## Assessment of Reading Habits among Engineering students and Strategies for Enhancing Reading Skills

**Mrs. D. Jeyamala, Ph. D Scholar and Dr. Pauline Das, Ph.D.**
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### What is Reading?

Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning. Like all language, it is a complex interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and language community which is culturally and socially situated. The reading process requires continuous practice, development, and refinement.

### Reading Helps in Bettering Our Communication Skills

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Reading helps in bettering our communication skills. Bettering our communication skills aims at:

- Empowering students for career opportunities and economic development.
- Reading improves their overall English language skills as well as critical thinking, oral presentation, interviewing, debate, and research skills as needed by future engineers and technical experts.
- Reading helps to increase their awareness of issues and concerns of businesses in emerging technologies.

**Importance of Reading in English and Its Special Relevance to India**

The historical circumstances of India (having been ruled by the British for over two centuries) have given the Indians an easy access to mastering English language, and innumerable opportunities for advancement in the field of science and technology. Many Indians have become so skilled in English language and have won many international awards for creative and comparative literatures during the last few years. Of late Indian authors have won the prestigious booker prizes for their books. Over the years, English language has become one of our principal assets in getting a global leadership for films made by Indians in English language.

In India, people going from North to South for education or business mostly communicate in English, which has become a link language. Some of the states of India are witnessing popular increase in public demand for teaching of English language from the primary classes. English language is our window to the world. English language is one tool to establish our viewpoint. We can also propagate our theories among the international audience and readers. Therefore it is necessary to inculcate reading in our students.

**Sample for the Study**

The first step towards the fulfillment of this objective was to assess the reading habits of the Karunya students. 100 students from various branches of B. Tech were chosen for the study.

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**Methodology of the Study**

The following questions were put forth to them:

1. How much TV do you watch on an average day at home?

2. How long do you spend with your laptops?

3. Do you have free time?

4. Do you do any regular reading (for example, a daily newspaper, weekly magazines, occasional novels)?

5. When are you most likely to do your reading?

6. Do you have any aversion to reading?

7. Did your teachers in school make you interested in reading?

8. Do you enjoy reading?

9. Arrange the following skills in the order of your preference: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing.

10. Has your knowledge increased due to reading?

**The Data**

To the first question (Table 1) "How much TV do you watch on an average day at home?" the majority of the students (81%) answered that they spend an average of 1 – 5 hrs every day watching TV. This is an issue of great concern. An alarming note was given by 11% of students who replied that they watch TV for 6 hours 45 minutes to 12 hours regularly. Only one student watched a normal of 30 minutes to 45 minutes every day. 5% of students watched TV depending upon their moods and 2% of students did not have the habit of watching TV.

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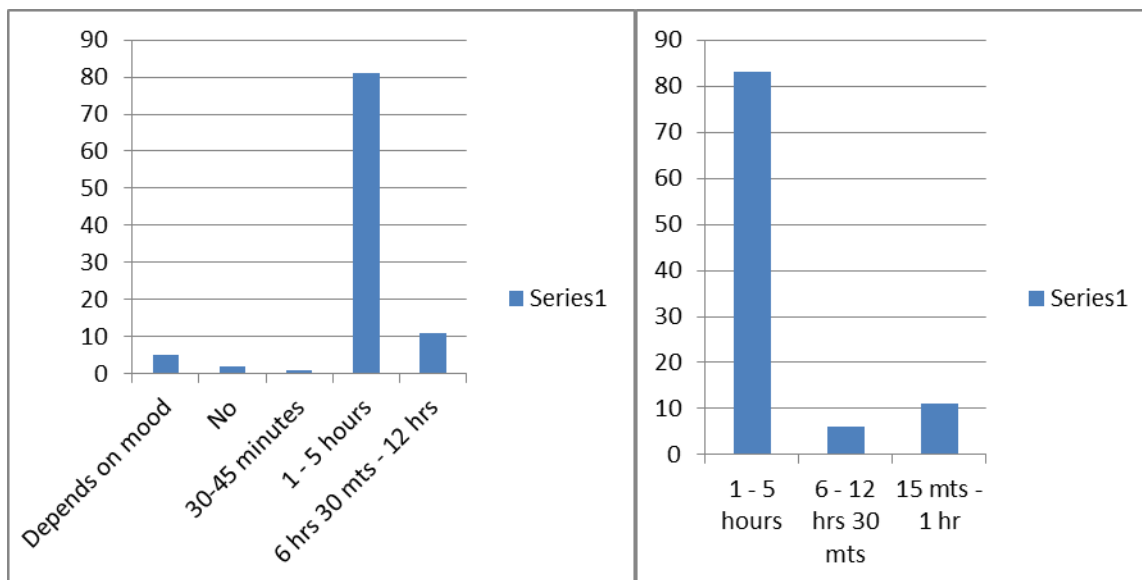
**Table – 1**                                    **Table - 2**

