

Using technology to improve reading skills among the Diploma Holders – A survey based on Selected Advanced Technological Institutes

Suganthy Subhakaran

Senior Lecturer/English

Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education- Dehiwala

Abstract: English plays an important role in school curriculum as well as in higher education. It is quite obvious that in Sri Lankan contexts the students have to be motivated to learn English as it is not their mother tongue. They do not give much importance to learn English as it is a second language for them. So, the teachers from schools and lecturers from higher educational institutes have to put maximum effort to make the students learn English effectively.

Language learning with technology is a new method of learning in the modern world. We now live in a world in which technology pervades every aspect of our lives. Apart from its time and labour – saving function, technology can also inspire creativity and bring new opportunities to students, connecting those to new ideas and to new world. Here the researcher has introduced this technology and wants to prove that reading skills of the students can be improved by using or introducing this technology in the higher educational sector.

Recently most of the Sri-Lankan Higher educational institutes compelled to start e-learning as new methods to facilitate teaching and learning process due to COVID-19 pandemic situation. Any how all the students in the higher educational sectors are used to this new technology and are able to complete their higher studies successfully. So, it is inevitable for all teachers and the students to adopt into this new technology in future as well because nobody knows when this COVID-19 will come to an end.

In this research the researcher has explored her analysis into improving reading skills among the students through technology which plays a crucial role nowadays in higher education. The students can be motivated to learn this reading skill while they are using new devices of technology in their day- to- day lives.

Keywords: English, reading skills, higher education, technology, second Language

1. Introduction

These days, there is no doubt in the fact that the English language is becoming something of a forerunner in global communication. It is the language of choice in most of the countries of the world. Thus, English is playing a very significant role in bringing the world together. Nowadays in Sri Lanka English plays a crucial role in the educational sector. In the school level and in the higher educational level English is given much importance and the students are somewhat keen in learning English because in many places it is compulsory to pass the English language. In the higher educational sector, all the higher studies have to be followed in English. Though the students follow the courses in the medium of English, in certain areas it is somewhat difficult to make them learn effectively. Especially, when we talk about the four skills of English such as reading, writing, listening and speaking, as lecturers of English we are able to notice that the students are not much successful in these four skills.

Therefore, the researcher has planned to seek the ways how the students can be motivated to learn these skills especially reading skills which is the most important skill among the others. The researcher believes that if the reading skill is achieved by the students, automatically they will be able to improve other three skills. Reading is the basic skill which makes the students learn the English language effectively. The researcher has been working at Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Institute (SLIATE) for more than 22 years and SLIATE has been conducting all diploma programs in different aspects. Among these Higher National Diploma in English, a 2 ½ year program is a very popular course among the students all island wide. In this program reading is a major subject in the four semesters of the course. The researcher has been teaching this subject to the students for more than two decades and is able to analyze the barriers which the students undergo while learning this reading subject.

The researcher has observed that nowadays the students are addicted to technological devices. Smart mobile phones are the most popular devices among the teenage group. So, the researcher has decided it is an effective method that the technology can be introduced in improving this most popular reading skill among these teenage group of students. The students are able to engage with the reading activities in the class room interestingly if the technology though smart phones or computers or tabs is introduced in the class room.

Today's students find this new world of digital learning to be very motivating. In fact, today's youth use the power of digital devices, language translation apps, Visualizing, Artificial intelligence and tools to increase engagement, encourage, collaboration, innovation and enhance student learning. Black text on white pages and white chalk on blackboards are traditional learning method that continues today. Nowadays, technology in its many forms is showing how learning can stain with a much broader range of colors, from images and music to games, wikis, and many other, any time, any place, on desktops, laptops, and smartphones.

2. Objectives of the Research:

Language learning with technology is a new method of learning in the modern world. We now live in a world in which technology pervades every aspect of our lives. Apart from its time and labour – saving function, technology can also inspire creativity and bring new opportunities to people, connecting those to new ideas and to new world. Here the researcher has planned to introduce this technology in English language learning. In this modern world the students, especially teenage learners are fascinated with modern technology. They are fed up with old teaching methodologies and they want to learn with modern technologies. For them this new technology is a very good opportunity to improve their English knowledge. The researcher specifically wants to talk about **smart phones** under technology.

