical and scientific occupations, to continue their education throughout their careers because much of their value to their employers depends on their knowledge of the latest technology. Engineering in high-technology areas, may find that technical knowledge can become outdated rapidly. By keeping current in their field, engineers are able to deliver the best solutions and greatest values to their employers.

Engineers are expected to keep abreast with the latest in their own domain and to this end they need to read books and research articles published from time to time. Globalization has created opportunities it has also provided challenging situations to deal with. Engineers are required to cull information from various sources and use higher order thinking skills to resolve problems and conflicts. An engineer requires comprehending large amount of written matter and using it strategically. This hence calls for active, strategic, thinking and basic reading skills such as decoding, fluency and vocabulary. Unless decoding is automatic and reading is fluent, comprehension suffers. So another way to understand the reading process is to see it as a hierarchy of skills. Beginning with letters and sounds, moving to identification of words, fluent use of those skills and understanding of the meaning of words and sentences, comprehension is the culmination of a series of processes.

Problems in the area of reading:

Evidence suggested that many engineering students are not aware of that they have comprehension problem. They often don't know how much they're missing. According to Markman "both young and mature readers failed to detect logical and semantic inconsistencies in the text" (Markman, 1977). This lack of awareness is noticeable with adult learners aged 18 to 22, at the engineering level. Sometimes discussion reveals their misunderstanding about the text or their lack of background knowledge in the subject matter. They need to be taught not just the nuances of communicating orally but also the strategies of reading. They need to be taught new competencies in reading so that they are able to respond efficiently. They need to be aware of specialized use of the English language in technical domain.

Aim:

To identify various strategies applied by the English lecturers in the class room while teaching reading skills

To study various methods applied by the lecturers in the classroom to enhance reading skills.

Objectives:

- To know the attitude of English Lecturers towards teaching reading skills.

Method:

The researcher has prepared questionnaire and personally met nearly 69 English lecturers who are working at various Engineering colleges affiliated to JNTUKAKINADA to collect data. Filled questionnaire is collected and analyzed by applying SPS software. The questionnaire consists of fourteen questions with five multiple choice (Strangely Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

Analysis of the Questionnaire:

Opinions of lecturers were collected on

1. English medium instruction is difficult for regional medium students.
2. Students refer to dictionary, if they don't understand the meaning of difficult word.
3. Family background influences reading English.
4. Aloud reading helps to understand difficult text
5. Teachers can help students when they fail to comprehend.
6. Students are not comfortable with long text.
7. Along with prescribed text, other study material will be used in the class.
8. Reading strategies will help students to understand the text better.

9. Reading will be taught extensively.
10. Students from urban area can apply more reading strategies.
11. Social , Economical differences influence reading.
12. Regional medium students read slower than English medium students.
13. There is difference between regional medium students and English medium students in applying reading techniques.
14. Remedial classes on reading will help regional medium students.

Findings:

Statement number five and eight are Strongly Agreed, where as the reaming statements are Agreed by the lecturers.

Questions		N		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		Valid	Missing					
English medium instruction is difficult for regional medium students.	count	69	0	8	30	10	17	4
	%			11.6	43.5	14.5	24.6	5.8
Students can refer to dictionary, if they don't understand the meaning of difficult words.	count	69	0	21	34	7	5	2
	%			30.4	49.3	10.1	7.2	2.9
Family background influences reading English.	count	69	0	12	34	9	10	4
	%			17.4	49.3	13.0	14.5	5.8
Aloud reading helps to understand difficult text.	count	69	0	14	36	11	5	3
	%			20.3	52.2	15.9	7.2	4.3
Teachers help students when students fail to comprehend.	count	69	0	34	31	3	1	0
	%			49.3	44.9	4.3	1.4	0
Students are not comfortable with long text.	count	69	0	13	38	12	6	0
	%			18.8	55.1	17.4	8.7	0
Along with prescribed text other study material should be used in the class.	count	69	0	26	34	8	1	0
	%			37.7	49.3	11.6	1.4	0
Reading strategies will help students to understand the text better.	count	69	0	38	27	4	0	0
	%			55.1	39.1	5.8	0	0
Reading should be taught extensively.	count	69	0	17	29	10	13	0
	%			24.6	42.0	14.5	18.8	0
Students from urban areas can apply more reading strategies.	count	69	0	12	24	23	9	1
	%			17.4	34.8	33.3	13.0	1.4
Social and Economical differences influence reading.	count	69	0	9	22	15	18	5
	%			13.0	31.9	21.7	26.1	7.2
Regional medium students read slower than English medium students.	count	69	0	12	37	15	4	1
	%			17.4	53.6	21.7	5.8	1.4
There is difference between regional medium students and English medium students in applying reading techniques.	count	69	0	13	39	14	2	1
	%			18.8	56.5	20.3	2.9	1.4
Remedial classes on reading can help regional medium students.	count	69	0	19	36	11	2	1
	%			27.5	52.2	15.9	2.9	1.4

Conclusion:

Majority of the lecturers have expressed that reading strategies, should be taught extensively to the engineering students. All teachers across the curriculum and levels can play a role in teaching students to use reading skills and strategies to learn the content of the subjects that they teach and become independent readers and learners. Lecturers may implement some of the following methods to improve reading skills.

1. Cooperative learning: cooperative learning approaches create learning strategies which are independent of content and thus are transferable to different content areas (O'Donnell & Dansereau, 1992).
2. Cooperative discussions- Group Discussion: Cooperative discussions improve students' recall of text content(Dansereau,1985)
3. Learner Involvement : involve students actively in the learning process. (Dansereau,1985 & Slavin, 1990)
4. Promote Interaction: Baird & White 1984 state that promote interaction, a foundation principal of cooperative learning. It builds students 'responsibility for themselves and their group members.
5. Learners' involvement in class procedures: Marzon, 1992 identifies specific ways in which students become involved in developing class procedures when cooperative learning is the basis for class processes.

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