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## How to Integrate Technology to Revive the Reading Habits of the Engineering Students – A Classroom Try Out

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### Abstract

Engineers require communication for several purposes and very particularly for their employability. Today communication is equated with proficiency in English language because of the intervention of computer and internet. Work place like MNCs, industries, academic institutions, public sectors, private sectors, BPOs, call centers etc. demand engineers with good communication skills. Unfortunately the diminishing reading habit of the engineering students seriously affects their scope of communication. Reading is essentially an intellectual activity which contributes a lot towards successful communication. Hence this paper illustrates the following objectives:

- Why is the reading habit important for the engineering students?
- Can technology be integrated to revive reading habits?
- Effectiveness of technology in a mixed ability class room.
- Right material and right methodology (technology)
- The presenter's experience in integration of technology to revive reading habit – a share and review with reference to The Selfish Giant a short story by Oscar Wilde.

**Key words:** LSW skills, reading skill, reading habits, audio text files, engineering students, Material, Methodology, ELT and Linguistic Competency

### Why is the Reading Habit Important for the Engineering Students?

“Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man”, says Bacon in his “Of Studies” (<http://www.preservearticles.com/201104024907/essay-reading-maketh-a-full-man-conference-a-readyman-and-writing-an-exact-man.html>). Reading is the most comprehensive skill needed for engineers and engineering students to cater to several purposes. We do see different types of reading depending on the purposes. Literature reading is meant for pleasure. Newspaper reading is for knowing information. Report reading is for getting the status. To quote the two main purposes of reading are for knowing information and to hone the communication skills, irrespective of the purposes that reading offers input to LSW skills. However, time spent for reading is deteriorating. Loss of reading skill affects the overall acquisition of communicative skills especially for the learners who have English as a second language or foreign language. In this context, a meticulous analysis says that engineering students do reading as an academic exercise which does not serve the purpose of communication. Hence the presenter suggests that with right choice of material and technology, students can be motivated to revive their reading skill.

### **Can Technology be Integrated to Revive Reading Habits?**

Role of English teachers at engineering colleges is multifaceted. Apart from regular teaching, they play roles like placement trainers, soft skills trainers, language consultants etc. Hence, teachers of English language should be ready to embrace technology and they should incorporate it in the classroom environment. Today plenty of educational tools, applications and multimedia programs are available in the market as well as have open sources on the internet, to enhance LSRW skills. Teachers of English should be willing to know such advancements of technology to teach language skills. Playing audio text files with different combinations of words, diction and pronunciation by continuous highlighting of words would be helpful to revive reading skills. In this regard, the presenter would review and share her classroom experience at the end of the presentation. Tools that use audio and on screen text greatly aid learning, it provokes the reading skill through listening. Students would simultaneously listen and read the material. When they hear the voice over, as a byproduct they achieve proper pronunciation also. Several researches reveal that in order to gain reading fluency student must first understand words by hearing the sound of the word and then by recognizing the words. Technology is

amazingly helpful to have a good effect in the area of reading fluency. Learners of present generation are tech savvies, hence they can easily be motivated to revive their reading skill. As mentioned earlier, when right material is identified and integrated with suitable technology, definitely it will revive the reading skills of engineering students. Digital content can ensure all aspects of reading and language development, for example, phonetic, word building, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The class room experiment conducted by the researcher at Velammal College of Engineering and Technology (VCET), Madurai, was recorded in the following sections. Technology in English language classrooms can develop active, creative and thoughtful readers. It will equip the learners with the language skills and sub language skills.

### **Effectiveness of Technology in a Mixed Ability Class Room**

Academicians, educators, teachers and administrators should understand the need for updating technology to teach communication skills. They have to cope with this change to improve students' reading habits. Audio text (sound reading) materials would be a right choice in a mixed ability classroom. A thorough research/ survey has to be done by educationists, publishers, instructors and researchers to check the effectiveness of technology in a mixed ability class room. Sound reading materials from different literary genre would be suitable for the mixed ability class rather than the media news, technical English, business English etc. Gradually educational publishers with the help of academicians, teachers and other stake holders can integrate content and study activities as sound reading material. Since easy access to reading takes place via listening would stimulate and revive engineering students' reading habits. Specifically, language, arts, literature and stories should be classified and built as corpus to help students to reinforce the reading habit. Definitely mixed ability class will be benefitted more if educational publishers, instructors and researchers cooperate with each other on developing sound reading materials for students to regain the reading skills. And this is a prime objective of the presenter who is interested in the impact of technology to align the students' reading behaviour.

