

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

ISSN-2321-7065



Volume V, Issue III March 2017



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A Study on Developing Strategic Reading Comprehension Skills among the First Year B.Tech Students of M.V.R.College of Engineering and Technology, Paritala Affiliated to Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Kakinada

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Abstract:

Why should one learn to read? In our life, we need to acquire knowledge for various academic and non- academic purpose and reading plays a major role in the process of knowledge acquisition. Secondly, reading is a skill that gives the second language learner exposure to elements like vocabulary, grammar and text structure, and enables the learner to develop the other language skills like speaking and writing. Learning how to read in a second language is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning as reading is a complex process involving aspects like linguistic knowledge as penned by Sruti Akula (2012). This study is therefore based on the assumptions: teaching of reading involves the teaching of sub-skills/ strategies and their effective use.

Introduction :

Reading skills are not introduced systematically in the syllabus for advanced Indian L2 learners. The assumption seems to be that the learners will understand a passage will enough as long as they know all the characters, words, and grammar in that passage. Although L2 linguistics knowledge, mainly word knowledge, is a single best predictor of reading comprehension, accounting for up to 30% of the variance, learners also need other domains of linguistic knowledge, such as textual structure and word knowledge, to comprehends the idea of a passage(Linda, 2010). By learning the art of speed reading a reader will give up reading by word by word and use the proper skills and increase accuracy in reading comprehension.

Acquisition of reading comprehension is learning to understand writing as well as spoken language. At the beginning of learning to read, the correlation between reading and spoken language comprehension are small (Curtis, 1980, Sticht & James, 1984). This is

because, at the beginning, children are learning to decode and identify words, so it is these words – reading processes that limit comprehension.

However, as children move beyond the beginnings of learning to read, the correlations between reading comprehension and spoken language comprehension increase and then level out by high school (Sticht and James, 1984).

As the child learn to read words, the limiting factor in reading comprehension shifts from word recognition to spoken language comprehension. According to Van Dijk & Kintsch, (1983) comprehension requires multiple levels across units of language: word level, sentence level, and text level. Across these levels, processes of word identification, parsing, referential mapping and a variety of inference process all contribute, interacting with the reader's conceptual knowledge, to produce a mental model of the text.

Research Problem:

It is generally observed that students, who have insufficient exposure to academic reading in English at the school level, face difficulty in reading academic texts at the undergraduate level due to the specific nature of the discourse, the density of information and technical vocabulary present in the texts. This makes a great demand on their self-study skills and strategies. However, the students at this level seem to be underprepared for advanced level reading and experience difficulty in this area.

Review of Literature:

The proposal for reading skills and reading components mainly come from two different but connected perspectives: (1) the instructional and testing perspective and (2) the research perspective. Alderson, (2001) mentioned reading comprehension requires eight skills. 1. Recalling word meaning 2. Drawing inferences about the meaning of a word in context 3. Finding answers to questions answered explicitly or in paraphrase 4. Weaving together ideas in the context 5. Drawing inferences from the content 6. Recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude, tone, and mood 7. Identifying a writer's techniques 8. Following the structure of a passage. Alderson also mentioned that comprehension would develop with a systematic syllabus and material design, as well as the design of language tests.

A common view on reading is reading consists of two components: 1. Decoding (words recognition) 2. Comprehension. Reading comprehension includes parsing sentences, understanding sentences in discourse, building a discourse structure and integrating this understanding with what one already knows. (Gough, Juel & Griffith, 1992)

On reading, Carver (1987) mentioned three components: 1. Word recognition skills 2. Reading rate or reading fluently 3. Problem solving comprehension.). As writing improves through daily communication use, reading is enhanced (Goodman, 1983).

On reading strategies, Garner (1987) mentioned that reading strategies were plentiful activities undertaken by active learners. Garner (1994) concerned with Paris, Lipson, and Wixon (1994) that reading strategies can and should be learned to the point automatically, after that they become skills and learners must know not only what strategies to use but also

when, where, and how to use them. The review of literature has emphasised that there is a need to do research on reading comprehension skills of the first year B.Tech students and their reading strategies as this research problem is undisclosed.

