PROMOTING INTENSIVE READING AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS FROM RURAL BACKGROUND

Dr. B. Zulaiha Shakeel, *Associate Professor & Head***,** *Department of English, ThassimBeevi Abdul Kader College for Women, Kilakarai, Ramanathapuram District*

Dr. S. Zahira Banu, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women, Madurai*

Dr. A. Joycilin Shermila, *Principal &Associate Professor of English, Annammal College of Education for Women, Thoothukudi*

Abstract:

A classroom action research was conducted to promote the habit of intensive reading for the rural students at the undergraduate level. The aim of this research is to promote intensive reading habits for ESL students. The participants of this research were forty-five final year undergraduate students who majored in English Literature at Thassim Beevi Abdul Kader College for Women, Ramanathapuram. The data were collected from classroom observations, interviews and testing. During the process of this research, the participants were instructed to maintain a reading diary to note down the progress of their reading routine. In order to identify the positive traits gained through this reading habit, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to the participants. The observations and responses of the participants indicated that reading habit is of utmost importance as they were able to improve their vocabulary, level of comprehension and achieve academic success. The practice of reading that was given during the course of this research has actually cultivated the culture of reading among the students.

Keywords: Reading, slow reading, speed reading, reading comprehension, reading habit, vocabulary

Introduction:

Students are expected to read, comprehend and interpret complex texts that are prescribed at the tertiary level. But it is observed that students lack reading skills and are devoid of reading habits. In order to promote reading habits among the students, it was decided to offer strategic guidance and motivation. Realizing the crucial need of this practice, the objective of this study was framed to promote reading practice by providing methods and techniques that develops the learners' ability to read, understand and comprehend.

Literature Review

Today's students belong to the age of digital technology and they are familiar with computers and the internet from an early age. So, to make them to read texts has become a challenging task. Reading abilities and motivation towards reading among youth have undergone substantial changes as more and more youth rely on the internet for searching and exchanging information (Niazifar 2019). Many students have no reading role models and that is one of the major reasons why they fail to relish and value the enjoyment that can be derived from reading. Moreover, students are concerned about their scores and success in their examinations rather than improving their reading habits and enhancing their understanding of the text (Deci and Ryan 1985). Warden and Lin (2000, 539) have categorized this aspect as "required motivation." Even though "required

motivation" is perceived as a negative phenomenon, it can turn out to be positive and productive. As Duke and Pearson (2005) suggest, it is essential to teach the strategies and explain how it should be used while reading through the think-aloud process, group practice, partner practice, and independent use of the strategy. Studies have been done to improve reading skills of students through extensive reading. On the other hand, research pertaining to intensive reading seems to be limited. Intensive reading involves learners reading in detail with specific learning aims and tasks. It is in contrast to extensive reading, which involves learners reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills. The present study aims to promote intensive reading skills by practicing reading a prescribed novel.

Methods

The main goals are to increase students' reading fluency and rate, heighten and stimulate learners' confidence and self-awareness. Forty-five students from the class of final year English Major were selected for this study. This practice typically requires about 20-25 minutes of class time every day for 10 consecutive days. Level of students was identified initially. Time spent on reading 10 chapters of the novel was marked with the improvement level of reading more in less time in the next 10 chapters. Students who read the whole novel for the first time were recorded. Methods of reading tested were Slow Reading and Speed Reading. Types of reading involved were Individual Reading, Pair Reading and Group Reading. Second round reading method was named as "Round the Clock

Reading" in which students were encouraged to read the whole novel in 24 hours. Number of students who could complete successfullyinvolved was marked. New vocabulary learnt through this intensive reading was also measured. Students' ability to reproduce their reading content was tested through peer sharing. Feedback was collected and recorded in Google Spreadsheet. As most of the female students prefer to take up teaching as their profession, their liking and interest to use this method in their classroom teaching was collected. In addition to this, feedback and outcome of this project were also recorded.

