

ENHANCING ACADEMIC READING SKILLS FOR UG ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN THE ESL CONTEXT: A STUDY

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on how to develop reading skills through strategy academic reading skills among under graduate engineering students studying science and technology in the ESL context. As a matter of fact, it is not an easy to acquire reading proficiency in the second language (L2) as compare to the native language (L1). Skill and strategy are both supplementary and complementary but the skill of reading differs with the strategy of reading. Consequently, the learners with lesser reading skills need focus on the strategic ways of skill orientation in the reading. In order to achieve the academic goal of enhancing academic reading skills among the UG engineering students, the author has suggested several useful techniques in this context. To gain proficiency in reading L2, the interest of the readers is to be considered as high priority. The basic standard of the learners before they enter into professional courses will also be taken into account. Their passion towards learning new things, admiration for language (L2), need of acquiring skills and adoption of various knowledge applications and available opportunities of learning skills in the specific domain of reading will be examined. This paper suggests the need of strategy instructional reading which plays a vital role in enhancing the skills among the learners in the ESL context.

Keywords: *Reading skill, ESL context, learning strategies, suggestions*

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Literature Review

According to Grabe (1991), reading is an essential skill and probably the most important skill for second language learners to master in academic contexts. Since reading comprehension has been distinctively important both in first and second/foreign language learning, reading strategies are of great interest to the field of reading research. Reading research in recent years has also shed light on the perception of strategies, and strategy use/training in reading comprehension. Since the 1970s, there have been a variety of reading strategies advocated by second language learning theorists to teach students to read well (Carrell, 1989).

As far as reading is concerned, "Efficient reading is not just finding or gathering meaning from the printed page; it often lies in creating personal meanings in interacting with the message on the page or the screen. Good readers arrive at their own best meanings by making use of the most effective and economical means, that is, those that demand minimal investment of time and energy to produce maximal gains" (2010, p.22). Reading from the cognitive point of view in the words of, Day and Bamford concisely define reading as "the construction of meaning from a printed or written message" (2012, p.12).

Reading comprehension is specifically the basic goal for ESL/EFL students to gain understanding of the world and of themselves, enabling them to think about and react to what they read (Tierney, 2005).

This paper throws light on the specific objectives of the reading enhancement through strategy instruction such as:

Objectives

This research has specific goals:

A primary goal is to focus on the importance of reading skill the context of ESL among the UG level engineering students.

- To enhance the reading skills through various methods especially strategy instructional methodology.
- To enable interest among the learners to get constant practice and training towards enhancement of the reading skills.

- To suggest possible ways of learning approaches and to suggest possible ways towards enhancing the reading skill.

The Use of Reading Activity among the Learners in ESL Context

The inclusion of reading activities on task-based evens and project based learning for engineering students enable them in improving English as a second and foreign language. First, the process leading to the end-product of project-work provides opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence (Fried-Booth, 2002). In addition, students demonstrate increased self-esteem, and positive attitudes toward learning (Stoller, 2006:27). Students' autonomy is enhanced (Skehan, 1998), especially when they are actively.

Reading skill is basically a receptive skill which occupies a considerable role in acquiring effective communication skills for the students at UG level. Activities on developing reading skills on the practical basis in the curriculum need to be framed with the notion of prioritizing the strategy based skills enable learners at different capacities at tertiary level.

Required instructions related to strategy learning for this task of enhancing academic reading skills of under graduate engineering students in the ESL context have been discussed. Individual interests of choice in selecting reading topics are discussed.

Reading skill is one of the important language skills need to be prioritized at all levels of teaching learning for the professional students. During the informal discussions with the respondents, the author has found that the most of the learners are weak in reading skills. As a result they felt the need for finding out various reasons for their shortcomings in reading skill. The aptitude to read books in English in order to grow knowledge and congregate information is conceivably the major focal point of teaching language for the professional students.

In order to find out the reasons of how reading skills enable the learners to get improved communication skills at the tertiary level, the questionnaire was taken as a tool for administering this task.

Design of the Research

The objectives of the questionnaire were to get additional information regarding the teaching of reading skills for the UG level professional students in the ESL context, to find out whether the students feel the importance of reading, their problems and prospects in reading, and their suggestions to develop their reading skills to get enhanced at various means. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions in which the first 3 questions were pertaining to general interest in reading skill. Next 3 questions were based on the need and importance of reading skill which enable them skill oriented and next 6 questions were

related to academic importance of reading skill.

For data interpretation and analysis, the author has chosen Likert scale for measuring the responses of the students. It is relatively simple to assemble this scale because this can be performed without panel of judges and is considered as more reliable as the respondents here answer to each statement included in the instrument.

