# THE EFFECT OF EXTENSIVE READING ON VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE STUDENTS OF ENGINEERING

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*Abstract : The objective of this study is to examine if Extensive Reading (ER) leads to the development of vocabulary in the engineering students and if ER can be introduced along with the regular syllabus of English. Research conducted earlier on Extensive Reading yielded positive results and it was proved as a significant technique to improve one's vocabulary. A group of one hundred and twenty students studying first year engineering course in a private engineering college were selected for the study. The students were divided into experimental and control groups. Extensive reading sessions were conducted for the experimental group while the control group followed the conventional method of reading the syllabus. The experimental group read Treasure Island, an adventure novel written by Robert Louis Stevenson in addition to their regular English syllabus. A Pre-Test was conducted for both the groups in the beginning of the semester. A Post-Test was conducted at the end of the semester to observe if there was any improvement in the vocabulary knowledge of the students. After the data was analysed it was found that the students in the experimental group showed considerable improvement in their vocabulary compared to the control group.*

*Keywords: Extensive Reading, Reading, Vocabulary improvement*

## Introduction

Vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learners. I.S.P Nation (1994) states that vocabulary enriches language use and language use enriches vocabulary. Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language proficiency and provides the basis for understanding how well learners listen, speak, read and write. Without extensive vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, learners often achieve less than their potential in terms of their real life communication and academic success. Studies show that L2 learners can acquire new vocabulary 'incidentally 'in the context of reading, apparently without any intention to learn them (Elley, and Manghubhai , 1983; Krashen 1989 ; Day and Omura and Himmatsu, 1991).  According to Schmidt (1994) incidental vocabulary learning refers to learning vocabulary without having any intention to learn it, i.e. learning vocabulary when the learners primary objective is to do something else (e.g. to comprehend  a reading passage). Incidental vocabulary learning is possible when the learner is exposed to extensive reading (Huckin & Coady, 1999; Krashen, 1993; Wodinsky & Nation, 1988).

Extensive reading involves reading for pleasure and it is usually reading large chunks of a variety of texts. This results in learning new vocabulary through meaning focussed input and creates opportunities for developing known vocabulary. For palmer (1964), extensive reading is reading book after book rapidly, and the goal is not language, but the meaning. The reading texts selected for extensive reading must be interesting and appealing to the learners. It is definite that students who read more will acquire many words than those with poor reading habits. The more one reads the better are the opportunities for one to encounter the same word or other new words in different situations. Research conducted earlier on Extensive Reading yielded positive results and it was proved as a significant technique to improve one's vocabulary.

## The Problem

It was observed that most of the students pursuing engineering course in the state of Telangana do not have good communication skills and as a result they fail to do well in their academics and also unable to perform well during their job interviews. One of the reasons for their poor communications skills is lack of adequate vocabulary. This study aims to find out if extensive reading would enhance the vocabulary knowledge of the students and if ER can be introduced along with the regular syllabus of English during their first year of Engineering programme.

## Method
### The subjects

A private engineering college located on the outskirts of Hyderabad was selected for conducting the study. One hundred and twenty students studying I B.Tech. were selected as the subjects for the study. All of them belonged to the age group of 17 and18. The students were randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group with each group consisting of sixty students. It was made sure that none of the students who participated in this study had reading habit. The students did not read any other books apart from their academic text books. All the students selected for the study had scored more than 80 marks out of 100 in the English Language paper examination of the two year intermediate course. The students who attended the classes regularly were selected for the study.

*The tools*

The tools used for the present study are:
1. Questionnaire for the students and teachers
2. Pre and Post Tests

A questionnaire consisting of fifteen questions was administered to the students selected for the study. The objective of the questionnaire was to:
1. understand the students personal background
2. understand the students opinion about the English text book
3. find out the methodology used by the teachers to teaching vocabulary
4. find out if the text book has been helpful for them to improve their vocabulary
5. find out the strategies used by the students to learn vocabulary
6. find out the reading habits of the students.

A questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was administered to the teachers who were teaching English for the first year students of engineering. The objective of the questionnaire was to:
1. understand the teachers' academic background
2. understand the teachers' opinion about the English text book prescribed for the first year students of engineering
3. understand their perception of the role of the materials in enhancing the vocabulary knowledge of the students
4. find out the time spent for teaching vocabulary in the daily classroom
5. find out the methodology used to teach vocabulary and their perception of students receptivity.

*Pre-Test*

A Pre-Test was conducted in the beginning of the first semester of the B.Tech. programme. The test was conducted for both the control and experimental groups to assess their knowledge of vocabulary. The test had forty target words selected from their prescribed English text book. The target words selected for testing appeared both in the prescribed English text book as well as the material selected for extensive reading. The question paper was divided into two sections-A and B and each section had 20 questions. Both the sections were designed to test the students' receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary.

*Post test*

A Post-Test was conducted after the intervention programme of extensive reading for the experimental group. The question paper which was given for Pre-Test was used for the Post- Test also to see the linear progression between the Pre-Test and the Post-Test. The order of the questions was changed for the Post-Test.