1. Level of Students

The reading level of the students was identified by self-evaluation method with the reading type they like and capable of. Among 45 students involved in the study, 15 students were in advanced level whereas 24 and 6 students were from intermediate and low level respectively. In the experimental group taken for this study, 29 students were reading the whole novel for the first time. Again, from those 29 students, 24 students were interested in slow reading and 21 were interested in practicing and developing speed reading.
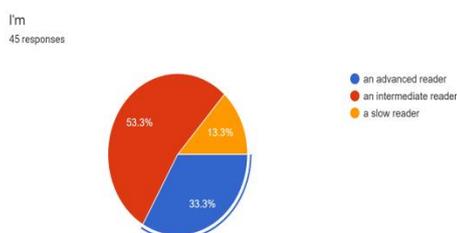
This is my first time reading the whole novel.
45 responses

● Yes
● No

35.6%

64.4%
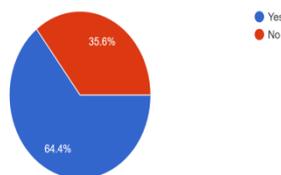
2. Time Frame

The novel taken for study was divided into three parts of ten chapters each. Time taken by each student to complete reading each chapter was tested and the same was recorded in the table given below. The achievement of reading speed was measured and highlighted.

Parts	Time frame for reading each chapter				
	No. of Students who were able to read in 25 Minutes	*No. of Students who were able to read in 20 Minutes*	*No. of Students who were able to read in 15 Minutes*	*No. of Students who were able to read in 10 Minutes*	*No. of Students who were able to read in 5 Minutes*
Part -I 1-10 Chapters	15 33%	21 47%	6 13%	3 7%	-
Part -II 11-20 Chapters	10 22%	25 56%	8 18%	2 4%	-
Part -III 21-30 Chapters	7 16%	25 56%	10 22%	2 4%	1 2%

It was found that 33% of the students were able to read each chapter of the first part in 25 minutes. 47% of the students were able to read each chapter of the first part in 20 minutes. 13% of the students were able to read each

chapter of the first part in 15 minutes. And 7% of the students were able to read in 10 minutes.

Similarly, the time taken for reading the second part was measured and calculated. 22% of the students were able to read each chapter of the second part in 25 minutes. 56% of the students were able to read each chapter of the second part in 20 minutes. 18% of the students were able to read each chapter of the second part in 15 minutes. And 4% of the students were able to read each chapter of the second part in 10 minutes.

Eventually, the time taken for reading the third part was measured and calculated. 16% of the students were able to read each chapter of the third part in 25 minutes. 56% of the students were able to read each chapter of the third part in 20 minutes. 22% of the students were able to read each chapter of the third part in 15 minutes. 4% of the students were able to read each chapter of the third part in 10 minutes. And 2% of the students were able to read each chapter of the third part in 5 minutes.

The interest of students needs to be triggered. For example, if the teacher expects the students to practice teaching, she has to use motivational expressions to trigger the minds of students to think and act towards reading and engage them in reading tasks and activities. The best way to improve the speed of reading is to read, read and read. That has to start with slow reading, normal reading, reading that helps comprehending ability and finally speed reading. Finally, from the table given above, it is clear that the time taken to read each part has comparatively decreased for

22% of the target group and this process has enabled the students to improve their reading speed.

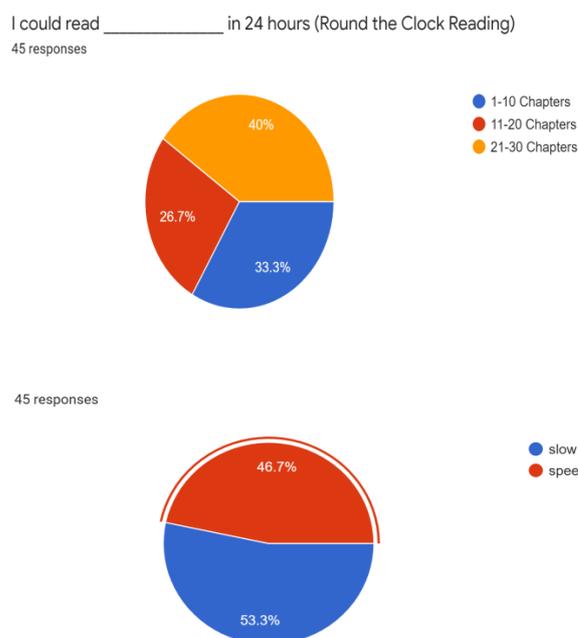3. Types of reading - Individual, Pair, Group

45 responses
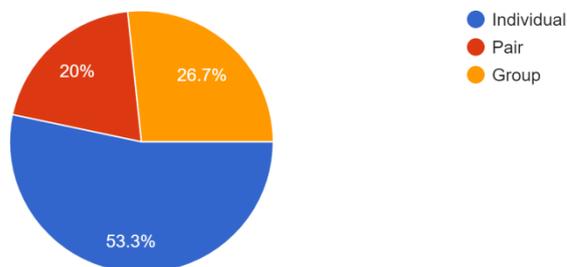
Individual reading, pair reading and group reading were assigned for the students to test their preference of the reading type. From the figure given above, it is observed that 53.3% students preferred individual reading, 26.7% preferred pair reading and 20% of them preferred group reading. Readability of students is based mainly on the lexical difficulty of the text. The reading material selected for reading practice should be suitable for reading. And the teacher should be aware of the standard of the text and the level of students' reading ability, "the use of a readability formula is valuable only if the teacher knows the reading ability of the student" (Fry, 1986).