Differences of opinions on the importance of individual criterion can be worked out by using simple consensus methods of adopting the group average or mode. The procedure is to take all the relevant questions, ask the participants separately to secure their individual responses and integrate the individual responses for each question into one average response (Delbeeqetal.)

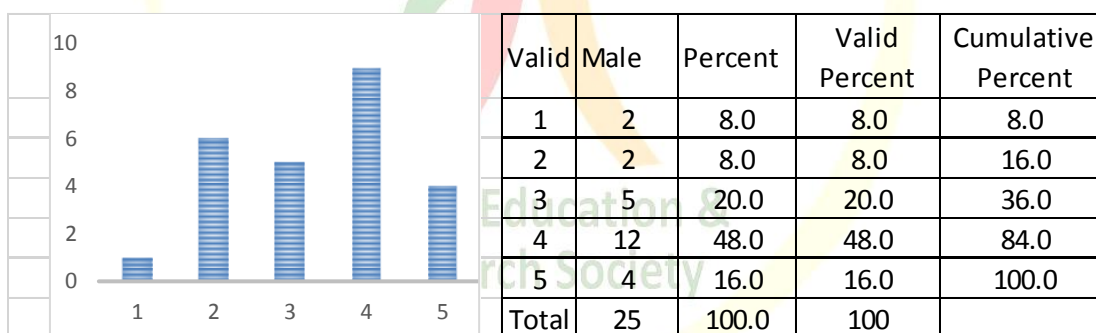
The designed questionnaire was administered to twenty five under graduate engineering students from one of the reputed institutes of technology and science, in India.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

In the following Likert scale graphical interpretation X-axis represents options (1-strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3-undecided, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree), Y-axis represents frequency and bars represents percentage.

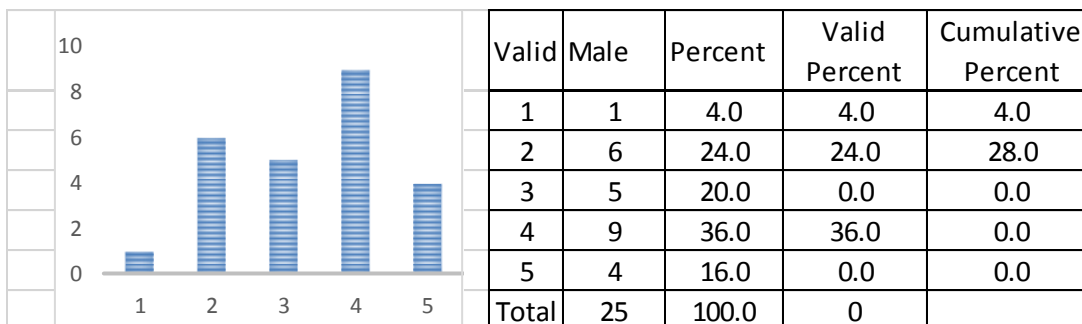
1. I like reading English works.

Most of the respondents **agreed** that they like reading English works.



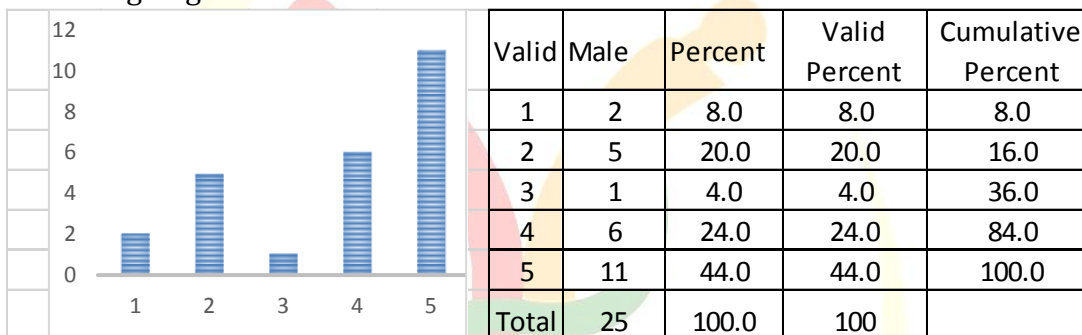
2. I practice reading English regularly.

Most of the respondents **agreed** that they practice reading English regularly.