*Materials and procedure*

Materials selected for extensive reading play a major role in this type of research. The texts selected with a specific focus give useful data leading to findings and conclusion which either prove or disapprove the research hypothesis. The novel *Treasure Island* written by Robert Louis Stevenson was selected for extensive reading. None of the students participating in the study had read the novel before. Both the control and experimental groups studied English during the first semester. Three classes were allotted for English every week. Each class was of fifty minutes duration. In addition to the regular English syllabus the experimental group read the novel *Treasure Island* while the control group read only the English text book. The reading sessions for the experimental group were conducted in the classroom by the teacher. Twenty hours of extensive reading spread over a period of six weeks was done by the experimental group. A Post-Test was conducted at the end of the semester for both the experimental and control groups.

*Data analysis*

*Analysis of the students' questionnaire*
1. The students did not read books for pleasure. They were not used to extensive reading.
2. Most of the students felt that the lessons in the English text book are not inspiring or motivating.
3. All the students agreed that vocabulary is an important component in academic success.
4. Most of the students expressed that English texts books did have adequate number of exercises on vocabulary.
5. Some of the students consulted a dictionary whenever they came across a new word while some others ignored it and continued reading. Very few tried to guess the meaning of the word from the context.
6. Many of the students were not satisfied with the teaching methods used to teach vocabulary in the class room.

*Analysis of the teachers' questionnaire*
1. All the teachers had more than five years of teaching experience in engineering colleges.
2. All the teachers expressed that the students could not speak grammatically correct sentences and were unable to use the right words while speaking English.
3. All the teachers expressed that vocabulary is necessary for listening, speaking, reading and writing English.
4. Most of the teachers said that the prescribed English texts books did have adequate number of exercises on vocabulary.
5. Many of the teachers said that they spend 5 to 10 minutes for teaching vocabulary after the completion of each lesson.
6. All the teachers said that they did not use any other material other than text book to teach vocabulary.

*Results of Pre and Post Tests*

| Descriptive Statistics | Control Group | | | | | | Experimental Group | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Test | | | Post-Test | | | Pre-Test | | | Post-Test | | |
| | Sec 1 | Sec 2 | Total | Sec 1 | Sec 2 | Total | Sec 1 | Sec 2 | Total | Sec 1 | Sec 2 | Total |
| Average | 3.9 | 3.7 | 7.52 | 4.23 | 3.77 | 8 | 3.7 | 4.0 | 7.63 | 10 | 8.33 | 18.4 |
| Mode | 3.0 | 3.0 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 3.0 | 2.0 | 7 | 10 | 8 | 18 |
| Media | 4.0 | 3.5 | 7.5 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 3.5 | 4.0 | 7 | 10 | 8 | 18 |
| SD | 1.5 | 1.8 | 3.15 | 1.36 | 1.9 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 2.4 | 2.96 | 2.47 | 3.15 | 3.8 |

*Discussion*

The test results obtained indicates a significant improvement in the vocabulary learning ability of the students of the experimental group. Most of the students of the experimental group who could score only between 2 and 4 marks during the Pre-Test scored between 20 and 23 marks during the Post-Test. There is 51 % increase in the marks scored by the experimental group in the section-1 of the post test and 44% increase in the marks score in the section-2 of the Post-Test. There is considerable gain of marks in the Post-Test. There is significant proof to establish that Extensive Reading produces desired results if it can be implemented in an Engineering College. At the same time the results of the Pre-Test and Post-Test conducted for the control group indicates no perceivable difference between the two performances.

*Conclusion*

The novel selected for the study motivated the students to read and also catered to the needs of the students with limited language. They were able to overcome their inhibitions about their ability to read independently without the guidance of the teacher. The students had a positive approach to the task at hand. The exposure to language had so far been restricted to the course book. Exposure to extensive reading had certainly increased the ability of the students to learn new words. The study shows that the confidence levels of the students had increased after the extensive reading sessions and they were ready to read other books. The students had gained knowledge of vocabulary after the extensive reading. Perhaps the greatest change or gain that was noticed was in the students heightened motivation to read, and more importantly to read on their own. Looking at the outcome of the study it is strongly felt that incorporating an extensive reading programme to the existing English syllabus would enhance the vocabulary knowledge of the students.

The flexibility of implementing an extensive reading programme can be seen in the duration of the ER programme. Elley and Mangubhai (1981) conducted an ER programme in rural Fiji that lasted for two years. Lai (1993a) conducted four week summer extensive reading programme. The present study was conducted for six weeks. All the programmes have reported positive outcomes. Just as the duration of the programme is not of prime importance, so are the number of books, the maxim being 'the more they read the better'.

Further research can be carried out to check if extensive reading will enhance the vocabulary knowledge of the engineering students from the vernacular medium background. A study can conducted to observe the effect of extensive reading on the writing skills of the students.

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