45 responses
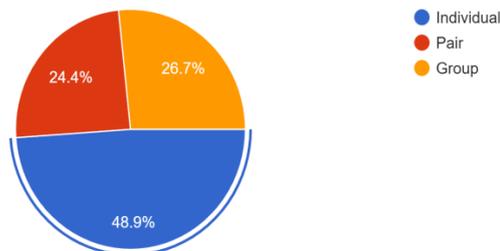
Students were exposed to the opportunity to interact with their reading partners and team members when they work with a pair and a group. 49% of students feel that individual reading has improved their understanding level, 27% were of the opinion that group reading has improved their understanding level and 24% of them expressed that pair reading has improved their understanding level. One of the outcomes of this method of reading is the implication of textual comprehension and interpretation that are reflected in their reviews.

4. "Round the Clock" Reading

I could read _____ in 24 hours (Round the Clock Reading)
45 responses

40%
26.7%
33.3%

● 1-10 Chapters
● 11-20 Chapters
● 21-30 Chapters

45 responses

46.7%
53.3%

● slow
● speed

In order to check whether the reading speed of the students has improved, a second reading of the same text was suggested. The time allotted for this process was 24 hours.Within this allotted time 33.3% of the students were able to read only the first ten chapters. 26.7% of the students were able to complete 20 chapters and 40% of the them were able to complete all the 30 chapters within a day. This reading task implies that repeated reading

practice will certainly increase the reading speed. When asked which method of reading the experimental group preferred, 47% of them preferred speed reading and 53% of them preferred slow reading. This is due to the fact that slow reading enables the readers to comprehend better and pay attention to literary devices.

5. Vocabulary Learnt

I learnt _____ vocabularies after reading this text
45 responses

below 10
10-20
20-30
30-40
40-50

35.6%
8.9%
22.2%
33.3%
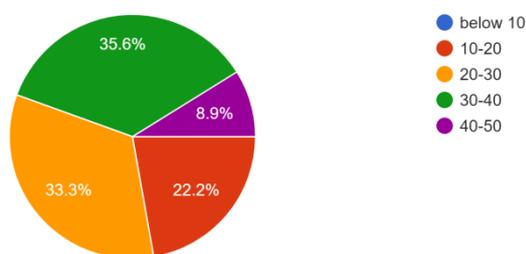
Reading has a substantial impact on vocabulary development. It is suggested that those who develop reading habit and continue it are likely to enhance their vocabulary range. 22.2% of the students reported that they learnt up to 20 new words. 33.3% of them said that they learnt up to 30 new words, 35.6% and 8.9% had learnt up to 40 and 50 words respectively through the reading of the text.

6. Peer sharing and the ability to comprehend and present

45 responses

below 20%
20-40%
40-60%
60-80%
80-100%

44.4%
42.2%
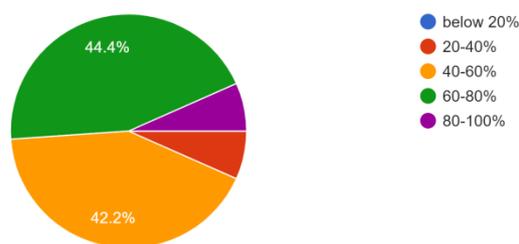
Students were able to transfer what they read from the text as a summary and explain the ideas they learnt through their reading to their peers.A class seminar was conducted to test the ability of the students to reproduce what they learnt. 6.7% of the students were able to comprehend

and present 40% of the text that was read. 42.2% of the students were able to comprehend and presentupto 60% of the text. 44.4% of the students were able to comprehend and presentupto 80% and 6.7% of the students were able to comprehend and presentfrom 80 - 100% of the text. This activity could develop their skills in organising and plan their learning activities and work collaboratively with others. Feedback of their peers regarding their presentation helped them to evaluate and improve their own learning.

