

Improving Reading Skills Enhances the Self-Esteem of the Low-Proficiency Learners at the Tertiary Level in the Rural Colleges of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The reading skill rests on the quality of comprehension which is the result of listening skill that manifests itself in the conversation. The training in reading improves one's image as it reveals the caliber of the individual in the language because, it comprises of grouping of words, articulation, pronunciation, intonation, word stress, understanding the phrasal verbs, idioms, etc. that needs listening and comprehension. The hearers raise their brow if they come across an individual with greater reading competency resulting in the better self-image of the person and boosts up the self-image. As the youngsters in the rural colleges have inadequate ambience for them to have a suitable exposure to listening to standard English being spoken by their peers, the conscious and assiduous training in reading as a result of listening will enable them to move up in the ladder of success. This article envisages delineating the vitality of training in reading skill in making the students from the rural colleges come out of their inhibitions and perform better in their academics and career.

Keywords: reading, listening, speaking, self-esteem, self-image, meaning-guess, vocabulary building

Introduction

English has become the lingua franca of the world and has made a permanent berth in Indian soil. English, the colonizer's language, after having become the linking language of the world, made the colonized nations to make English as the medium of instruction in every level of administration including education and India is no exception to this phenomenon. The globalization has made English as the language of commerce, technology, media, education, etc.

English has become the communicative language of the world. It is considered as the intercultural communicative medium. The people world over who speak different languages, belong to different nationalities and follow varied cultures, have realized the need for a common language and have chosen English as their common language of communication. In fact, the colonized countries of the British were driven to choose English as their common Communicative language. English will be a language used mainly in multicultural contexts as a

second language and for communication between the non-native speakers (Priya 2017: 69). Thus, English has shifted its position from being just a native and a second language or foreign language to the status of a universal language meant for communicating and exchange of ideas.

Cheschire further confirms by saying: “The role of English has not been replaced and it has not succeeded in driving out any of the indigenous languages of India. In fact, in its long sojourn in India of over 300 years, it has been enriched by the Indian languages, and has enriched them in return” (300). The indisputability of its effect in all areas of administration, education, communication, governance, etc. makes it necessary to be a person of substance in our land. Its influence is felt in the way the common official communications are done in our land by the Government filtering down to various public and private sectors in our land. It has infiltrated into our psyche to the extent that a person is considered illiterate if he or she does not possess the adequate communicative skill in English.

Hypothesis

The training in “reading” in English among the low-proficiency students in the rural colleges improves their language absorbing ability enhances their self-image and enables them to have a self-esteem.

Objectives

01. To teach them to group the words to make meaning.
02. To instruct them and show them the phrasal verbs
03. To teach them the pronunciation of the difficult words and their synonyms
04. To train them in the intonation and word stress
05. To be assessed by their peers

Importance of Proficiency in Reading

Evans says that the school-university transition can be a daunting and perplexing experience for any undergraduate student, but it is more so for the ESL and EFL students who enter the colleges with a lot of dreams from the rural schools only to find everything in the language that dreaded most in their schooling. This situation has to be confronted by any rural student who enters the campus with high dreams (2011: 395).

Reading is a skill through which an individual can manifest his or her caliber to the hearers. A good reading in English is a confirmation of the fact that the individual has a good comprehending power and has a good listening ear resulting in a good delivery.

In order that L1 brain attains the acquisition and comprehension of the patterns of L2 readers may require direct instruction in English-to-sound conversion, onsets and rimes, an ample practice with easy readings and steadily increasing vocabulary to build up their facility with English reading strategies (Birch 2008: 168) Birch continues to say: “The proficient reader has an expert decision-making and problem-solving mind that uses extensive knowledge of language and the world, effective cognitive comprehension strategies, and quick automatic low-

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level processing strategies to interact with the text efficiently” (167). So, it confirms the fact that the reading is itself a skill that needs proficiency in order to attain syntactic and semantic comprehension.

In Chinese universities an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) reading course is stipulated in the syllabus for when the undergraduates finish foundation stage study after the second year. The problem is that the course is not given due attention and is neglected in many universities and institutions by university authorities, teachers and students. (Weir 2000: 2)

In China, before 1985, the required speed of reading in English for Chinese university students was 17 wpm. The Ministry of Higher Education conducted a survey and showed that only one third of university graduates acquired this ‘reading ability’. In 1985, the National College English Teaching Syllabus (NCETS) was introduced by the State Education Commission. In this syllabus, the English course, which is compulsory for all university students across the country, is divided into six bands. All the students must meet the requirements of Band 4, which include a reading speed of 50 wpm for careful reading and 80 wpm for quick reading with 70% comprehension. The requirements of Band 6 are aimed at students who have successfully completed Band 4 study, the target reading speed being 70 wpm for careful reading and 120 wpm for quick reading with 70% comprehension. Band 4 and 6 together constitute the basic grounding stage of the College English Course. This course focuses primarily on the development of students’ linguistic competence with only limited attention being paid to the development of language skills and strategies (Weir 2000: 1).

The world is aware of the economic revolution in China. The rapid economic growth of China made the entire world to admire and to learn from their policies. The economic growth is the resultant of the changes that were brought about in the field of education as the aforementioned educational change in China indicates. The achievement of China should pave the way for India which has a undisputed history of having a solid educational system.

