



Reading in Digital Era: A Study on Enhancing Reading Skills

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Abstract— *One of the basic skills of language learning is reading skill. It is integral to develop comprehension, pronunciation and intonation skills. It also helps to improve vocabulary and communication skills, broadens the horizons and enhances the knowledge of the students. Hence, it is very essential to inculcate the habit of reading among the students from a very young age. With the surge of digital tools, several modern methods can be adopted to make reading more interesting and engaging for the students. Availability of online books, graphic literature, use of digital art in literature, interactive novels and write-ups - all of it have indeed made reading easy and enjoyable to the students. However, there are several challenges involved in it as the majority of the students are not very actively involved in any reading process. The present paper aims to discuss the scope of reading, its types, methods and tools that can be used in the classroom to build reading skills, active utilisation of digital tools, and the difficulties involved in it. The paper also attempts to analyse the impact of digital media on the reading habits of the students and how it can be utilised for the benefit of the students.*

Keywords— *Reading skills, digital tools, digital media.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Language being a system of communication encompasses a group of words arranged in a grammatical structure to convey ideas or concepts to other people. Language learning is an active and continuous process. An individual starts learning language informally by trying to reproduce the words they hear without actually knowing the grammatical rules or structures. Later on, they learn new languages based on their interests and requirements. They develop fluency in language by increasing their vocabulary, using complex structures and using their repertoire in new situations. Language learning helps people to develop interpersonal skills, cognitive skills, gain knowledge about various cultures and places, greater academic and career advancements etc. Hence it becomes imperative to teach languages to children from an early age as they can easily adapt and survive in an ever changing world.

To develop fluency and confidence in using language one must first acquire the essential skills of the taught language. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four basic components of language learning. Among the four skills, reading and listening are known as receptive skills, as they involve receiving information hence, referred generally as a passive skill. Speaking and writing on the other hand are known as productive skills as they involve producing words, sentences or paragraphs and hence referred to as active skill. These skills provide ample opportunities for any language learner to acquire proficiency in language and thereby ace in personal and professional domains.

Reading as a receptive skill, initially begins with the recognition of alphabets, numbers, words etc and eventually leads to development of comprehension and writing skills.

Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson in their research article published in 1985 in the journal *Education and Treatment of Children* defines reading as

“Reading is a process of constructing meaning from written texts. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of interrelated sources of information”

Reading is not merely identifying words and their meaning but an active process in which readers pay attention to what they are reading, comprehend, analyse and appropriate the content in its totality. In other words reading is a cognitive process which involves conscious mental activity. Two crucial aspects involved in reading are creating stimulus and interpreting meaning.

Canale and Swain in their study (1980) identified communication competencies as follows:

Grammatical (ability to create grammatically correct utterances),

Sociolinguistic (ability to produce sociolinguistically appropriate utterances),

Discourse (ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances), and

Strategic (ability to solve communication problems as they arise).

Later in 1983 Canale refined his model adding 2 more competencies to the list namely coherence and cohesion.

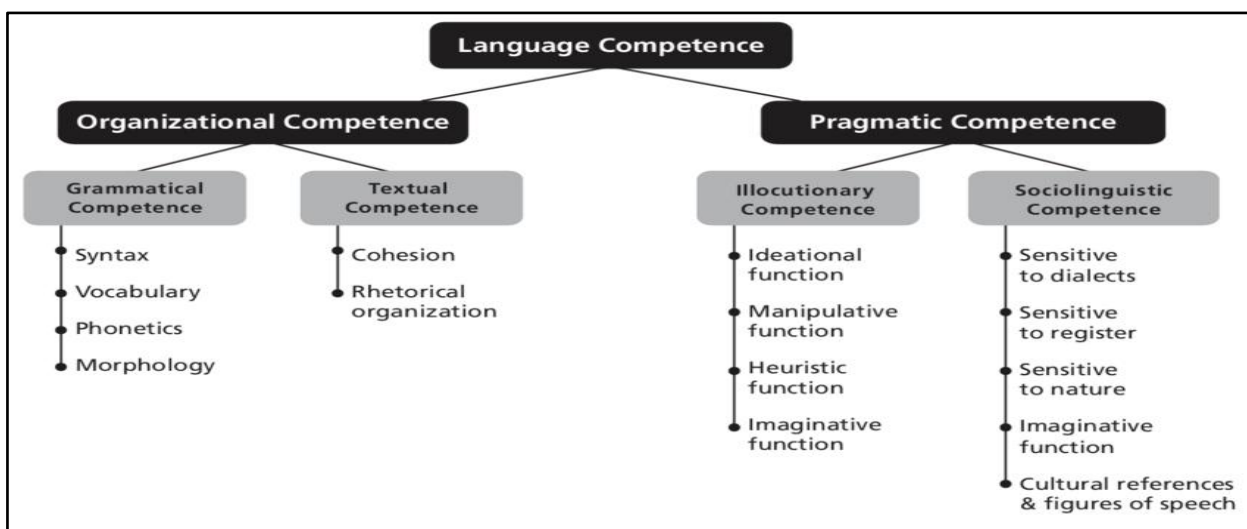
According to Canale and Swain communication competency is “a synthesis of knowledge of basic grammatical principles, knowledge of how language is used in social contexts to perform communicative functions, and knowledge of how utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to the principle of discourse”.