Data Collection:

To collect data, the researcher voluntarily selected 150 first year B.Tech students of Civil, CSE, ECE, EEE, Mech branches of MVR College of Engineering and Technology, Paritala, located near Kanchikacharla, Andhra Pradesh, India. A Questionnaire consisting of fourteen questions was prepared with five point scale (Strangely agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strangely Disagree) to collect personal data. The collected data was analyzed statically by applying SPS software based on its conclusions were drawn.

Aim of the Study:

The aim of the study is to develop reading comprehension skills among the first year B.Tech students, through strategy training.

Research Questions:

What are the problems that learners face in reading comprehension?

What strategies do engineering students follow in reading?

How to develop strategies to enhance reading skills?

Methodology :

The researcher has selected voluntarily 150 students (as mentioned bellow in the table) of the first year B.Tech of MVR College of Engineering and Technology, Paritala, near Kanchikacharl, Andhra Pradesh, India.

S.NO	BRANCH	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
1	Civil	50
2	CSE	50
3	ECE	50
4	EEE	50
5	Mech	50

The researcher conducted Pre-test to measure the comprehension ability of the students and the strategies they apply while comprehending. A twenty five pages booklet with multiple answers was printed and distributed to each student with maximum marks of 135 and the duration of the examination was three hours. The following parameters were taken into consideration for assessment.

S.NO	AREA OF TESTING	Number of exercises(each exercise has five questions) and allocation of marks	TOTAL MARKS
1	SKIMMING	5x5	25
2	SCANNING	5x5	25
3	VOCABULARY	3x5	15
4	INTENSIVE READING	3x5	15
5	EXTENSIVEREADING	3x5	15
6	GRAMMAR	6x5	30
7	GUESSING	2x5	10
TOTAL MARKS			135

Pre-Test Assessment:

It was observed by the researcher that most of the rural first year engineering students were unable to comprehend and apply strategies. To make them aware of reading strategies and techniques of comprehension, the researcher designed a thirty day intensive coaching program from Monday to Saturday from 3 PM to 4 PM with the permission of the principal of the college. Emphasis was laid on teaching methods and application of reading strategies followed by interactive sessions. A special course material was designed and distributed to the pupils.

Design of the Programme:

The researcher designed a thirty hours course with an objective

- ◆ To improve reading comprehension skill among the first year B.Tech students.
- ◆ To make them aware of reading strategies.
- ◆ To enhance students' confidence levels.
- ◆ To avoid Anglophobia

The following topics were taught and discussed elaborately in the class.