All the models of reading that have been looked at so far have been designed with careful reading in mind. The intended comprehension is to extract complete meanings from presented material as opposed to comprehension aimed at only extracting main ideas, skimming, or searching for particular details. In fact, many of the models of reading that have surfaced in the literature to date have been mainly concerned with careful reading (Urquhart 1998: 477).

Place, Procedure and Outcome of Research

The findings are based on a study trip to Don Bosco Colleges of Arts and Science at Dharmapuri, Karaikal, Keela Eral, Yellagiri, Auxilium College at Rangunathapuram and St Alphonsa College at Karungal, Marthandam. The following questions were posed to 250 B.A. (English) students in the above-mentioned colleges:

S.NO.	QUESTION	RATING
01.	Do you feel confident to speak in English and find a career for yourself?	92% - No 8% - Yes
02.	Does your college provide you with good ambiance and opportunities to better your communicative skills in English?	100 % Yes
03.	Does your syllabus enable you to improve your communicative skills in English?	100 % No
04.	What are your suggestions to improve in English?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English has to be insisted within the campus and sanctions have to be given to the violators
05.	Do your staff members teach English as they take classes?	100% No
06.	The staff were asked: Do you teach English language to the students as you take class?	90% Yes 10% try our best but no time.
07.	Do the students show receptivity in learning English?	100% No

The responses from the students at the tertiary level were surprising because, despite the fact that the Colleges were providing good facilities and opportunities to learn English, they do not possess adequate skill to express or communicate in English. They were unanimous in their response that the curriculum and the assessment pattern do not help them in their learning or bettering of their language. There was no contrary opinion in requesting their respective Colleges to make them speak English in the campus and give sanction to the violators. The final response indicates the fact that they are aware of the dire need to improve but they do not know the way to improve in their skills. Invariably, those who felt rather confident in facing the corporate world were from English Medium Schools which was negligible compared to the majority from the Government schools who lacked adequate communicative skills in English.

Another phenomenon to be noted is the dialectic between the opinions of the staff and the students. The students are unilateral in saying that the staff are not teaching them the language in the class and the contrary opinion is expressed by the students. The staff also say that the students manifest hesitation and inhibition to learn the language. This opposing opinion could be a good topic of research and discussion.

In order to find out the right methodology to bridge the gap, i.e., to make the students to learn the language in the class, the students of second year B.A. (English) consisting of 17 of Don Bosco College of Arts and Science, Karaikal was chosen. The students were divided into three categories: Below Average (Low-Proficiency), Average and Above Average. There were five students who came under below average category, eight were average students and four were above average students. They were given a passage from *Impressions III* (textbook for University of Pondicherry) and they were made to read the lesson “A Day’s Wait” by Ernest Hemingway. The students who belonged to average and above average category were able to read well and grasp the content rather well.

The below average students were separated from the class and were given the special training in the reading. First, they were made to get the correct sounds for ‘s’, ‘l’, ‘w’, ‘sh’, etc. They were also made to group the words together and the pronunciations of the difficult words were taught as it is given below:

WORD	PRONUNCIATION	MEANING	SYNONYMS	ANTONYMS
Miserable	'mɪz(ə)rəb(ə)l	Unhappy depressed	Gloomy, pathetic, sad, tragic, wretched	Cheerful, happy, good, joyful, elated
Forehead	'fɔrɪd/ /'fɔ:(r),hed	the part of the face above the eyebrows.		
Flush	flʌʃ	(of a person’s skin, face, etc.) become red and hot, typically as the result of illness or strong emotion	Even, smooth, level	Broken, uneven, irregular

The word stress for the following sentences was taught to the students. There were told to give stress to the words that are important in a sentence while reading. They were given the practice to stress the underlined words.

01. He <u>came</u> into the room / to shut the <u>windows</u> / while we were / <u>still in bed</u> / and / <u>I saw</u> / he <u>looked ill</u> /.
02. But / when <u>I came downstairs</u> / he was <u>dressed</u> / <u>sitting by the fire</u> / looking <u>very sick</u> / and <u>miserable</u> /...
03. He seemed to <u>know</u> / <u>all about influenza</u> / and said / there was <u>nothing</u> / <u>to worry about</u> / if the <u>fever</u> / did not / go <u>above</u> / <u>one hundred and four degrees</u> /.
04. I though / perhaps / he was / a <u>little light-headed</u> / and / after <u>giving him</u> / the <u>prescribed</u> capsules / at <u>eleven o’ clock</u> / I went out / for a while./

The below average students were brought in front of the other students who came under average and above average category and make to read the same lesson. The others found that these students performed better, and they received appreciation from the others and this appreciation brought in satisfaction and the entire group witnessed the growth of the students. From then on, we found a remarkable difference in their reading and their attention in the class and over-all performance improved. In this way, we found that the students with low English proficiency showed a remarkable improvement and they felt good about themselves and created a better image of themselves in front of the class.

Conclusion

English has come to stay in our land and that is going to influence the course of history and the future of our youngsters due to globalization. Inadequacy in English proficiency is going to leave them in the lurch and will stand as a hurdle for their growth in their career. The school Education does not provide them with sufficient exposure to learn as the entire system is towards the academic results. An attempt to find a way to make these students in the tertiary level to gain confidence in learning English resulting in the better image of themselves is proved in this article. If this is achieved, then the purpose of the article has achieved its purpose. May this pave a way forward for the students with low English proficiency in the tertiary level for a better tomorrow which will help the Nation to grow.

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