7. Improvement in the level of reading

My overall reading level improved from
45 responses
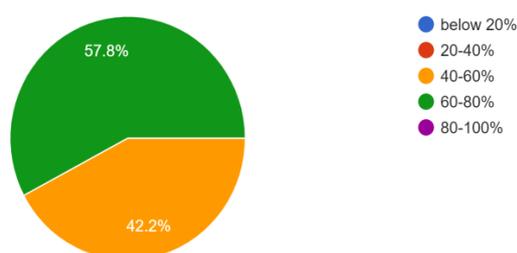
From the responses that have been received, it is evident that 42% of the students felt that their reading level has improved from 40-60% and 58% of the students observed that their reading level has improved from 60-80%.

8. Adoption of this method in the future

The method and technique adopted in the reading practice may be tailored according to the desire and requirement of the teacher and the learner.They were asked about their preference of using this method or a

similar one to develop language skills that are in need. The response of the same is shown below:

45 responses
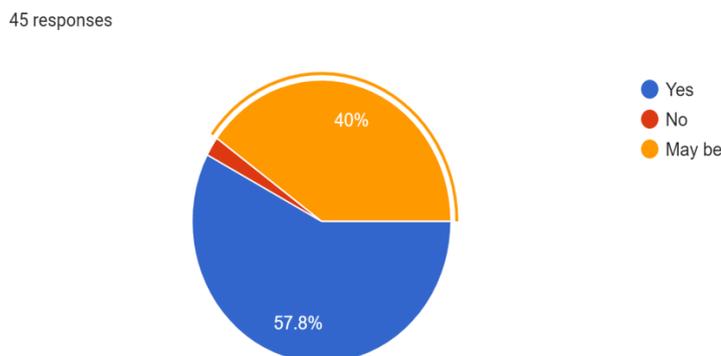
58% of the students expressed their preference to use this method to inculcate reading practice. 40% indicated that they may be using it to teach reading practice and the remaining 2% did not want to use it.

9. Feedback

The pros and cons of this reading practice were collected through an open-ended question. Students had highlighted the positive impact of this process. The feedback given by the students are listed: 1. Theycould read the whole novel 2. Level of comprehension has improved 3. Skills of reading have developed 4. Reading speed has improved 5. Helped to learn new vocabulary 6. Interpretation skills have improved 7. Confidence level has improved 8. Presentation skills have improved 9. Independent reading and understanding have improved 10. Listening has improved through pair and group reading.

The following reasons were given as negative feedback by the students

1. Time constraints

2. Difficult to understand the concept during time paced reading

3. Hard words were misinterpreted

4. Slow learners could have been given simple tasks with more time

Since most of the students in this target group were reading the novel for the first time, they suggested that the time provided to complete reading the novel was insufficient. Furthermore, they said if the time limit had been extended it would have given them an opportunity to enjoy and understand the text in a better way. They added that the opportunity to offer feedback has given them the scope to improve their reading as it enabled them to identify the solution to perform better by changing their focus to improve their reading. They expressed that if this model is practiced in future, it would pave way for them to improve their interest in reading and subsequently develop a passion for reading.

Limitations

From the researchers' point of view, it was perceived that if this project had been extended for another six months, follow-up activities would have enabled them to observe the progress or change that had taken place in the target group. Strategies adopted to inculcate intensive reading were not tested with students who majored in other disciplines as the students who majored in English alone were taken as the experimental group.

Recommendations for improvement:

1. Time may be extended by allocating more library hours for reading and a time table may be created for them to read beyond college hours

2. Difficulty level of the text may be assessed and different texts may be identified for different levels of readers.

Conclusion

There are a wide variety of teaching methods and techniques for students to practice reading in their English classroom. Thorough and

accurate understanding is possible in reading, but that needs a lot of time, guidance, and practice to succeed. Reading is a complex process as it involves various elements simultaneously. There are elements of codes, signs and signals. The readers' ability to discriminate these things is involved. This action research reports that the students exhibited a positive impact towards reading. As per the initial survey, 64 percentage of participants did not have any experience in intensive reading which was due to lack of resources, lack of motivation and inadequate language skills. After this action research, which involved sufficient reading practice, a desirable change was observed not only in their attitude towards intensive reading but also in extensive reading.The results imply that students experienced a sense of achievement as this practice helped them in intensive reading.This in turn, enabled them to share what they read with their peers and to complete the tasks that were assigned. Eventually, they were motivated to read further.

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