Day wise Schedule of the Programme

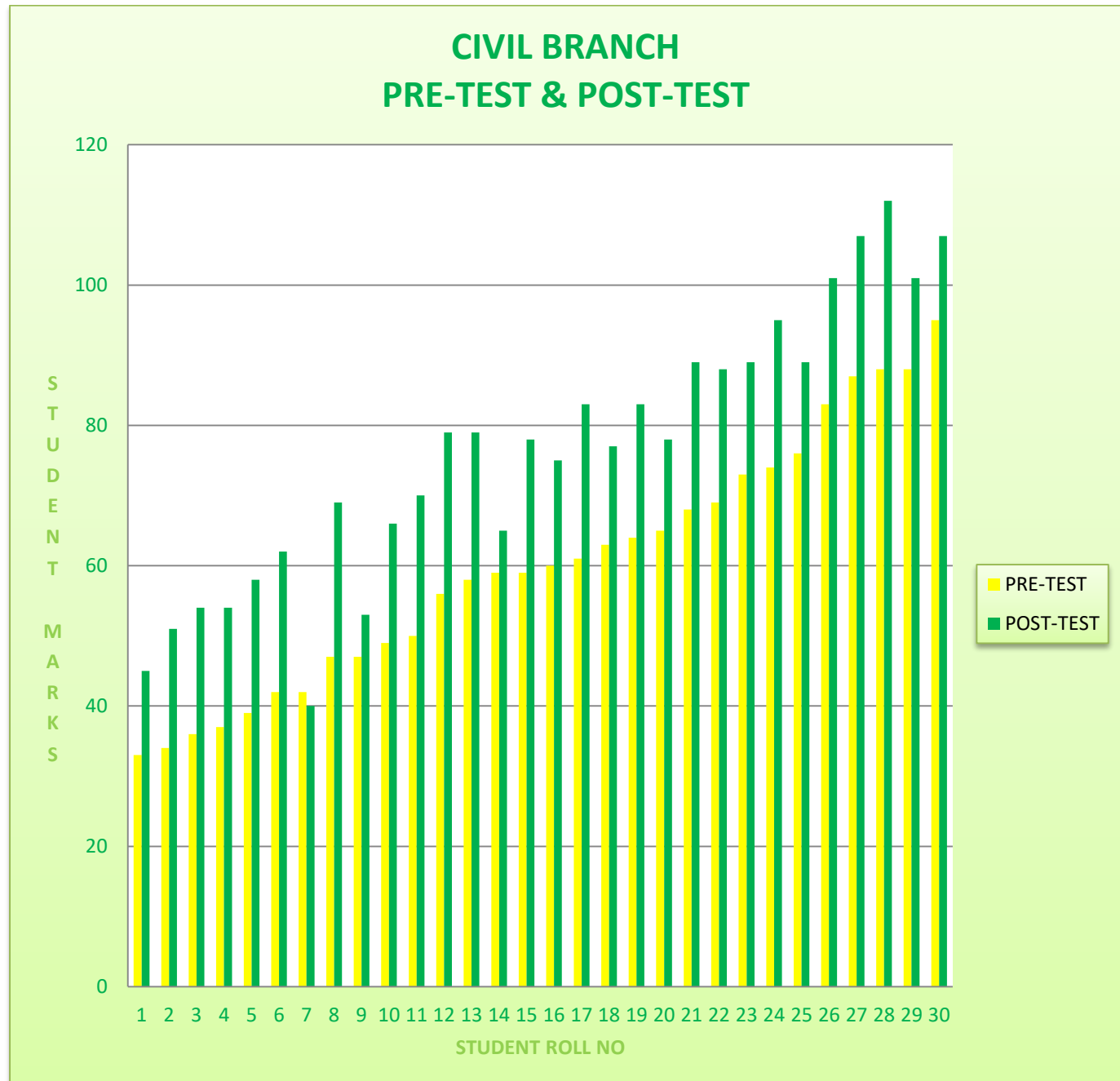
DAY	TOPIC COVERED
1	Introduction
2	Introducing various theories
3	Bottom -up theory
4	Top down theory

5	Cognitive theory
6	Metacognitive theory
7	Introducing strategies
8	Analyzing suffixes / prefixes
9	Analyzing contextual clues
10	Inference – analyzing word clues
11	Analyzing vocabulary
12	Identifying signal words
13	Extensive reading
14	Using a dictionary
15	Identification of similes and metaphors
16	Identification analogies
17	Categorizing information
18	Developing questioning techniques
19	Predicting
20	Guessing
21	Using illustrations and graphic devices
22	Identifying the structure
23	Intensive Reading
24	Scanning
25	Skimming
26	Identifying tone and mood
27	Comparing and contrasting
28	Sequencing events
29	Comparing fact / opinions
30	Speed reading techniques