A similar framework of communicative competencies was developed by Bachman & Palmer (1982, 1996). In their study Bachman & Palmer identified three competencies:

Organisational knowledge (grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge)

Pragmatic knowledge (knowledge of sociolinguistic rules and functional knowledge)

Strategic competence.(effective use of available abilities to carry out a given task)



Source: Components of Language Competence (Bachman, 1990, p. 87)

These communication competencies in a reader not only aids in effective communication but also in reading and responding to a text, as reading requires application of several techniques and above mentioned strategies to comprehend a text.

John Locke conveys a relative idea in his 'Of The Conduct Of The Understanding'. He states that,

“Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is thinking that makes what we read ours. We are of the ruminating kind, and it is not enough to cram ourselves with a great load of collections; unless we chew

them over again, they will not give us strength and nourishment. ...only by our own meditation, and examining the reach, force, and coherence of what is said; and then, as far as we apprehend and see the connection of ideas, so far it is ours; without that, it is but so much loose matter floating in our brain.”

Reading, since ages, has been a great source of knowledge. Reading is vital for cultural, social, economical, mental, moral, spiritual, academical, and professional advancement. In today’s dynamic world, there is so much more to know and learn and keeping abreast with

expanding knowledge base is challenging. Therefore, to understand the various techniques, strategies available in digital platforms and their impact and role as digital tools to enhance reading an empirical study was conducted.

Objective of the study:

The study aims to understand the impact of this paradigm shift and also to analyse the importance and challenges of digital resources in enhancing reading skills among undergraduate students.

II. METHODOLOGY

A random sampling survey was administered among undergraduate students. A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared on google form and was shared to respondents. 150 students participated in the survey. The details of the survey are as follows:

Survey findings and analysis:

Table-1 Gives the details of the respondents stream wise.

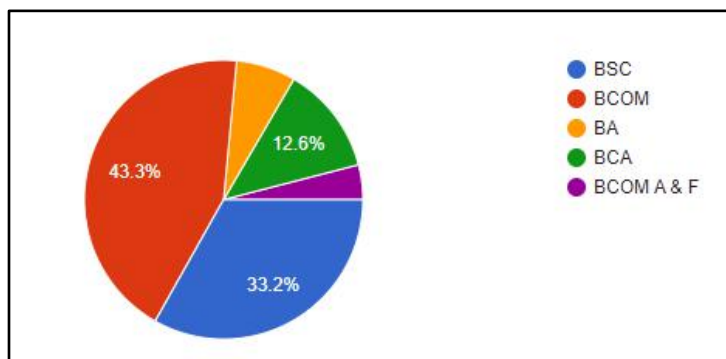


Table-2 gives the details about students’ preference of reading. 17% of the students prefer reading printed books, while 25% prefer to read E-books and 12% like to read magazines. Nearly 15% of the students like to read newspapers whereas 31% choose to refer to websites to read on any topic. Likewise, table-3 tells about the devices from which students prefer to read. 25% of students like to

read from printed books while 19% prefer reading from a computer. 16% of them find it easy to read on tabs and 40% would like to use mobile phones to read. The numbers indicate that students like to read online and use digital devices as it is easily accessible and time saving compared to printed books as they have to go to bookstores or libraries to get the books.