To the second question (Table 2) "How long do you spend with your laptops?" yet another issue with youngsters again there was 83% spending 1 – 5 hours every day. To this question also, the scholar got an alarming reply of 6% of students spending 6 hours – 12 hours 30 minutes in their laptops. Only 11% of students spent a normal 15 minutes – 1 hour with their laptops.

This is the reason why to the third question "Do you have free time?" (Table 3). 31% of students expressed that they do not have any free time for reading. An average of 56% of students have 45 minutes to 3 hours of free time, 8% of students have even 3 hrs 30 minutes to 6 hours of free time. Obviously they are wasting time, and 5% of students keep themselves busy, having only 30 minutes.

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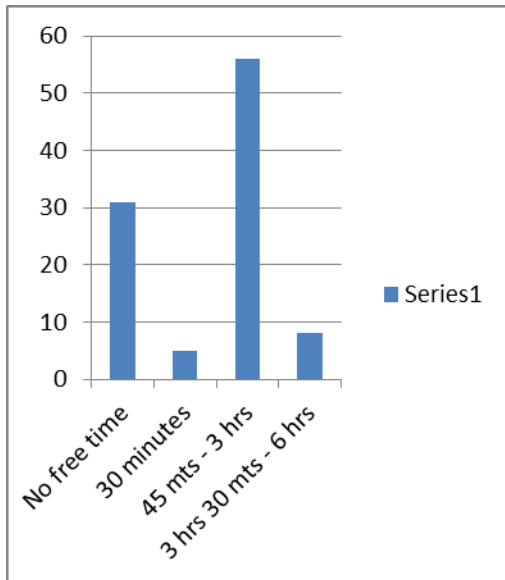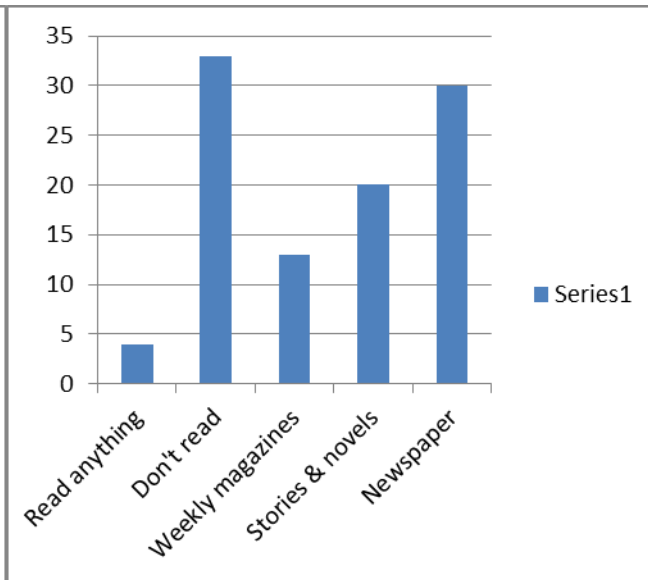
**Table – 3**　　　　　　　　　　　　**Table - 4**

To the fourth question (Table 4) "Do you do any regular reading (for example, a daily newspaper, weekly magazines, occasional novels)?" the sad answer was that 33% of students don't read anything at all. But 30% of students have the habit of reading newspaper, 20% of students read stories and novels, 13% of students read weekly magazines. 4% of students alone have real interest in reading. They read anything that they come across.