The researcher has focused on one of the major skills of English Language- that is Reading skills. Nowadays the students are not willing to engage with reading books. They spend a lot of time on social Medias rather than spending time on reading books. So, Social Medias influence a lot in the lives of the students. This is a challenging topic for the researcher because the researcher's intention is how to improve the reading skills among the diploma holders. So, this research paper is going to explain how teenage learners show their negligence to improve their reading skills and thereby, how they are not successful to master the second language without having the knowledge of English. At the end, this article will give some solutions to overcome these problems and will show some ways how to improve the knowledge of reading skills in their day today life.

The objectives of this research paper are:

- To identify the barriers in which the students struggle to improve reading skills
- To motivate the students in reading through technology
- To engage the students in reading activities with online access
- To access information through reading by using internet
- To have exposure to the target language
- To develop effective strategies to improve reading skills among the students
- To encourage the learners to maintain a Reading Journal

3. Research Problem:

Reading is considered as one of the major skills in the second language learning. Developing strong reading skills among students is one of the key goals of every early education program. It is through reading that students expand their vocabulary and learn about the world. Reading is also the key to success in spelling and writing. Here the researcher has attempted to analyze the difficulties undergone by the diploma holders while they are learning the second language. Most of the students do not pay attention in reading skills. When the class room activity on reading skills is given to the students, they are not much interested or motivated to complete the given task. The researcher has observed this issue in the class room. Therefore, the researcher has to find some ways to motivate the students and make them engage with activities on reading comprehension with keen interest. Before that the researcher has analyzed the facts why the students are not motivated to practice comprehension in English. The main reason is their negligence towards reading skills. Despite the traditional neglect, recent years have shown a greater awareness of the **questions** which need to be addressed with regard to reading skills:

- What strategies do learners use to improve their reading skills?
- How is a second language learner's mental lexicon organized and how does it develop over time?
- How do learners build an understanding of the relationship with reading comprehension and vocabulary?
- What kind of factors influence the students to improve the reading skills?
- Are the students ready to adopt to use the technology to develop their reading skills?

4. Scope of the research

This research focuses on reading skills and covers only diploma holders of English (currently following the HND in English program at SLIATE). HND in English program have been conducted at 17 Institutes. The

researcher has decided to do this research only at three institutes due to some practical difficulties. And also, the second-year students will be taken into consideration for assessment and 60 students will be considered for analysis due to limited time frame. Generally, each batch contains nearly 100 students at each institute and the researcher takes 15 students from each Institute and altogether 45 students from three institutes will be assessed for this research. The semester consists of 15 weeks and within this period the data should be collected and analyzed.

5. Justification for collaboration & brief information about national and international scenario in the proposed area of research-

Reading is a critical skill for students to improve their knowledge of English. Many adults say that reading books give them a kind of pleasure and they love reading. But if we ask this question to teenage students, they would say that reading is a kind of boring activity and they can't get any pleasure from reading. The researcher is handling the group of teenagers for this research and negative ideas will be received from the teenagers. It is natural. The researcher, having 22-year experience in teaching English to teenage group has planned to analyze this problem among the diploma holders of English as they learn reading skills as a major component in the diploma curriculum. These students need the reading skills to practice the comprehension throughout the four semesters. Comprehension is a critical lifelong learning skill because students will need this skill to understand text in future higher studies and use the skill for future career opportunities.

Technology has had much advancement in the last decade. There is a large push to integrate technology into the classroom setting. Some educators feel technology in the classroom is the future and other educators feel as if technology is consuming the minds of students in the wrong ways. Through this research, this study will be completed to determine if using technology-based strategies will enhance the reading comprehension skills of the students and improve their overall academic success. Technology sources used in this research include access to various applications on a tablet device and smart phones, Internet access to various websites, and access to a computer-based comprehension program. The different technology avenues are provided to determine if the technology options offer equal or greater benefit to the students. If it is proven to be beneficial, technology tools could soon take the place of the traditional classroom strategies for aiding students with reading comprehension.

6. Literature Review

Reading is a complex and multifaceted skill. In today's world, reading is basic to everyday life. If anybody wants to learn English more quickly, lots of reading is important. The more the students read, the more input their brain gets about how the language works. When the students read in English, they can improve their vocabulary, their grammar, and their writing skills at the same time. Reading is the best way to improve the vocabulary! The context of articles, stories, and conversations helps the students figure out and understand the meaning of English words in the text that are new to them. Reading also provides repetition of vocabulary words they have already learned to help them remember.

