

Integrating E-Reading Into Traditional Classrooms Of Budding Engineers

DR. SABITHA

Professor of English

KL University,

Vaddeswaram,

Guntur district.

sabitha@kluniversity.in

MS. PREM CHANDRIKA

Assistant Professor of English

KL University,

Vaddeswaram,

Guntur district.

Abstract:

The paper focuses on the need of E-Reading and integration of E-Reading into the classrooms with Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES). Computer has the potential to become the amazing teaching tool. Besides the written text the technical way of learning has quality, rhythm, tenor and pitch. These parameters vary as per the moods of the teacher in the traditional classrooms. But in the e-learning there is no mood swings to the inanimate objects like video or audio. So, it is the teachers' ingenuity to select the suitable e-content to the students and make use of the instruments to the fullest extent for the benefit of the students. The ultimate goal of the teacher is to make the learners as independent readers.

Keywords: e-reading, technology, benefits, independent, learners

Introduction:

Integrating E-Reading into Traditional Classrooms of Budding Engineers

Literally speaking, the term e-reading is an abbreviation of electronic reading or, more precisely, a computer based form of reading experience. E-reading is possible through e-learning, in the case of technical students. A typical example of how e-learning is understood is illustrated in a recent article by the Learning and Teaching Support Network. The article enumerates the sources of e- learning:

E-Learning covers a wide set of applications, such as Web-based learning environments, computer-based learning... and videotape, satellite broadcast, Interactive TV and CD-ROM.¹

In the above example, several forms of technology and its enabled services are cited, including the traditional electronic media such as video and more recent media such as Internet.

E-Reading is an imperative feature for professional entry and a desirable skill for all technical students. Broadly speaking, television, video and Internet may seem dissimilar; but they share technologies and several basic characteristics in common. They provide a capacity to publish or present resources, to read either in the form of video, text or sound, enabling interaction of some form between resource and recipients. Technical colleges and universities have long used a range of conventional technologies to support learning and reading. For example, since the 1970s, the regular technical universities have used audiotapes, video and

television to provide lectures for part-time study and distance learning. With the help of technology, even courses like M.Tech. (Computer science) are possible through distance education for technical students. Hence, a new approach in vogue is education through e-learning. As academicians and educationists emphasize a particular technique or form of learning through electronic context, Paul Cather all quotes Good who opines e-learning as a pedagogical approach, a method of teaching suitable for an on- line or digital context.

According to Good, E-learning is different from traditional forms, and demands new pedagogical skill... keeping an eye out for new technological developments and for new way of using the technology, autonomously solving problems and learning.²

Hence, it is pertinent here to draw the attention that e-reading is different from the traditional forms of reading. The difference between printed text and screen-based texts is often talked about as the kind of linear and non-linear connections; but they are also distinctive in terms of efficiency, speed and accuracy.

Fundamental reading is reshaped into multimodal environment of new technology. On the screen the reader needs to make sense of images and other modes of representation, besides, other modes of communication, which are available. This type of reading reflects in the process of reading multimodal texts. At school level, fiction and non-fiction books contain high proportion of images. The images illustrate the writings. But, the importance of images is not reflected in children's writing. This is, in fact, because of the children's lack of focus of reading the images, failure to read the written text and the inability to relate the two forms of representation. In the past, as the school student progressed, the importance of images in the text reduced. As the reader became more proficient in reading, the usefulness of images shrank. But now, it is not the same scenario. Even in the school textbooks, images persist. Even in the secondary school English texts, images appear in the medium of worksheet, map pointing, models, teaching-aids, anthologies, films, and video; even on the Internet sites, images occupy a very important chunk. The technical students are supposed to be exposed to monomodal written-text for reading and also multimodal written-text reading. Mono-modal means the written text or important visual information and it is of only one type. Multimodal written-text means the text may have an image, a diagram and a text. Depending upon the type of the text, the reader takes up reading. Reading depends upon the size of the page, the directionality, shape and angle of the text. In this context Kenner, the author of *Becoming Illiterate* makes a perceptive comment on how reading is affected:

Reading is affected by the spatial organization and framing of writing on the page, the directionality, shape, size and angle of script.³

The writer's script shows the direction of the reading. The font sizes of the written letters change the speed of the reading. On the whole, the written text decides the efficiency of the reading and it also shows different modes and potentialities. In this context, Kenner and Kress opine:

Different scripts can be seen as different modes, giving rise to a variety of potential meanings - making with 'different representational principles.'⁴

Therefore, as said above, reading is a multimodal practice. Many of the technical students prefer to engage themselves in reading with images. Visual elements motivate them to read the text with comprehension. Besides the written text or images, reading is also involved with voice that is heard; bringing the voice allows the reader to read more interestingly, as it has quality, rhythm, tenor and pitch. These four qualities of voice shape the type of reading. For students the voice can well be a substitute for the teacher's explanation. This view is supported by O Donoghue, the writer of *English in the Digital Age 2000* who collaborated Reading with CD-ROM. For some students, reading from screen can also offer a less 'alienating' experience of text.⁵

Material on (CD-ROM) can also be "read" as video. For example, the B.Tech / B.E. content subjects are taught through video, which has the potential to form indelible impressions on the minds of readers/ students.