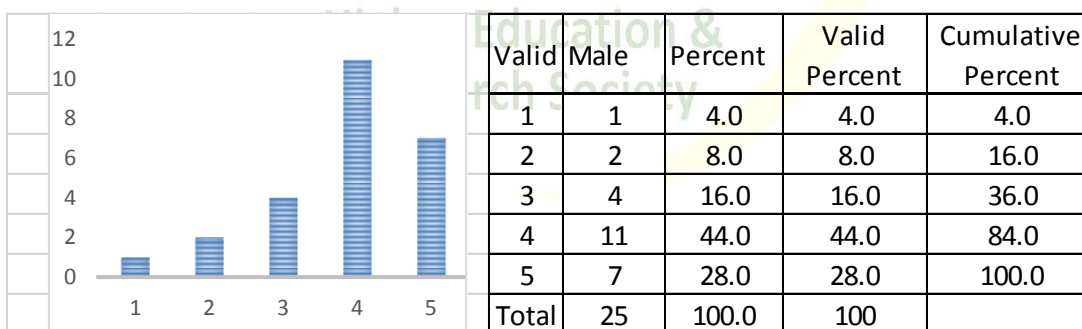
3. I focus on academic reading than general reading English.

Most of the respondents **strongly agreed** that they focus on academic reading than general reading English.



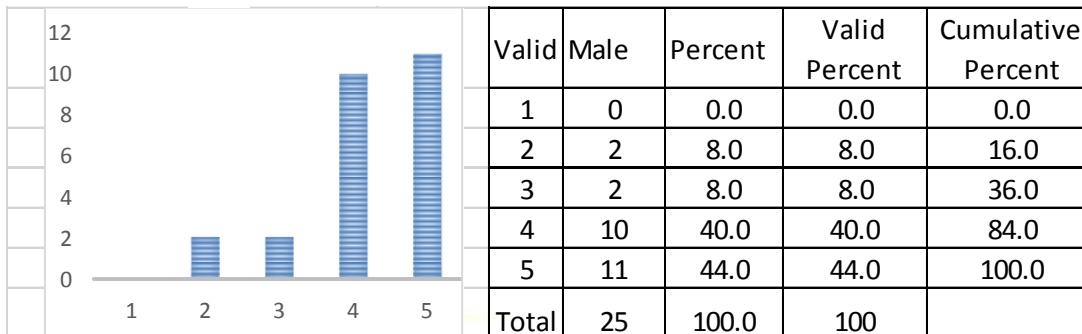
4. I need multimedia lessons to help develop my reading practice skills.

Most of the respondents **agreed** that they need multimedia lessons to help develop their reading practice skills.



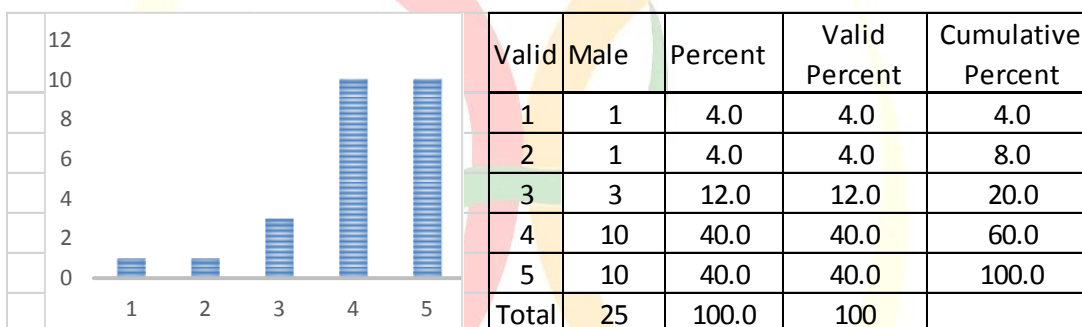
5. I need more hours to practice effective reading skills.

Most of the respondents **strongly agreed** that they need more hours to practice effective reading skills.



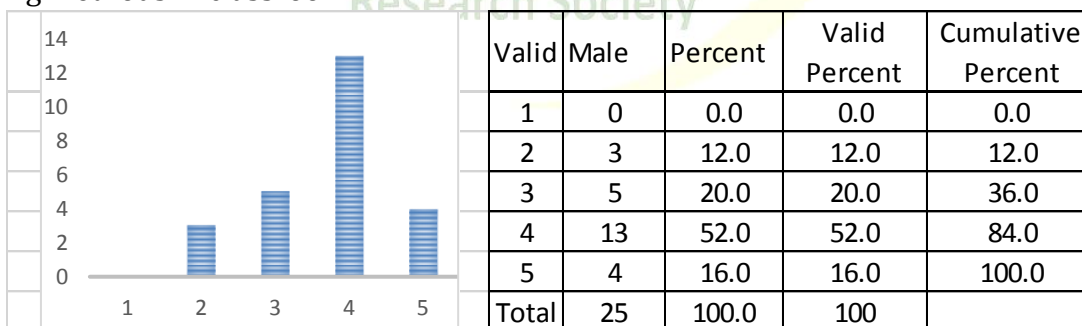
6. I need self-instructional materials to develop my reading skills through learning by doing method.

