ABSTRACT

Many students entering college today do not have the reading skills needed to do effective work in their courses. A related problem is that students often lack the skills required to think in a clear and logical way. What is needed is the need to develop effective reading and clear thinking. Students now live in a culture where people watch an average of over five hours of television every day. All that passive viewing does not allow much time for reading. Reading is a skill that must be actively practiced. Therefore it is necessary to make our students think why we read and reinforce the benefits of reading in their minds. This forms the basis of this research work.

The thesis has been divided into 5 chapters. The first chapter brings out the importance of reading for engineering students. Reading empowers students with good communication that helps in getting career opportunities and economic development. Reading not only improves their overall English language skills but also their 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. Reading also improves concentration, helps us to seek for facts and improve knowledge, enhances our creativity and also gives us pleasure.
The first Chapter in addition speaks about importance of reading in English and its special relevance to India; the community of authors and readers; and about psychologists’ views on reading. The Chapter closes with the observations on training in comprehension. It should be a major objective of colleges these days to lead children to effective comprehension and interpretation. We need to include in our time-table periods when we help older boys and girls to form study habits, to understand what they read and to build up a deep and lasting interest in reading.

Chapter – II titled “Assessment of Reading Habits among Engineering students” gives the result of the assessment of reading habits of the Karunya students. 100 students from various branches of B. Tech were chosen for the study.

From the data collected from students, it was disheartening to know that students spend an average of 1 – 5 hours watching TV and spend 1 – 5 hours with their laptops. 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. This study showed that although students don’t read much, they do not have any aversion to reading. This was a happy note to start with. Having analyzed the reading habits of the Karunya students, the next step was to introduce them to ways of reading, nature of reading etc.
In Chapter – III titled “Steps to Improve Reading” 10 different aptitudes in reading are explained. They are: Reading to improve vocabulary, Reading to find the main idea, Reading to find supporting details, Reading to understand implied main ideas and the central point, Reading to find relationships, Reading to differentiate between facts and opinions, Reading to get the inference, Reading to find the purpose of the author, Reading to understand the tone of the author and Reading to trace argument.

Chapter IV titled “Assessment of Reading Skills” records the continuous assessment made in the tests conducted, based on the ten steps of reading discussed in Chapter III. These passages deliberately avoided engineering topics which students may already be familiar with, and hence might hinder the scholar in analyzing their aptitude.

A total number of around 253 students from II B. Tech (EEE), II B. Tech (CSE), I B. Tech (Section I, comprising all branches), I B. Tech (Section R, comprising all branches) were chosen for the study. Out of these students, the mother tongue of 82 students is Malayalam. Tamil students are 102 in number; the others are: North Indian students 34, Kannada students 28 and Telugu students 22. II B. Tech students are 131 in number and the rest 122 students are in I B. Tech. Number of girl students is 132 and boy students are 121. The study was conducted to find out the strength and weaknesses of the students in their levels of
reading. They were also assessed according to their vernacular languages, age groups, subject groups and gender.

Chapter – V titled “Strategies for Enhancing Reading Skills” discusses different strategies that teachers could adopt for enhancement of reading skills in students. 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. 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. 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.

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.
Chapter VI discusses the outcome of this study. After reading strategies were introduced to the students and reading tests were given, once again the 10 questions that were given to the students at the beginning of this study to assess their reading habits were given. The result shows a great improvement in the students’ attitude towards reading.

The true outcome of this study comes from the answer to the question for preferences of language tasks. The earlier result showed that reading was only their third preference and listening and speaking were their first two preferences. But now reading has become their first preference. The study shows that the reading habits of Karunya students have considerably increased as a result of the strategies adopted to enhance it.

In the same way reading passages were given to cater to their needs as identified from the earlier tests. At the end of the training, a retest consisting of questions from all the ten areas of training were given to the students, and the results were analyzed. The results of the retest clearly shows the improvement of the students in their reading skills after adopting the strategies for improving reading.