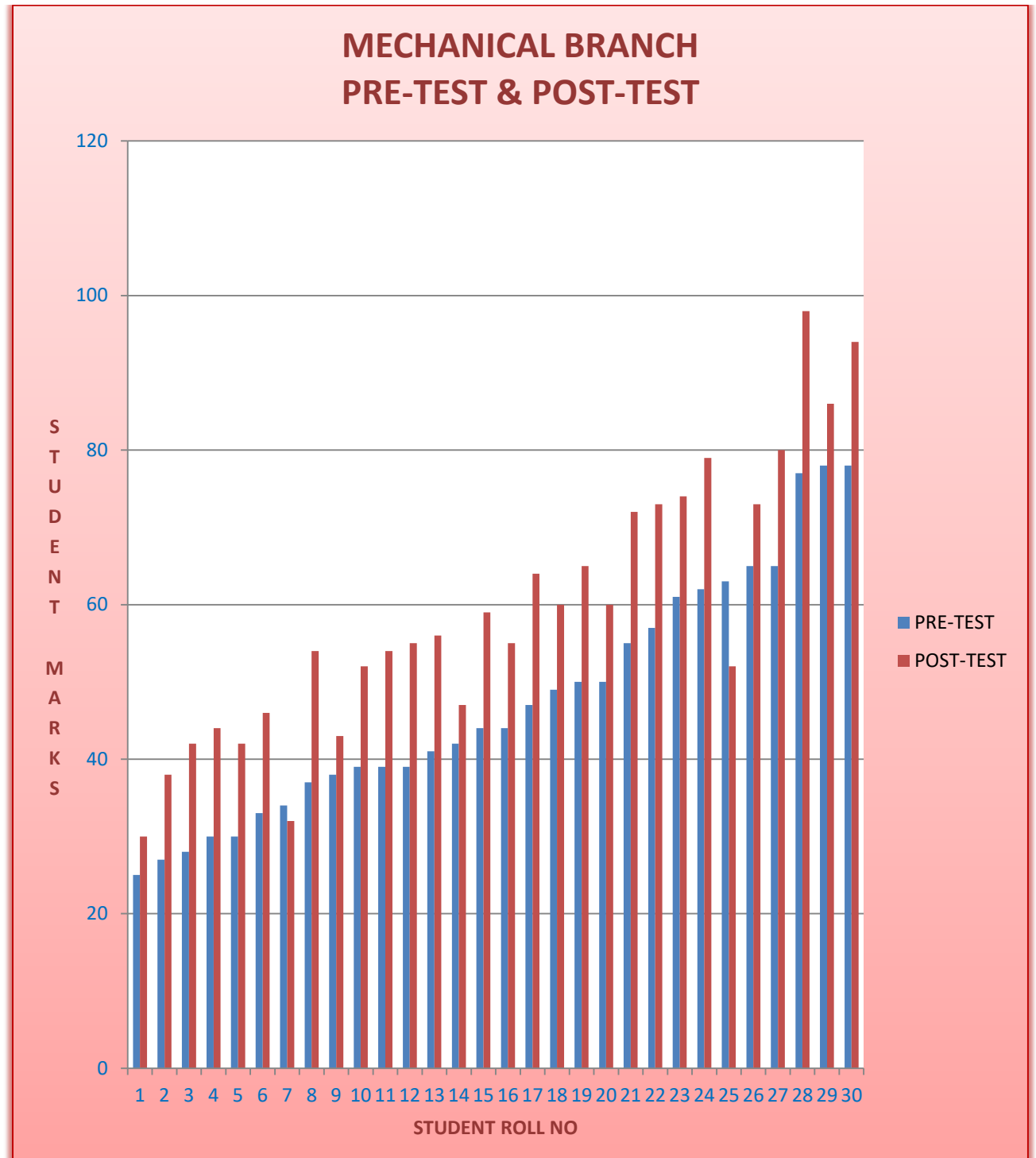
Post – Test:

The researcher conducted a post-test for 135 marks in order to identify the impact of the thirty day intensive coaching program. Like pre test a twenty five pages booklet with multiple choice answers was distributed to each student and analysis was drawn between pre and post test.