Most of the respondents **agreed** that they need self-instructional materials to develop their reading skills through learning by doing method.



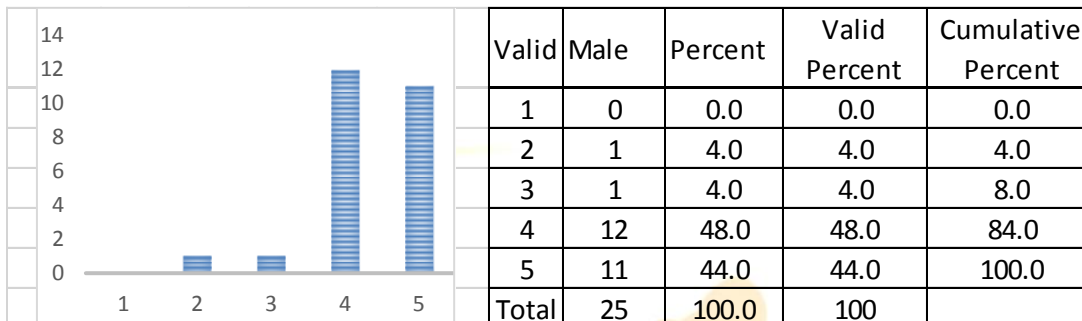
7. I improve my reading skills through strategy learning methods in classroom.

Most of the respondents **agreed** that they improve their reading skills through strategy learning methods in classroom.



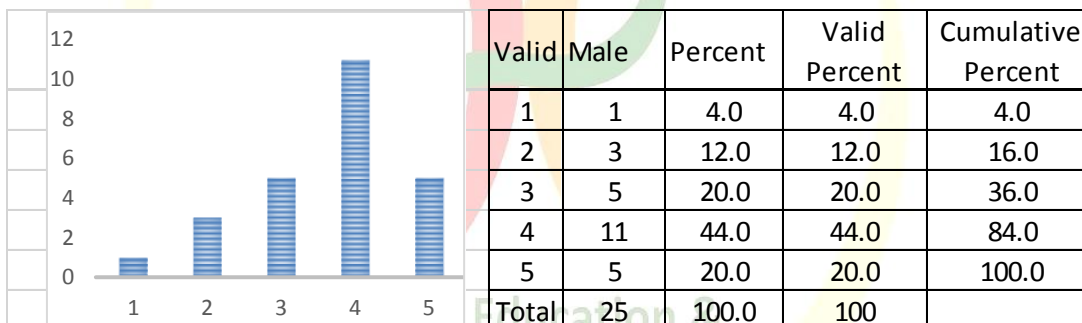
8. My teachers encourage me to improve my reading skills through various reading activities.

Most of the respondents **agreed** that their teachers encourage them to improve their reading skills through various reading.



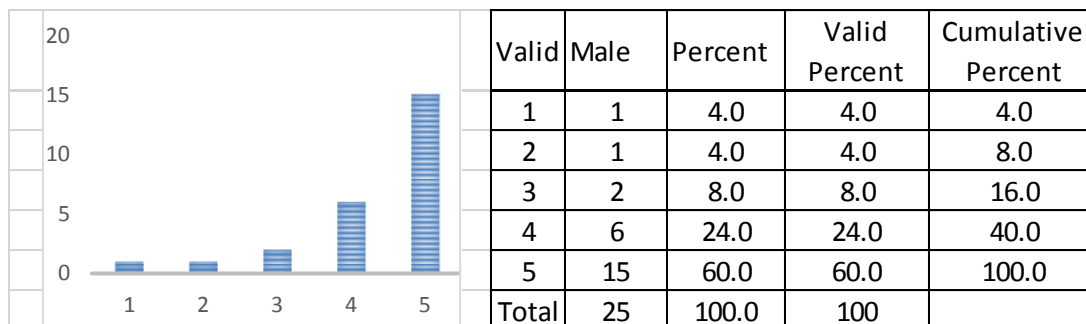
9. My syllabus topics on reading exercises are interesting.

Most of the respondents **agreed** that their syllabus topics on reading exercises are interesting.