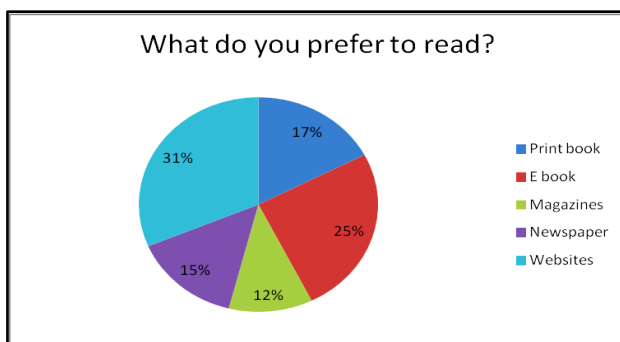


Table-2

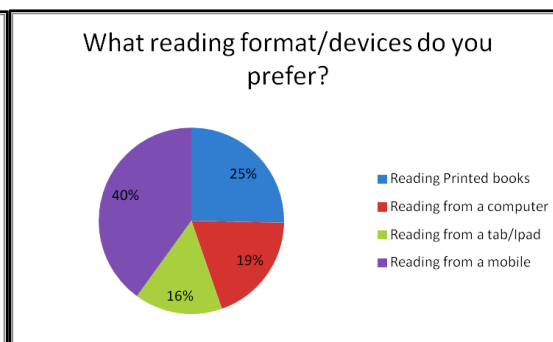


Table-3

Tables 4&5 gives the average time spent on reading by a student in a day and the frequency of reading. Here we learn that 54% of the students read at least for one hour everyday and 21% read for 2 hours. Moreover, 40% of the

respondents read everyday. These numbers tell that students do invest their time in reading and it is still a significant part of student life.

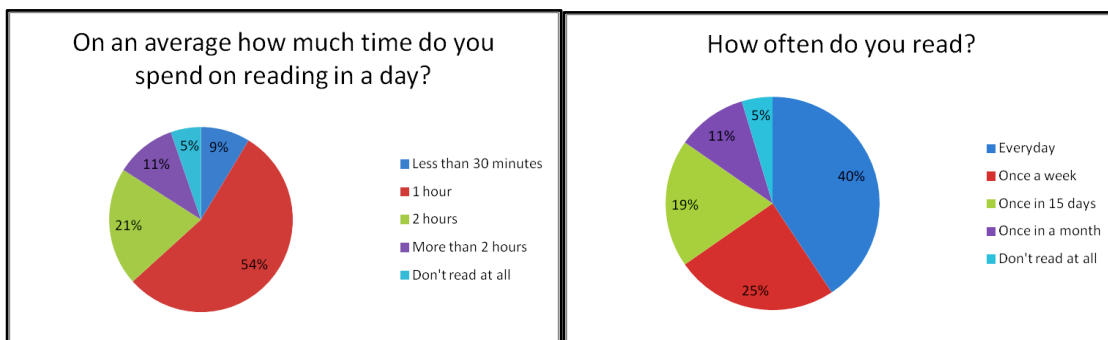


Table-4

Table-5

Table -6 explains the preference of genre while reading. The graph indicates that 20% of the learners like to read fiction while 13% like to read non-fiction. This is a very low percentage as the majority of the learners do not take

up any serious reading habits. They like to spend their time reading text messages and social media information. This is an alarming scenario as such reading does not result in the cognitive development of the students.

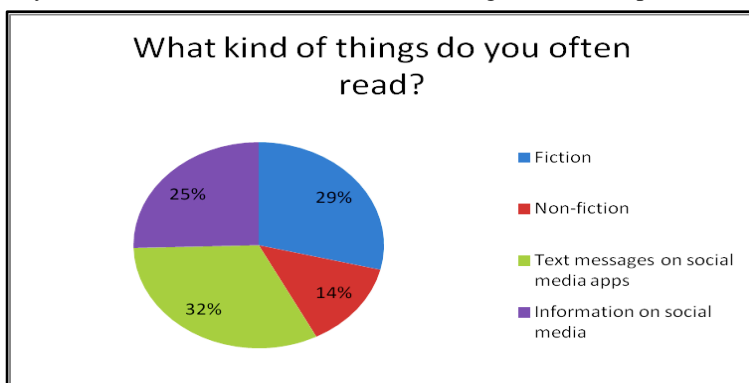


Table-6

Table-7 shows the purpose of reading. A majority of 32% of students read from an examination point of view. 26% of respondents read to get information, 13% read for

relaxation, 12% for enjoyment and 17% read when the content is interesting for them.