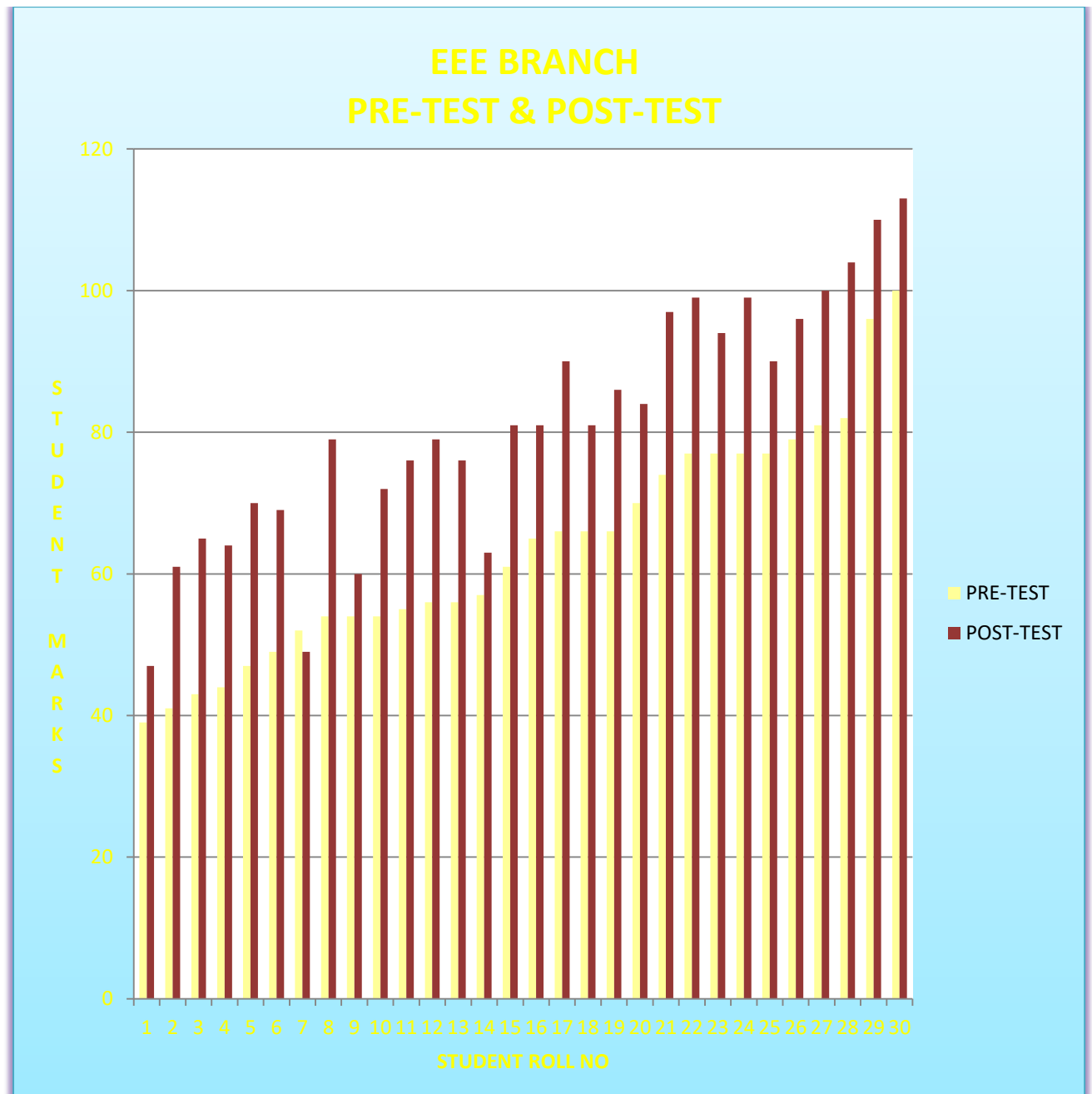
CIVIL BRANCH



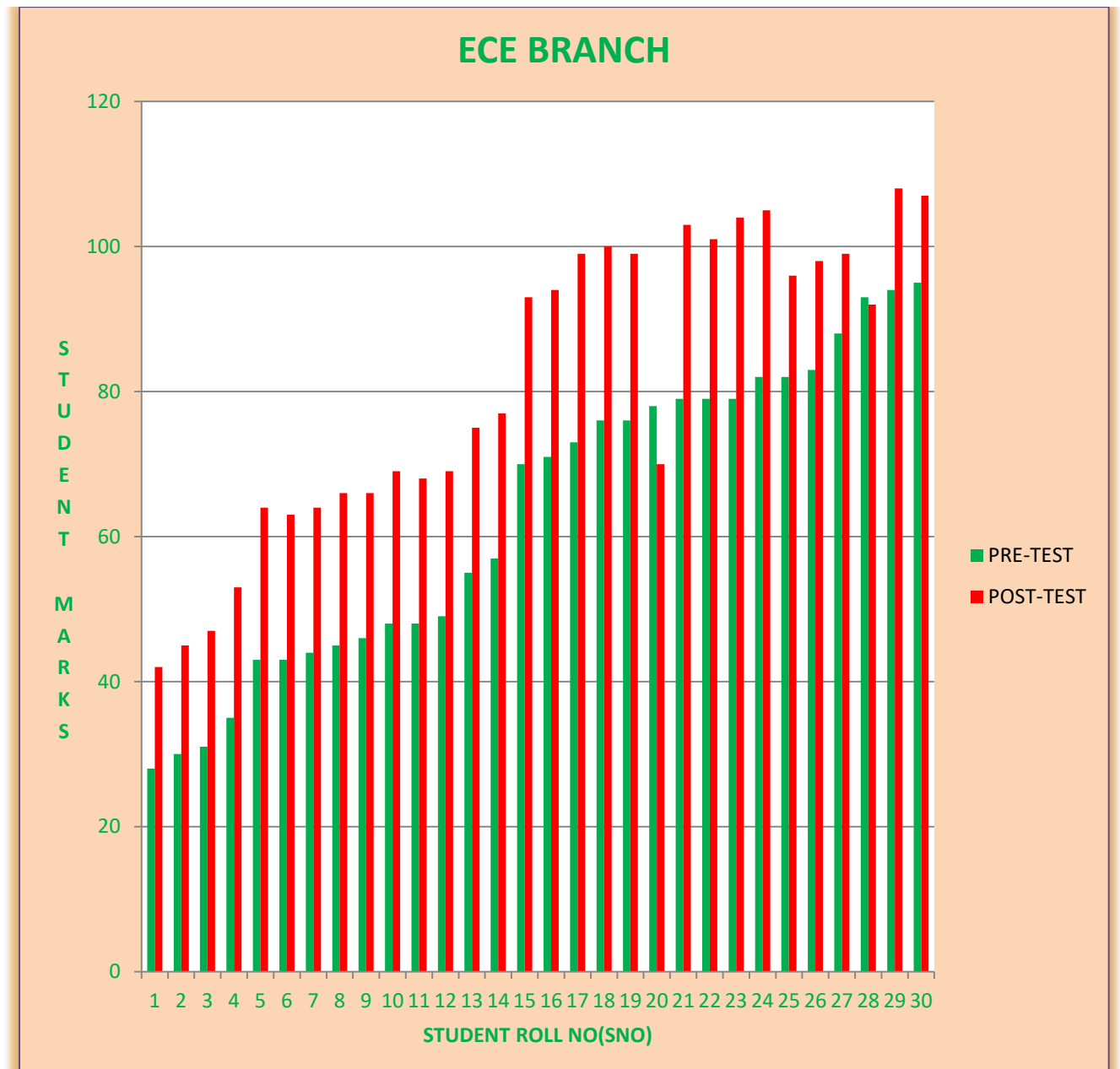
MECHANICAL BRANCH



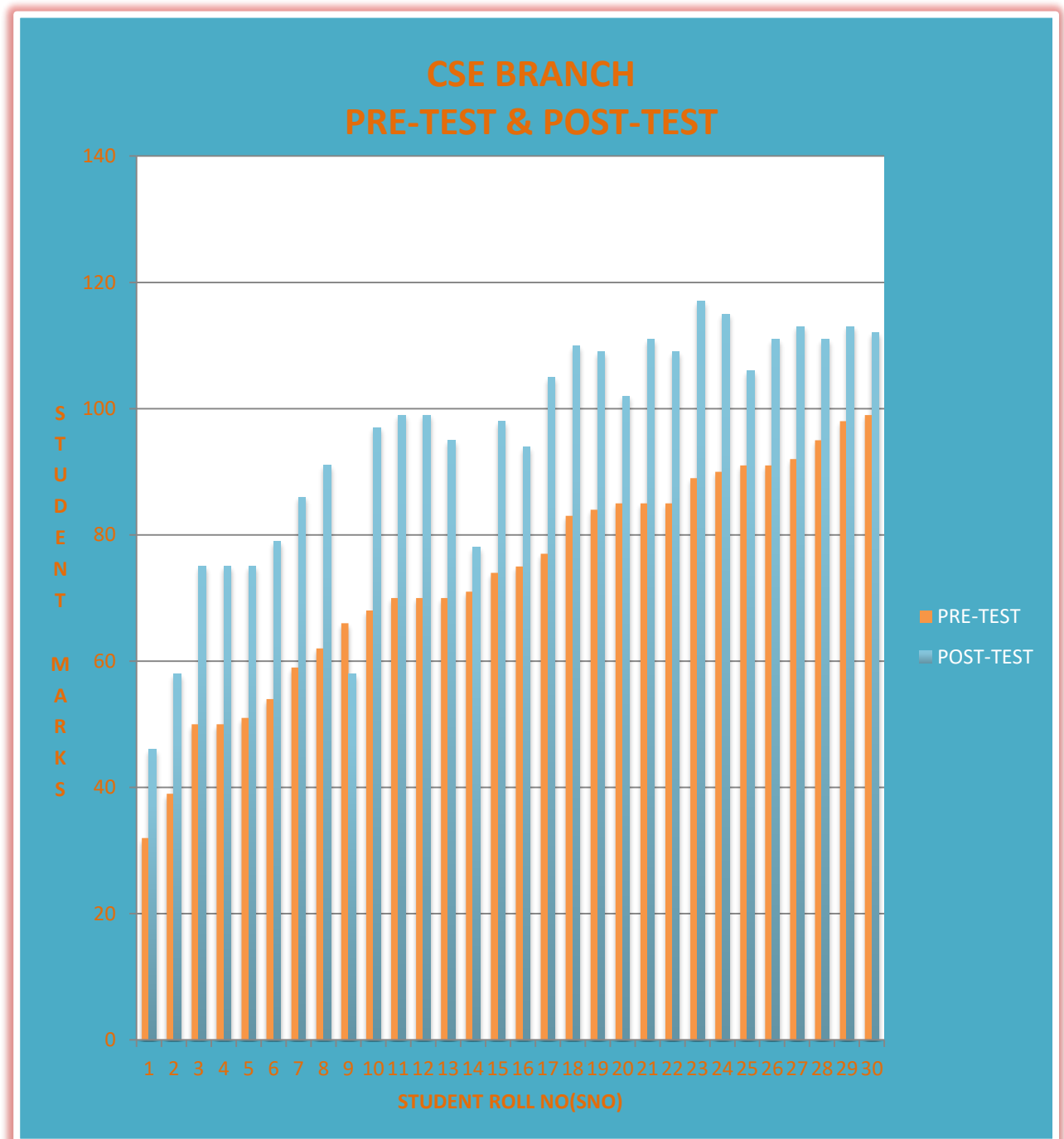
EEE BRANCH



ECE BRANCH



CSE BRANCH



Results:

1. It was observed by the researcher that there was a remarkable improvement among the test takers in reading skills.
2. Majority of the test takes were able to apply reading strategies.
3. Students were able to apply strategies like skimming, scanning, guessing, and predicting confidentially.
4. Intensive and Extensive reading strategies were given much emphasis in the training helped the test takers to enhance their reading skills.
5. Interactive sessions helped the students to clarify their doubts on reading comprehension
6. Most of the students were able to read fast and understand the text better when compared to pre test.
7. The usage of dictionary was minimised as students started applying contextual clues, guessing techniques to identify the meaning of a difficult word.
8. Group discussion strategy by Dansereau,(1985) helped the test takers not only express their opinions properly and but also improved their confidence levels and communication skills.
9. It was revealed that the thirty day Intensive coaching program on reading comprehension motivated the students and created a positive attitude towards English language among the students.

Conclusion:

Reading is a very important skill for academic purpose. Students feel a great sense of frustration when asked to read a small passage. The reading problems can broadly grouped under those related to attitude , language problems, ability to comprehend, accuracy, fluency, speed, pronunciation, lack of motivation, environment. Students with these problems often confuse letters; they read slowly and hesitantly, they read without fluency, word by word or constantly lose his places there by learning out whole chunks of reading the same passage. As most of the engineering students appear for TOEFL, GRE, IELTS , they have to improve their reading comprehensions skills and also learn the art of applying reading strategies.

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