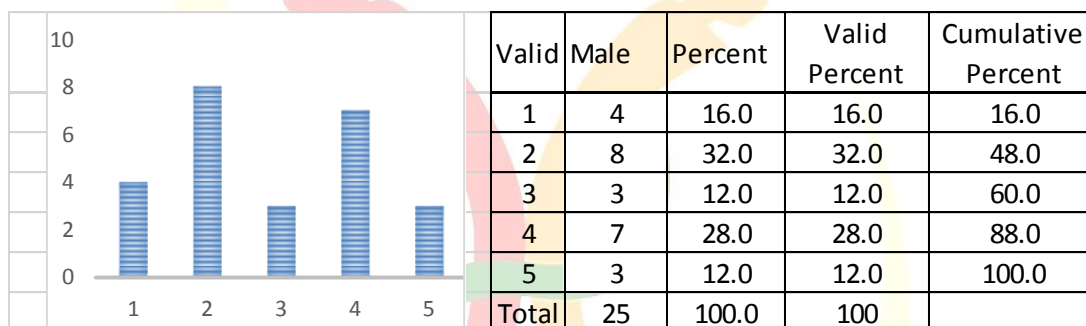
10. My reading helps me to develop my accent and pronunciation.

Most of the respondents **strongly agreed** that their reading helps them to develop their accent and pronunciation.



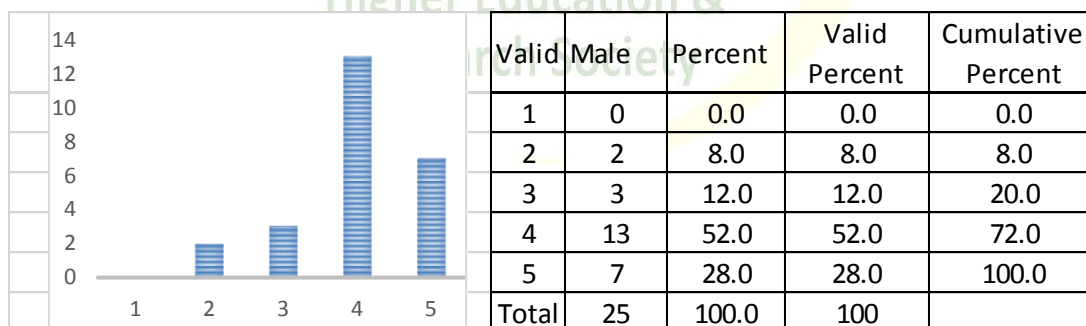
11. My academic reading is enough to build my vocabulary and word power.

Most of the respondents **strongly disagreed** that their academic reading is enough to build their vocabulary and word power.



12. I practice reading with other skills as listening, speaking and writing.

Most of the respondents **agreed** that practice reading with other skills as listening, speaking and writing.



Suggestions and Recommendations

- However as suggested during the survey some of these motivational and remedial measures may help in yielding better results for the learners in the ESL context.
- Overall, the learners should take the skill acquisition process interestingly and in the context of reading skill particularly, it plays vital role to acquire all other language skills.
- Teachers' objectives in imparting these skills are high end essential. They should take up the task in enabling students to feel the requisite to read English by imparting effective practice and training through strategy instructional learning method.
- Every day teacher may assign simple reading tasks for the students to say something about current events, narrate a short story and some latest technological advancement in their respective branch of specialization. Such activity enhances curiosity among the learners and motivates towards reading activity and to become equip with eloquence.
- They need to be familiar with the use of technology mediated language learning in addition to reading the text books and references.
- Teachers may demonstrate language activities through computer lab for screening subtitled short documentaries, movies, animation pictures etc for developing language skills.
- Regular activities on general reading may motivate them to read magazines, newspapers or any short story books available to them.
- Teacher may advice students to library occasionally and shows them how to use encyclopedia, thesaurus. They may assign some vocabulary exercises from the textual lessons and ask them to find about them.
- Remedial measures such as conduction of additional compulsory reading sessions can be organized in order to improve the reading skills of the students.
- To enable learners more proficient in the skill of reading some exercises like comprehension passages, puzzles, riddles to solve, reading for specific information etc. can be assigned to their inheres.

Conclusion

The overall evaluation is evident that there is a need for developing academic reading skills through strategy reading among under graduate engineering students studying in the ESL context. Adequate practice sessions for developing reading skills are required for learners to be successful in career quest. The more practice required for students to gain command over appropriate vocabulary and worth reading activities though learning by doing method is required. This also needed that acquiring skills and adoption of various knowledge

applications and available opportunities of learning skills are to be explored. Apart from that, the need of strategy instructional reading is to be implemented to enhance academic reading skills among the learners in the ESL context.

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