

# OVERCOMING IMPEDIMENTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND ASSISTANCE TO PROMOTE LISTENING AND READING SKILLS – A STUDY ON RURAL ENGINEERING ENTRANTS

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**Abstract:** English Language Learning is all the more essential for Engineering Students. The rural Engineering entrants have some specific impediments in their learning process. Of the four broad language skills, LSR&W, Listening and Reading are normally considered passive skills but they are actually receptive skills. The aim of this paper is to show the importance of Listening and Reading skills (receptive skills) in the English classroom in order to get a perfect acquisition of the language. In general, Listening and Reading skills have been taught and explained separately, but they are closely interconnected. Both Listening and Reading skills are comprehensive skills and it is important to practise them together and integrate them with the rest of the skills. These skills are very important in relation to understand the language and for its proficiency. Listening and Reading skills are quite difficult to practise especially when the student does not live in English speaking surroundings. This paper analyzes the difficulties faced by the students in acquiring Listening and Reading skills, and tasks to promote their Listening and Reading skills. This gives them assistance to overcome the impediments.

**Key words:** *Comprehensive skills, Receptive Skills, Impediments.*

## Introduction

In the Indian education system teaching English has gained more importance, because English is used as a Link- Language and widely used in academic institutions, offices, industries and business sectors. In rural parts of Andhra Pradesh, teaching - learning process is bilingual and vernacular. The same students when getting into higher education and employability, English plays a very prominent role in the medium of instruction as well as communication respectively.

English Language skills are broadly categorized into four divisions, namely Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Among them, Listening and Reading are receptive skills whereas the other two, Speaking and Writing are productive skills. Listening and Reading are termed as passive and receptive skills. The mind of the listener as well as the reader is active in his own way while receiving the ideas of the communicator, decoding the ideas and assimilating them. Hence Listening and Reading skills become active skills even though they are termed as passive skills. If the listener/ reader are attentive, Listening and Reading attains effectiveness.

While teaching English to Indian students in the earlier days, the main focus lay on developing only the written skills. This was not a natural process. Only by developing Listening and Reading abilities, one can naturally develop Spoken and Written skills.

Indian students spend a lot of years in learning the English language from primary level to university level. In rural areas of Andhra Pradesh region, we can see English medium schools, which started teaching the English language from pre-school education. Still, students are not capable of speaking and expressing fluently in English when they come for higher education. Students have a negative attitude towards English language and they do not need English in their daily life, as their perception is that English is a colonial language which is now less heard or spoken outside the classroom. Students who can get good marks in English examinations are not able to have a basic conversation in the English language. This fact proves that English Language Teaching also has many problems and challenges.

### **Listening Skill:**

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply” – Stephen R. Covey

The importance of Listening cannot be ignored as it is the first step towards the language learning. In communication, effective speaking is the only one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is listening. According to Nunan (2001:23), Listening is a six-stage process, consisting of Hearing, Attending, Understanding, Remembering, Evaluating and Responding. These stages occur in sequence and rapid succession. This table shows the basic stages of the Listening process and their functions.



Fig.1.listening process

### **Impediments to Listening in learning a Second Language:**

- When students are listening to English they lack concentration. They do not usually show interest to listen in English.

- ii) In rural schools especially, the student rarely has the opportunity to listen to English for sufficient time.
- iii) In rural schools, English Language Teaching starts with writing skill, which is totally reversed.
- iv) The obstacle in teaching listening skill can be lack of training to English language teachers and their competence level to speak. If the teacher speaks the English language incorrectly or the pronunciation is wrong, the student also speaks incorrect English.
- v) One of the most common factors that affects Listening comprehension is individual differences and the Students who have different backgrounds of knowledge, experience, socio-economic status etc.,
- vi) The capacity to understand the second language is highly related to intelligence. In receiving the language and comprehending it, intelligence plays an important role.
- vii) Inadequate knowledge of English grammar, words, and phrases affects listening comprehension.
- viii) Emotional factors like fear, embarrassment, shyness, defensiveness etc. affect the learner's capability to understand the teacher's message in the classroom.

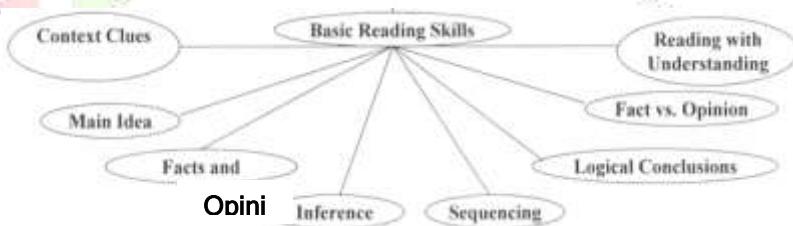
### **Reading Skill:**

**“Reading maketh a full man”**

**-Francis Bacon**

Reading Skill is the keystone for success not only in schools and colleges but throughout our lifespan. Through reading, students can cultivate new ideas, acquire knowledge, obtain needed information, relax their minds and improve their command of language and vocabulary.