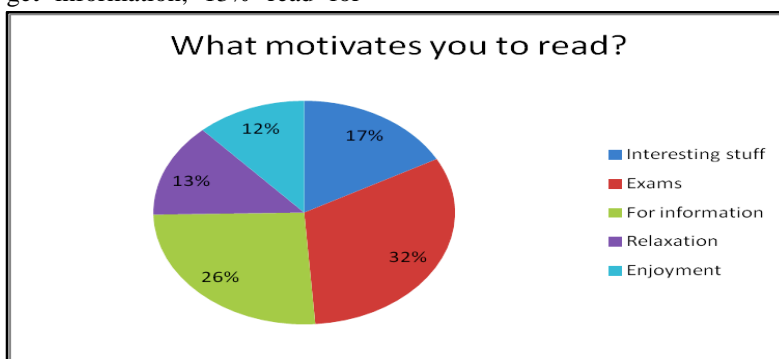


Table-7

From table-8, it can be seen that students show more interest in reading books if it is made available in digital form. Only 13% feel that availability of printed books is

preferable. This reflects the shift in the interest of reading among the younger generation.

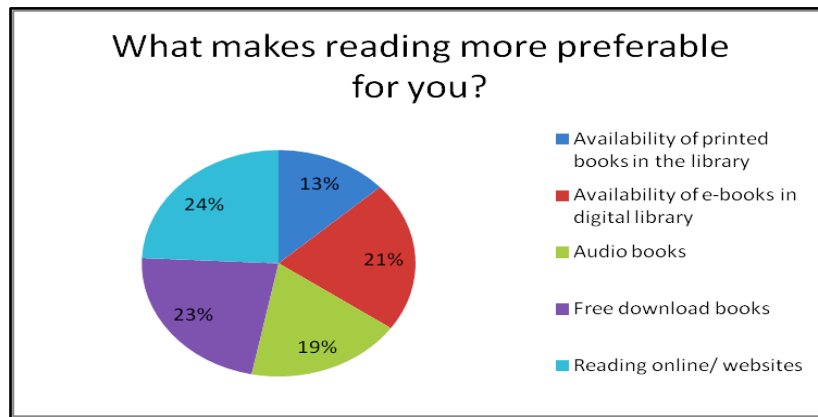


Table-8

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the survey conducted, we can deduce that students are more enthusiastic in reading books that are accessible on digital platforms. The ease of accessibility, cost effectiveness, variety and choices available makes it conducive to prefer reading using online platforms. Interactive novels, audiobooks, web series, graphic literature etc are becoming more popular among the youths. This trend can be utilised for the benefit of the learners by integrating technology with the teaching pedagogy. A few digital tools which may be incorporated are:

- Bartleby is an online source which gives unlimited access to books, articles and information for students, researchers, teachers etc without any cost.
- Books should be free is another site which gives access to thousands of free audio books. The books can be downloaded and played on any device like computers, mobiles, tabs etc.
- Children's Storybooks in another digital site which offers many free illustrated childrens' books from children, teens, through young adults.
- Free classic audiobooks is yet another online site that gives access to classic stories to read for free.
- Actively Learn is a digital reading platform that offers both ready-made lessons and gives an opportunity to create customised reading assignments for students.
- Newsela is a good online platform for reading non-fiction. It gives a wide range of articles on history, politics, science, current affairs etc.
- Reading Rockets is a multimedia project which helps people to develop reading activities to build fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

- Reading Rainbow is a television series designed to encourage reading through videos, games etc. It enables children to read on their own and develop a passion for reading.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the study conducted above, we can observe that students are interested in reading provided the accessibility of the books is easy and suits their interests. Students must be encouraged to read on their areas of interest to make them develop higher order skills such as critical thinking, comprehension, vocabulary enhancement, appreciation of cultural, social issues, human values, creative expression, communication skills etc. A Blended mode of teaching can be incorporated to cater to the requirements of the students. An understanding of the paradigm shift from traditional to digital platform which has widened the preferences and access to knowledge sources for readers is the need of the hour. Today, digitally accessible resources such as e-books, e-libraries, podcasts, youtube, vlogs, websites, e-journals etc., have considerably impacted reading. However, Social media platforms, online language learning platforms, language games, audio books, kindle etc should be used judiciously so that students inculcate the habit of reading good materials available.

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