46% of students expressed that they prefer reading at night when the question "When are you most likely to do your reading?" was put forth to them (Table 5). 8% read between morning and noon, and 5% in the morning. However, 26% of them read during their leisure time and 4% when they are bored. 10% of students read when there is something interesting and 1% reads when some sports events go on.

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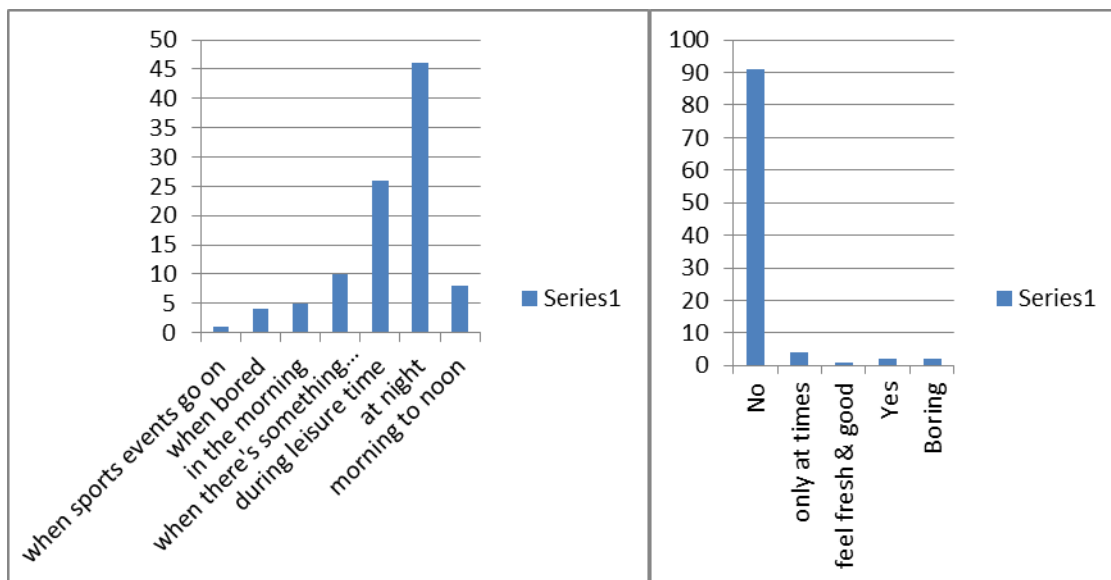
**Table – 5**                                                    **Table - 6**

The responses of the sixth question "Do you have any aversion to reading?" show that the majority (91%) do not have any aversion Table 6). Only 2% of students expressed aversion, 2% of students feel that reading is very boring 4% like to read only at times. There is only 1% of students to affirm that he feels fresh and good while reading.

The next question put forth to them i.e., "Did your teachers in school make you interested in reading?" most of the students (74%) affirmed that they did (Table 7). Only 21% said "No". And for 5% of students the answer was "Sometimes".

