

Difficulties in Online Classes with Reading Comprehension among the Engineering Undergraduates during the CoVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the reading challenges experienced by Engineering College pupils and the strategies they used to overcome those issues during the 2009 covid-19 epidemic. The research strategy for this study is descriptive qualitative research. Six Engineering College students in Chittoor, A.P. participated in the study; two each were selected from the higher and highest-achieving levels. Students' reading comprehension challenges were studied using direct observation, interviews, and written records. The findings indicate that both internal and external variables contributed to pupils' difficulty with reading comprehension. and students' efforts to overcome their reading challenges were increasingly mediated through their usage of the internet.

Keywords: Reading, Difficulties, Internal, External, Challenges, Unimaginable

INTRODUCTION

Pandemic Covid-19 hangs over the heads of people everywhere like the sword of Damocles, and it has had devastating effects on every facet of life, including education. The devastating effects of covid-19 on the educational system have posed hitherto unimaginable difficulties due to the widespread closure of Engineering Colleges. However, there is no denying that pupils have struggled with online learning and text comprehension despite the fact that it has shown to be advantageous.

English has been utilized as a common language for communication across the world,

regardless of the origins of the speakers. Consequently, the ability to communicate effectively in English is now often seen as a crucial component of success in today's global economy. Throughout their time in Engineering College, pupils will be expected to develop four essential competencies in the English language. It's important for pupils to have a firm grasp of all of the aforementioned basic English abilities. The ability to hear, talk, read, and write are all part of these skills. However, reading has always been seen as an essential ability that may help kids become more well-rounded individuals (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). For the following reasons, according to Pardede (2019), reading is the most important skill for every English as a foreign language (EFL) learner to acquire: (1) since they learn English in an environment where English is not used in everyday interaction, they lack inputs from their daily interaction, and reading could overcome it best; (2) reading significantly contributes to one's personal and intellectual development, further studies, career development, and the ability to meet changes; and (3) reading stokes curiosity and fosters a love of learning.

Word recognition and semantic understanding are just part of what it takes to read with comprehension. Understanding the meaning of written language, making connections to existing knowledge, and constructing a mental picture of the material read requires a more involved cognitive process for kids (Keenan, et al., 2008; Takaloo & Ahmadi, 2017). According to Pardede (2019), "reading comprehension as an interactive process including aspects of the reader, the texts, and tasks" is a key concept in contemporary theories of reading (p. 79). Reading comprehension, therefore, is the capacity to grasp and interpret written language via the dynamic process of making meaningful connections between newly acquired information and previously held knowledge (Leslie, 1993; Tierney & Pearson, 1994).

Reading comprehension is especially difficult for Telugu pupils since English is often taught as a foreign language there. As a result, students have a smaller vocabulary and find it more challenging to learn the language in a short amount of time. According to Hidayati (2018), reading is a crucial skill that helps pupils acquire other abilities, thus a student with a poor reading ability would encounter trouble in the learning process.

Problems in reading comprehension have been the subject of study by a few academics. By administering reading comprehension assessments to eighth graders, Saraswati (2021) was able to gather data on the most common reading challenges experienced by pupils whose first language is not English. Comprehending written material is one of these issues. In addition, students seldom hear or use the language. Qarqez (2017) investigated the challenges encountered by EFL students in Engineering College during reading. The outcomes demonstrated that they were confronted with unclear wording, unfamiliar language, and a lack of time to mentally

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comprehend the content. Riadil (2020) looked at the methods employed by EFL students to improve their reading comprehension and found a number of useful techniques. Li (2021) investigated why ESL students have trouble understanding what they read (ELLs). Findings indicated that ELL poor comprehenders performed worse than EL1 poor comprehenders on measures of vocabulary size, listening comprehension, and morphological awareness, but that there was no difference between the two groups on measures of more advanced abilities. Implications for theory and practise in the search for and training of English language learner poor comprehenders are examined. Finally, Hall (2019) examined the relative impacts of inference teaching on middle Engineering College children with below-average reading comprehension.

This study was motivated by those prior ones in an effort to learn more about the reading challenges faced by pupils and the strategies they used to overcome those challenges during the CoV-19 epidemic.

METHOD

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative research was to describe how different people and groups conceptualise a social or human issue. Descriptive qualitative research was conducted with the purpose of providing a comprehensive and precise picture of the reading difficulties experienced by junior Engineering College pupils.