Reading comprehension is easier if students already know the keywords in the reading. This is one reason that new vocabulary is presented and practiced at the beginning of each learning class. They can learn the meaning and practice the pronunciation of the most important words while engaging with reading activities. Reading is an important gateway to personal development, and to social, economic and civic life (Holden, 2004). It allows the students to learn "about other people, about history and social studies, the language arts, science, mathematics, and the other content subjects that must be mastered in school.

"The more you read, the more things you know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." This is a famous quote by Dr Suess. And it's 100% accurate. Without reading skills one cannot master the English language. In order to accomplish success, one needs to have good reading and comprehension skills. Without these skills students will struggle to grow academically as reading is the foundation to all academic subjects. If we look at the benefits of such reading skills, there are many;

- It helps the students to discover new things by enabling them to educate themselves in any area of life they are interested in.
- It helps develop the mind and imagination and the creative side of a person.
- It helps to improve (vocabulary and spelling) communication both written and spoken.
- It plays an important part in building a good self-image.
- It is a function that is necessary in today's society.

All the above facts explain how reading skill is important for the students while learning a second language. When presenting these facts, the researcher tries to focus how the students can be motivated to

improve their reading skills. Here the researcher wants to focus this research on technology side, especially on smart phones. The researcher has already had experience in this part and has observed how the students are very keen on using smart phones in the class room for reading and vocabulary activities. Therefore, this research paper will definitely give a solution to the problem of improving reading skills among the students by introducing the smart phone technology in the class room.

How technology helps to improve reading skills

Language learning is important for human's social development. As a language which is used by more than a half of population in the world, English holds the key as international language. English is tool of communication among people in the world to deal with trading, social cultural, science, and technology purposes. Moreover, English competence is important for career development. Therefore, students need to acquire English to improve their confidence to face global competition. To fulfill the students' need, the government determines English as a compulsory subject which is taught in junior and senior high schools and higher education sectors in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, to acquire English successfully, students have to master four language skills. Those are reading and listening as the receptive skills and writing and speaking as the productive skills. The receptive and productive skills are connected to each other. For example, to have a good writing skill, students need to develop their reading skill first. Reading is one of the important skills in English. While reading, readers will get a large amount of new knowledge. There are no certain rules to choose tasks to read and the way how to read them. According to Grabe, there are many ways that people engage in reading and different reading tasks call for distinct combinations in component skills. Elly Grabe states that they can read basic forms, read advertisements, read newspapers and use basic reading skills in their work and their daily lives when needed. In other words, everyone has the right to certain what they want to read. All these things may be possible through technology only

The Internet is a global wide area network that helps for the student to access the information at their fingertips 24 hours a day. They can appear almost anything online and it's most up to date version. This indicates access to everything from research materials and educational apps and open resources from reputable universities around the world. Furthermore, student can also increase their learning by connecting with online groups and virtual communities in real time. And also, they can cooperate on educational activities with tools such as wikis and application-based apps.

Motivation can be happened by using videos in students' learning process. Such as, students can learn a lot more from the visual material, so it is a great way to start changing learning process with some educational videos. There are many ways in which student can boost their motivation for learning through visual and video materials. This is a great way to start using technology and introducing some changes to learning process for motivating the children. There are so many educational videos that students can find; the resources are absolutely limitless. Students can be creative as well, and more importantly to learn something more about subject. If the students are interested to use the smart phones or TAB to read materials, it is a kind of motivation for them to develop their reading skills.

7. Research Methodology

The aim of this study is to examine the problems of improving reading skills in the ESL context. These students do learn in English medium in ESL setting of Higher National Diploma course. So, for data collection the quantitative method was used. Only 2nd year students were taken into consideration for data collection. In addition, the researcher conducted some interviews for both the students and the lecturers regarding to use the smartphones in the class room for reading and vocabulary activities. Three Institutes such as Dehiwala, Kegalle and Kurunagala were selected for this research. The students from these Institutes were selected for assessment. The sample was 45 adult learners from the second-year course. The research instruments were such as structured questionnaires, pre- test and post-test on reading-based activities which were given to the students to assess their knowledge on reading skills. These tests were used to measure the students' achievements on the particular lesson. A structured questionnaire was prepared focusing on students' general information and the main themes of the research area. Also, the researcher analyzed the semester results of the students of this subject and the first and the second semester of the results were compared.

8. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed by using the Microsoft Excel and the collected data were concerning about motivation level, technological factors as well as their comments were calculated and presented in descriptive statistic. Four scales were used to measure the level of motivation of students and technological factors. Such scale was used in the questionnaire to specify the level of the agreement or disagreement based on the following criteria:

Mean Range	Interpretation
3-4	Very High degree of Motivation
3-2	High degree of Motivation
2-1	Moderate degree of Motivation
1-0	Low degree of Motivation

The results found the types of students' motivation, technological factors and suggestions to enhance students' motivation for learning English Language. The findings of this study were divided into three parts: (1) students' motivation; (2) technological factors, and (3) suggestions for students to enhance motivation to improve reading skills by using technology.

The following table 01 outlines all the nine questioned items, using descriptive statistics of mean scores and standard deviation and their corresponding motivation levels, which serve as the basis for further interpretation and implications.

Table 01

No	Instrumental Motivation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Motivation Level
1	Has technology helped to reduce the time that identify the meaning of an English word, phrase, and sentences?	3.13	0.72	High
2	Are the English language errors accurately found out by the technological instruments?	2.93	0.77	High
3	Does technology help to learn the correct pronunciation of English words?	3.33	0.47	Very High
4	Are you motivated to use various apps and websites to learn English language?	3.53	0.50	Very High
5	Do you think that technology generates an collaborative environment with WhatsApp, Facebook, and telegram?	3.07	0.25	High
6	Has the use of technology enhanced the skill of learning English language compared to traditional methods?	3.00	0.63	High
7	Have you learnt English well by using technology?	3.33	0.60	Very High
8	Has the technology helped to lessen the stress of learning English in the learning process?	3.40	0.71	Very High
9	Has the technology made it easier for you to memorize new English words and learn English?	2.93	0.93	High
	Total	3.19	0.33	High

The overall mean score of instrumental motivation demonstrates a high level of motivation.

In addition to the above questions sixteen technological factors were considered to find out the students' motivation to learn English and to improve reading skills. They are: Accuracy, Easy accessibility, Fast response, Fast retrieve, High data capacity, Interactive, less effort, monitor user, predict user's requirements, Reliable, Special devices not required, updated data, User friendly, Do various comparisons, Visualizing, and Voice pronunciation. The same questions were analyzed based on these sixteen factors. These sixteen technological factors clearly identified the students' English language learning process for motivation. They also revealed that if the questions received positive answers, those questions have more or significant technological factors respectively and also received positive answer for technological factors.

Table 02

Sources	Technological factors for motivation	Marks /15
Printed Dictionary (Oxford Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary)	Accuracy	2
	Reliable	2
	special devices not required	2
Offline Dictionary and Apps (Oxford Dictionary, Collins Dictionary, English Grammar learning app, 1000 English Stories app)	Accuracy	3

	Easy accessibility	3
	Fast response	3
	Fast retrieve	3
	Interactive	3
	Less effort	3
	Reliable	3
	User friendly	3
	Voice pronunciation	3
Online Dictionary and Apps (Google translator, Oxford Dictionary, Cambridge)	Accuracy	3
	Easy accessibility	3
	Fast response	3
Dictionary, Speak English online, English Conversation practice)	Fast retrieve	3
	High data capacity	3
	Interactive	3
	Less effort	3
	Monitor user	3
	Predict user's requirements	3
	Updated data	3
	User friendly	3
	Do various comparisons	3
	Visualizing	3
	Voice pronunciation	3
Search engines (Google, Yahoo)	Easy accessibility	5
	Fast response	5
	Fast retrieve	5
	High data capacity	5
	Less effort	5
	Monitor user	5
	Predict user's requirements	5
	Reliable	5
	Updated data	5
	User friendly	5
	Do various comparisons	5
	Visualizing	5
	Voice pronunciation	5
Professional Websites (Universities websites)	Accuracy	2
	High data capacity	2
	Reliable	2
	Updated data	2
	Do various comparisons	2
	Voice pronunciation	2

The above **table 02** discloses the selected sources of sample group. Technological factors for motivation categorized by considering the sources and marks were given based on the sample group. The students' inclination toward motivation could be of great value for learning English process by using technology. At the same time the students should understand that the potentials and strategies for the students' motivations to learn English and to improve reading skills depend on using the technological methods and ultimately it improves their proficiency. It might be beneficial for students' self-improvement of English learning process.