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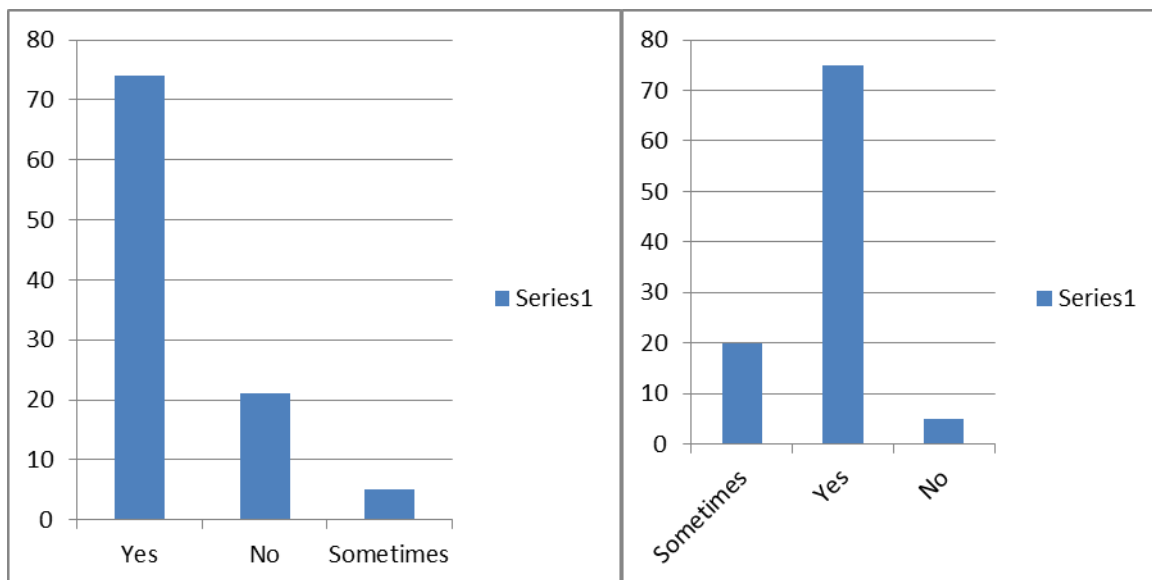
**Table – 7**



**Table - 8**

Yet to the eighth question "Do you enjoy reading?" the majority (75%) said "Yes" (Table 8). 20% of students expressed that they sometimes enjoy reading and only 5% said that they don't enjoy reading.

In order to assess how important reading skill is for students, they were asked to arrange the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) in the order of their preference (Table 9). Only 14% of students prioritize reading. For the majority (47%) Listening skill is the first preference. Speaking was preferred by 29%, and Writing by 10%.

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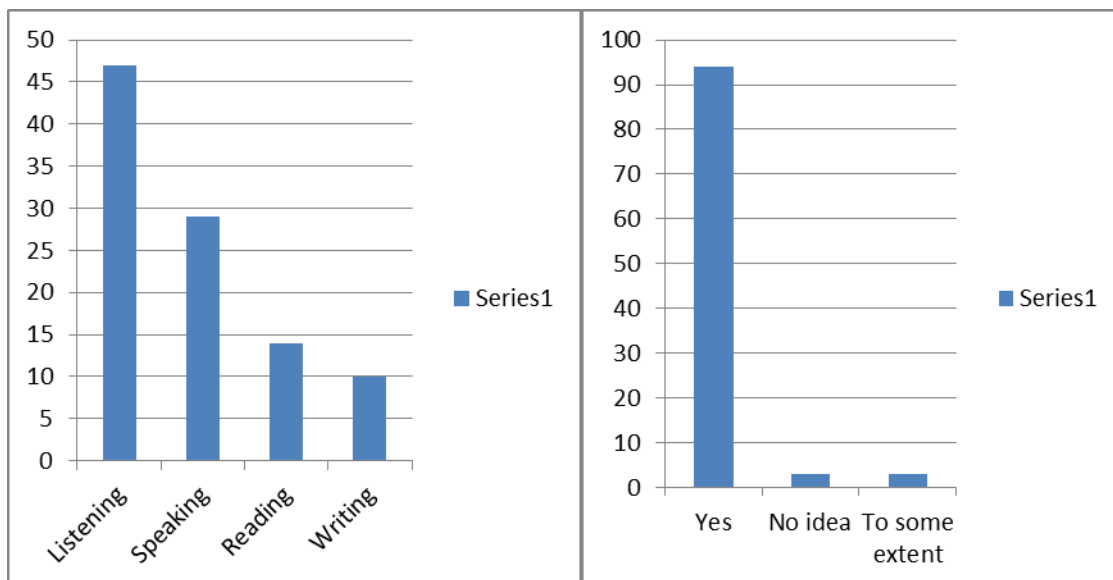
| Table – 9 | Table - 10 |

"Has your knowledge increased due to reading?" was the last question asked (Table 10). In spite of neglecting reading, 94% of students said "Yes". Only 3% said that reading has increased their knowledge to some extent, and 3% had no idea whether reading has helped or not.