According to W. S. Gray, “Reading is a form of experience. Reading brings us in contact with the minds of great authors, with the written account of their experiences, their recorded lives and the advancements made by them in various fields “ ( Methods of Teaching English in India; 158) “Comprehension is achieved by the bottom-up approaches of decoding word, phrase and sentence level as well as the top-down approaches of predicting content and drawing on existing schemata to create meaning” (Anderson,2003).



### **Impediments to Reading skills in learning the second language:**

- i) In reading comprehension, students face issues of decoding words, phrase, and sentences. The reasons for this are numerous and include issues with first language reading ability, low-level decoding skills, lack of motivation to learn, lack of diversity in teaching materials, lack of opportunities to read and inadequate exposure to reading materials.
- ii) It is observed that most of the rural Engineering students are unable to fully comprehend passages and articles, encountered many unfamiliar words and fluency, which hampered their reading comprehension.

- iii) They required longer duration to read passages and articles.
- iv) Students are facing difficulties with the words and sentence sequence forms and in reading long technical vocabulary.
- v) Some students have had their school education in the vernacular language and are therefore unable to follow the terminology used in course books and reference books.

Inhibition and inferiority complex are noticeable in first generation learners particularly from the rural areas.

### **Tasks that promote Listening and Reading skills in the classroom:**

#### **Task 1      Listening skill**

The teacher reads aloud a passage/story which comes under the Upper Intermediate level of English. Before training through podcasts, the teacher trains his/her students in the Language Laboratory. The teacher instructs the students to listen carefully the reading of his/her passage. The teacher has to read naturally and slowly at a normal speed while telling a story. He/she should use proper facial expressions, gestures and may also change the tone of his voice wherever necessary. The teacher reading should be dramatic according to the text or story. He/She reads an interesting passage loudly at a normal speed in the classroom and asks the students some questions like

1. Identify the adjectives
2. Identify the repeated verbs in the passage
3. Asking a question on the related phrase with the meaning of the sentence.
4. The intention of the speaker in the passage.
5. Antonyms related to a word.

**OUTCOME:** All these will make the students listen attentively. Taking notes while listening makes them involve actively.

#### **Task 2:**

#### **GIVING DIRECTIONS**

The teacher draws a sketch map on the blackboard. For example, A village map or a university map etc. The teacher gives the students some directions which they should mark with a colored chalk. After that, they should describe the directions to others in the class.

**OUTCOME:** Listening skill makes them attentive throughout the class. Narrating will give them active participation.

#### **Reading Activities:**

“Reading tasks should aim at understanding the information explicitly, inferring facts and forming one’s own experiences. Reading practice helps in developing the habits that characterize fluent reading, i.e., reading in meaningful segments”

**Reading to learn the language:** Reading material is language input. By giving students a variety of materials to read, instructors provide multiple opportunities for students to absorb vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and discourse structure as they occur in authentic context. Students thus gain a complete picture of the ways in which the elements of the language work together to convey meaning.

### Task 1

**Describing a person/event in the past:** Ask the students to work individually and gather information on any inspiring leader or some event happened in the past etc., Ask them to read the information on any of the above mentioned topic which they choose. After the information gathered, they are asked to present their views.

**OUTCOME:** Students write the related information they know. Their grammatical errors are viewed and corrected

by the teacher. Through this, they can know the historical information also. They can cultivate the reading skills.

**Task 2 Read, Gather and make a Poster:** The teacher assigns a scientific topic on ‘Energy sources’ to the students asking to gather information, and prepare a poster. The students confine the topic to “Alternative Energy Sources”. They are prepared to make a poster on it.

**OUTCOME:** Making a poster is a group activity. Students show much interest in preparing poster. Through this assignment, they can learn to frame the key words which are the main part of reading. This improves reading ability and vocabulary.

### Conclusion:

The four linguistic skills (LRSW) can be compared to the four pillars supporting the magnificent structure of language. Language is learnt through practicing the linguistic skills and not by learning only grammatical rules. In India, it is necessary to focus on developing LRSW skills, at a proper stage. It will be more beneficial if systematic exercises are provided at the beginning or elementary level. Accent, Pronunciation, lack of time, speaking tendency, limited knowledge of vocabulary and structures of sentences were the major impediments in the development of Listening and Reading skills among the students. Moreover, taking long time for listening, shyness, hesitation are also the barriers which hindered the process of listening in the classroom teaching. Students should spend much more time on reading practice. They should listen to /read to a variety of topics in order to get familiar with them. Hence the process of getting general information, learning language skills will be enriched along with. Teachers should use audio visual aids for the development of English Language Listening and Reading skills. They should communicate in English through activities in the classroom. Provision of listening and reading skills should be introduced through assignment worksheets in the textbooks of English curriculum to enhance the passive skills among students.

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