Participants

Six Andhra Pradesh students from three different reading levels participated in this research with their English instructor in Chittoor. For this study, we watched them in their English lessons and questioned them afterward to gather information.

Data Collection and Instruments

The information for this research was gathered via participant observation, interviews, and written records. Observation is the first point. At first, data was gathered via observation, then through interviews, and last through written record. The English instructor and six students were observed while they engaged in various classroom-based learning activities and took copious notes. After the lectures concluded, follow-up interviews were conducted to compile even more information. This study's instruments comprised observational forms, interview protocols, and written records. Descriptive statistics was used to examine the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

It became clear from the interviews and observations that two key factors were at play in the classroom: instructor activities and student activities.

Teacher's Activities

As soon as the instructor walked into the classroom, she welcomed the students in English, took roll, and reviewed the previously covered subject. Based on the data collected, it was determined that the instructor was not always successful in inspiring his or her class. She seldom got the class excited and engaged right away. She would only motivate during class if she ran into a difficulty with the content or if the pupils were having trouble. In her interactions with the pupils, she used both Telugu and English. The instructor did this because she worried that her pupils would be lost if she spoke to them in standard English. Also, she used the lecture format, which involves the instructor giving a talk to the class in order to transmit information.

Teachers in the courses observed utilised solely worksheet guides, and sometimes a dictionary, to help students learn English. The instructor looked preoccupied with the classroom materials (worksheets, dictionaries) to pay much attention to classroom management. Generally speaking, the classrooms were rather peaceful places. This led to lessons being boring and uninteresting, and eventually, students began to tune out. And they stopped caring about Engineering College as much.

At the end of each lesson, the instructor would go over what had just been covered and what will be covered in the next session. There are occasions when the instructor would inspire the class before handing out homework.

Students' Activities

Students' reading comprehension challenges were the focus of the interviews and observations. Several influences on students' English-learning challenges were found based on the data collected. Both internal and external influences have been identified. Things that have no direct connection to the Engineering College yet have an effect on the kids are called external factors. The interviews revealed that a lack of willingness to learn English and excessive mobile phone usage were the two most significant contributing factors. All six pupils answered "No" to the question, therefore it's clear that “ఉపాధ్యాయుడు ఇచ్చిన వేరేరణతో మీరు వేరోత్సాహించబడ్డారని భావిస్తున్నారా” ("Do you feel encouraged by the motivation given by the teacher?").

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Here, the author discusses the findings of an interview study with middle Engineering College children to determine the external variables that contribute to their struggles with reading English.

Because of pupils' general disinterest in studying English in class and teachers' inability to inspire them to do so, English language instruction suffered. A student's level of interest in the subject matter or their motivation to study English may affect how well they grasp the material. According to Rosalina (2018), interest is an ongoing propensity to focus on and recall certain experiences. If pupils aren't enthusiastic about the material being studied, they won't put in the effort required to succeed academically. Disinterested pupils are less likely to learn, but those who are curious about what they'll study in English class will have no trouble picking up the language.

Two of the students who were polled on their experiences with classroom English instruction said that they found the language to be challenging. Naturally, thinking like that might dampen one's enthusiasm for studying English. They felt that they didn't want to learn anything new, as reported by them. They also showed a lacklustre level of enthusiasm for reading materials written in English. The investigator posed the following question: “పాఠశాలలో ఇంగ్లీష్ నేర్చుకోవడం గురించి మీరు ఏమనుకుంటున్నారు?” (“What do you think about learning English at Engineering College”). They answered:

R1: “నేర్చుకోవడం కష్టం” (hard to learn)

R2: “అర్థం చేసుకోవడం కష్టం” (hard to understand)

A other group of four youngsters, however, found classroom instruction in English to be a lot of fun.

R3: “ఆసక్తికరమైన” (interesting) R4: “ఆసక్తికరమైన” (interesting) R5: “ఆసక్తికరమైన” (interesting) R6: “ఆసక్తికరమైన” (interesting)

Students' mental health issues count as an internal factor. Laziness and trouble comprehending English phrases were shown to be two key reasons. There are numerous potential causes of the mental state known as laziness, but the issues we've been discussing so far, especially those related to motivation, are still strongly linked to the disease. Students might get unmotivated to study due to a mental disorder known as laziness. The two students who scored lowest on the English proficiency test were the ones who reported this issue. They said that they were never exposed to the language outside of the classroom.