## Analysis of the Study

As per the data collected from students, it is disheartening to know that students spend an average of 1 – 5 hours watching TV and spend 1 – 5 hours with their laptops. They do have 45 minutes to 3 hours of free time but one third of them don't read anything at all.

The next one third read only newspapers, and another one third read stories, novels and weekly magazines. It is with this group (67%) that motivation can be done to promote reading. It is learned that students prefer reading at night. This study shows that although students don't read much, they do not have any aversion to reading. This once again is a happy note to start with.

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Of course for most of the students their teachers in Schools have got them interested in reading, and they are confident that they would enjoy reading from their past experience. However, students in Colleges give up reading because as grown-ups they prefer listening and speaking. Reading is only their third preference and writing is a heavy task for them.

Yet the majority knows knowledge increases due to reading. Therefore reading has only been a skill that they students are getting out of touch as College students. It is but necessary that teachers foster reading habits in students to become better thinkers.

**Strategies for Improving Reading Comprehension**

- Different reading strategies are needed for different subject disciplines. Different passages can be given for the same topic from different angles. Students should be taught to be selective about what they read depending on their purpose and interest. Science subjects tend to require slower and closer reading of smaller amounts of text. For most subjects, they need to change between different reading strategies.

- Students are not to be expected to read books from cover to cover. They can be selective about what they need to read in a book, depending on how useful the information is for their purposes. Teach students to use the index pages at the end of a book. They should be able to find the exact pages for what they need.

- Students should be taught to read from paper and to avoid reading for long periods from computer screens if using the internet. The print out of an electronic copy should be in a font that suits the individual student.

- It is easy to lose focus when reading. So set targets for students to complete a reading task, with clear objectives for what they want to achieve. Jot down a list of questions before they read and as they go along. This will improve their attention - and save them from getting side-tracked.

- Students should be taught fact-finding by looking for specific facts and data. They should also be instructed to do background reading. This is additional reading, which gives them a sense of the bigger picture.

- Select texts that are general and which they would find inviting or easy to read. Teach them to read these selectively and at their own pace. This is best undertaken in vacations if possible.

- The main purpose of reading is to understand - not to get through text at speed for the sake of it. Comprehension is increased if they discuss their reading with others. Each person is likely to make sense of different aspects, and teachers can pool their ideas.

- Direct the students to choose the easiest book first and work up to more complex texts. They should read something that gives them a general overview first.

- To keep the reading class active, set targets and jot down questions to answer. If the book belongs to them ask them to underline key points, use highlighter pens selectively, write summaries in the margin etc. This prevents them from drifting off or simply reading the same text over and over without taking it in.

- Tell the students to read in short bursts of up to twenty minutes, then take a few minutes break before starting again. Making notes of key points as they go along can create natural breaks every few minutes in their reading that can help maintain attention.

- Often, reading faster can help memory of what they are reading, so it makes more sense. Instruct them to browse quickly and focus in more slowly only where needed.

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- Change the text. Many people read less efficiently because they are not aware that their eyes have preferences for reading different fonts and colours.

Where possible:

- Have your eyes tested regularly.
- Check whether you read more efficiently with larger text.
- Experiment reading text printed on different coloured papers or using different coloured filters or lens over the text.
- If you have access to texts through the computer, experiment with different font styles and sizes and different colour backgrounds and text.
- See whether you read more easily in bright rooms, with certain kinds of light or in dim lighting.

All the same, reading should be a rapid, efficient, comprehending, interactive, strategic, flexible, purposeful, evaluative, learning and a linguistic process.

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