Based on the findings of this study, the results are unique for these particular students, their high motivation on both technology and technological factors will make them improve their reading skills.

9. Conclusion

As the motivation is one of the most important learning factors to improve reading skills, active participation of students in the learning process is very much important. It is actually for the benefits of the

students to engage with English language-learning with effectiveness and efficiency. In conclusion, this study was conducted to provide some insights into the level and type of motivation of the second-year students to improve their reading skills through technology. The study provides useful knowledge and information for the students to improve their English language and reading skills. Although the data source of the study may not represent all other student group, motivation in English language learning and reading skills of the students can be a great source of knowledge and understanding to implement relevant technological apps or instruments to stimulate the more motivating learning atmosphere. Students with adequate motivation will become efficient language learners with ultimate language proficiency.

The overall results reveal that the students are highly motivated to learn English because of the technology and some technological factors. These findings answer the research questions of what the level of the motivation is and identify the affected technological factors for learning English and improving reading skills process. Based on the comparison and assessment, it is discovered that the students are slightly more strongly motivated to learn English and to enrich reading skills which can answer the research questions of the motivation found. Also, the students are very enthusiastic to use technology for improving their reading skills. Rather than using the traditional method the students are very keen to adopt to new technology. It will make them engage in reading activities without boring. The research obtained the data from 15 students who study at Advanced Technological Institutes of Dehiwala. Also, the data was collected from other two institutes-Kegalle and Kurunegala and analyzed. Only data of Dehiwala students were tabled. It is recommended a larger sample size with a longer time frame and should be extended to increase the degree of generalization of the study in order to make the findings more valid and reliable. The following expected results of the research were achieved.

- The researcher was able to find out the barriers in reading skills
- The learners were able to develop effective strategies for improving reading skills
- The learners were able to be motivated in the reading skills in which vocabulary learning will also be improved.
- The learners were able to expose to vocabulary through reading and training lexical inference.
- The learners were keen in using smart phones for reading and vocabulary activities.
- Ultimately their negligence in reading skills was removed and their enthusiasm in improving reading skills would be developed.

10.Recommendation

All these findings have relevant implications and should therefore lead to recommendations for further training or studies. According to the suggestions of sample group it is summarized as follows,

- Use both traditional and technology-based learning methods to learn English Language and to improve reading skills.
- Technology needs to be developed as tool by using artificial intelligence, human machine interface so that users do not require special technological knowledge to learn English.
- Need to increase the awareness of technology-based learning methods.
- Need to improve the awareness of technology-based learning methods.
- Technology can be used to improve listening and speaking skills as well.
- It needs Basic English knowledge to use technological apps because most apps and websites cannot be operated by using Sinhala or Tamil language. So, the knowledge of English should be improved among the students to handle the smart phones.

11.Bibliography

- [1]. Ciampa, K 2014, ' Learning in a mobile age: an investigation of student motivation', *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, pp82-96.
- [2]. English Teaching Professional Journal (www.etprofessional.com)
- [3]. Granito,Mark, Chernobilsky, Ellina. 2012. The Effect of Technology on a Student's Motivation and Knowledge Retention Northeastern Educational Research Association. Washington, USA.
- [4]. John Cradler, Mary McNabb, Molly Freeman, and Richard Burchett, 2002, 'Learning & Leading with Technology' Research Windows, vol.29, no8, pp46-49.
- [5]. Modern English Teacher Journal (www.modernenglishteacher.com)
- [6]. Stacy Ehrlich, B, Susan Sporte, E & Penny Bender Sebring. 2013. The Use of Technology in Chicago Public Schools. Chicago, USA.
- [7]. Suranaree, J, 2015, 'English language learning motivation of Thai undergraduate students in the globalized era' Maejo University, vol.9, pp 23-45.