Students' disinterest in reading increases when they have trouble deciphering English phrases. The interviews revealed that pupils had trouble understanding English phrases owing to a lack of reading technique, problems with syntax, strain while trying to grasp lengthy words, and a general lack of fluency in the language. Replying to the Question “ఇంగ్లీష్ నేర్చుకునేటప్పుడు మీరు ఎదుర్కొనే ఇబ్బందులు ఏమిటి?” (“What are the difficulties that you experience while learning English”) the students replied:

R1: “అర్థం చేసుకోవడం కష్టం అని అర్థం” (the meaning hard to understand) R2: “అర్థం చేసుకోవడం కష్టం” (hard to understand)

R3: “అర్థం కాని పదాలు ఉన్నాయి” (there are words that do not understand)

R4: “ఎలా చదవాలి” (way to read)

R5: “నాకు మాటలు అర్థం కాలేదు” (words that do not understand) R6: “నాకు మాటలు అర్థం కాలేదు” (words that do not understand)

The Teacher's Efforts to Solve Reading Difficulties

Teachers are offering extensive explanations using the lecture style plus question and answer, assigning tasks, and reminding students that they already have resources to help them master English, as shown by firsthand observations and interviews. For instance, they may each utilise their own copy of YouTube, My Dictionary, or Google Translate on their own mobile devices. The instructor also took the effort to talk to the pupils individually, to find out if they were having any problems, and to give assistance in overcoming such difficulties.

How Students Try to Overcome Reading Difficulties

According to the findings of the researcher's in-depth interviews with the students, several different strategies were used in an effort to address the challenges posed by reading in English. Example: if they came across a word whose meaning or pronunciation was unclear, they looked it up online or asked the instructor. Replying to the Question “సరైన ఉచ్చారణలో ఆంగ్లాన్ని ఎలా చదవాలి తెలుసుకోవడానికి మీరు ఎలా ప్రయత్నిస్తారు?” (“How do you try to find out how to read English in correct pronunciation?”). the students answered:

R1: “గూగుల్ ద్వారా తెలుసుకోండి” (searching on google)

R2: “ఇంటర్నెట్ లో తెలుసుకోండి” (searching through the internet) R3: “గురువుగారిని అడగండి” (ask to the teaching)

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R4: “గురువుగారిని అడగండి” (ask to the teaching) R5: “గూగుల్లో సెర్చ్ చేయండి” (searching on google) R6: “గురువుగారిని అడగండి” (ask to the teaching)

There are still many pupils who do not have a solid grasp of the English language, despite attempts to help them.

DISCUSSION

Problems in Reading Comprehension among College Students

Students' reading comprehension problems may be broken down into two categories: internal and environmental, as shown by the statistics. One of the internal variables contributing to students' reading problems was a lack of desire. When a teacher isn't good at what they do, it might have a negative effect on their pupils' motivation. Aside from internal reasons, such as the students' own lethargy in reading and the complexity of the sentences they were asked to read in English, external variables like these also contributed to the students' reading comprehension problems. This supports the findings of the research by Saraswati (2021), which found that students may have difficulty with reading comprehension while learning English as a foreign language in Andhra Pradesh. The lack of consistent exposure to the language also contributes to students' limited vocabulary and slow progress in learning it. Additionally, pupils in Andhra Pradesh have a generally low level of reading desire. Evidence of this comes from a survey of global students taken in 2018 and published by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). According to the report, out of a total of 77 nations, TeluguF pupils' reading ability ranks 72nd, which is regarded quite poor.

Solutions to Reading Problems as Seen Through the Eyes of Students

After struggling with reading due to issues including a lack of vocabulary, pupils were found by the study to look up definitions online. Reading problems in certain kids may be traced back to a lack of language meaning. This lends credence to the findings of Hidayati (2018), which demonstrated that students' reading difficulties stemmed from a variety of causes, including a lack of grammatical knowledge, a limited vocabulary, a struggle with comprehending lengthy passages, a deficiency in exposure to media, a lack of family support, and a deficiency in reading strategies.

CONCLUSION

Students' struggles with reading comprehension stemmed from a lack of drive and vocabulary. Problems with themselves and with the instructor, who did not provide an attractive

style of teaching, particularly in the reading portion, were the driving force behind the students' efforts.

Participants used this approach as one of several to learn English during the COVID-19 epidemic, notably online, and found it helpful in overcoming reading comprehension barriers.

One clear flaw in this research is that it relied on volunteers from a single institution. As a consequence, it was suggested that future research include more students from a wider range of educational institutions to ensure more robust findings.

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