### **Right Material and Right Methodology (Technology)**

Teaching materials and methodology is indispensable in any course. English Language

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teaching material is varied like textbooks, videotapes, software, blogs, mobile apps, films, websites, social networks, etc. Teachers of English in engineering colleges can rely heavily on these diverse ranges of materials and appropriate technology. This paper tries to illustrate the materials can be of more human interested to reconstruct the reading skill by integrating technology. ELT and its emerging trend allow facilitators to choose any relevant material from anywhere to ensure the target skill. Computer, internet and technology provides a new reading experience to the I year Mechanical engineering students (2016 – 2020 batch) in the I semester. The material identified by the researcher to revive reading skill is an audio short story titled *The Selfish Giant* by Oscar Wilde.

### **The Presenter’s Experience in Integration of Technology to Revive Reading Habit – A Share and Review with Reference to *The Selfish Giant* a Short Story by Oscar Wilde**

To a large class or to a heterogeneous class, language components or language drills without relevant material is meaningless and irrelevant. According to Krashen (1982) quoted from **Second Language Acquisition an Advanced Resource Book** (2005), “... people acquire a second language, much in the same way as they acquire a first language not only talking about the language, but by talking in the language. In other words, to acquire a language one needs a great deal of meaningful input” (79 – 80). Here the meaningful input refers to what they read and listen.

Ultimately it should make the learner comfortable to read, understand and comprehend. Hence the presenter accounted the accent, pronunciation, simplicity, reading style and theme, while choosing the audio text. The objective of language teachers is not to teach about language, but to develop learner’s abilities to use language on their own. The audio text played on the select story affords a chance for the learners to read, understand, comprehend and listen. When the lesson began, the words pronounced and the whole sentence was highlighted in two different colours. This novel reading practice was accepted and well received by the students. **William R. Lee** states in his editorial in the journal **English Language Teaching**:

“...as far as the foreign language learner is concerned, the oral basis of language learning is (to be) rooted in lively and meaningful oral drills, in spoken

and acted dialogues, indeed in those very procedures which make for successful and interested learning of language. (4)

This new reading experiment not only revived the reading skill but also paved a way to achieve other functional language skills and language components (Vocabulary, grammar and Pronunciation).

The following structure was adapted in the classroom to motivate the heterogeneous class to read and participate:

(A) Listening and Reading Activities

(B) While Reading Activities - Listen to illustrations, key words, contextual meaning and expressions

(C) Post Reading Activity - Title analysis

Learners were allowed to know the difference between 'hearing' and 'listening'. They understood listening is a skill to be inculcated. Reading along with the audio text privileged the learners profusely.

As while-reading activities - listen to illustration, key words, contextual meaning and expressions were focused along with the main reading of the story. Students were encouraged to give synonyms, antonyms, compound words, phrasal verbs etc.

Post reading activity was conducted on title analysis, setting, character analyses and human values. This choice of material gave a chance for the learners and teachers to discuss in detail about the soft skills and humanity. This simple familiar story added new sight to eyes and new wisdom to mind. In order to speak well, one has to read and listen continuously is nurtured in the young minds. Entire class room experienced a mixture of emotions and feelings for the first time in Technical English class. It has provided a rewarding experience for both the teacher and the learners. The impact of new technology on the reading habit was scientifically tested and resulted in positive signs.

## **Advantages of Technology to Revive Reading Habit**

- Increases student engagement and motivation.
- Can be a time saver for teachers.
- Turns the most mundane lesson into something powerful and thought-provoking.
- Promotes learner independence.
- Text-to-speech features or interactive textbooks enable students to read.
- Effective tech integration changes classroom dynamics,

The above mentioned advantages are very explicit results and many implicit advantages are also there in integrating technology to revive the reading habits of a target group.

## **Limitations**

- Many teachers still remain uncomfortable with the idea of integrating it into language classrooms.
- Lack of preparation and negative perceptions about technology.
- Poor infra –structure prevails in engineering colleges across the country.
- Technology does not replace an effective teacher.
- Less or nil encouragement from the colleagues and management.

The above mentioned limitations are very immaterial and worth overcoming to serve the student community.

## **Conclusion**

Inclusion of technology to revive the reading habits of the engineering students will develop learners' ability to use language for a variety of communicative purposes. The choice of material is very important to train the learners on language skills. Further, the audio texts merge linguistic competence with communicative competence. Reading opens the world of communication and improves the language competency. Hence the paper concludes with an appeal to teachers of English to have the freedom of choosing their material by embracing technology.

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### Web

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