The technical students are expected to read through multimodal digital texts. In this text also there is writing, but it is restricted to minimal labelling. In this text the students rely solely on image and colour to "read" the transformations. For example conversion of liquid (water) into gas (vapour) can be well illustrated through an image giving it in colour. In this experiment, the text may be given about the conversion of water into gas on one side of the screen. And on the other side of the screen the image is pasted. The water is coloured to make the students notice the moving gas particles. In this situation, the image teaches more than the text. That is the reason why students "read" more the colour of the water particles than reading of the text of conversion. The technical students or computer literates prefer one mode to another mode when they are reading the multimodal text. They are privileged to use image and colour when they read the multi- model texts which is designed to read. Hence, it is clear that visuals have more impact on the minds of the students.

Another fact of multimodal text on the screen is: the text does not compel the students, for a single entry point to read the text. The technical student, depending upon his interest and need to study, enters the text from any point, as the multimode text has multiple entry points. Comparing the multimode text with the written text, the latter is on a page, and essentially the students take the linear path and the illustrator guides the eye in a particular direction connected to the reading of a text.

Traditional forms of reading are the student's readable handwriting and spellings. But in this technical era, there are acquisitions of new skills from new technologies. They are: operation of a computer, know the role of keyboard in finding, selecting, processing and presenting information. It completely reshapes the skill of "reading." Besides these new skills, a technical student is supposed to be trained in multi-literacy like the visual literacy, as the student already has cultural literacy, emotional literacy and intellectual literacy. Grader, the writer of *Literacy and Media Texts in Secondary English*, opines:

What it means to be literate in the digital era of the twenty-first century is different

than what was needed previously.⁶

In olden days, a literate means who could read and write, in other words an educated person. The meaning of “literate” has changed with the advancement of technology. The present technical student requires technical learning with the introduction of reading new technologies. This is a radical change in the “reading” screen, which accommodates the new within the domain of the old.

The difference between reading printed texts and screen-based texts can be assessed in terms of efficiency, speed and accuracy. The fundamental change in reading, using the new technology in the multimodal environment, is beyond writing. In the present day, technical students find the way of making sense of images with the help of the other modes. It leads them to understand that their reading is no less than reading a multimodal designed written text.

READING THROUGH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ENABLED SERVICES (ITES)

The phrase Information Technology (IT) refers to the creation, gathering, processing, and storage of information. The livery of information, the process and devices make this possible. Information technology can process raw data into useful information. For example, if a student gets a whole range of test scores between thirty and seventy, each score is a raw data. To turn these scores into information, it is essential to convert them into a grade for the course. It is useful information, as the teacher can decide if the student passes or fails in that course. Secondly, that information technology can recycle the processed information and use it as data in another processing step. For example, already processed data can be combined with other information to increase its impact. One student’s data can be compared with another student’s data. This is a very useful device of information technology. The third use is that it has a package of information in a new form; so it’s easier to understand, is more attractive or more useful. For example, all the Quality Point Averages of a particular student’s classmates can be sorted into descending order or placed on a chart so that the teacher can easily find out where each student stands. To be clear, the grade that the students get in a course can be combined with his grades of other course to calculate the student’s Quality Point Average.

In the IT field, in educating and training the technical students, the computer has the potential to become the most amazing teaching tool. They can pace the information in the form of instruction differently for each student. Besides information, it can animate important concepts, and use interactively to involve the students in the process of “reading” learning. Dennis P. Wrtin, Kim Folay, Kunal Sen and Cathelion Morin comment on the importance of computers, as follows:

At college computers are increasingly being used to teach courses like ones you’re taking. For example, this text has a computer application integrated into it. For another view of what’s discussed here, you can use the PACE CD, a multimedia programme that parallels

this text. To get more in depth and up-to-the-minute topics that has been pre-selected for you.⁷

Previously, computers were excluded from voice recognition capabilities and its connection to the Internet. Now through the Internet, “Reading” can be seen as a multidivisional task. Through Internet, umpteen websites are available. A website can be uploaded, by a company or an organisation can place its website on the World Wide Web (WWW) to make the reader aware of the company’s product. Besides companies, individuals also can place their personal websites. The Reading activity starts with the search engine. A Search engine is like a tool to open the web. To open the web, the search engines help immensely. Some of the best search engines are Google, Gmail, Hotmail, Being, AltaVista and Yahoo. Through a search engine the students can find various reading materials available on the web. The present day teachers of English can use the web in a very meaningful manner and train the students in cultivating “reading”. They can select the text which is appropriate for their level and copy and paste the text into a word processor.

Conclusion

If necessary, the teacher can interfere and simplify the text, in the case of utmost need for the students. The students can be trained to look for meanings and synonyms which are present in the dictionary provided by the computer. Thus, the students can be exposed to all the four stages of reading. Unseen or unfamiliar passage is given to technical students to evaluate their general, academic and technical reading skills. This practice with the Internet has the potential to make the students independent readers.

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