



A Study on Reading Habits of the School Students

Dr. P. Mangayarkarasi

Associate Professor and Head, Department of Linguistics, Tamil University, Thanjavur.

ABSTRACT

The activity of reading is regarded as a habit when it is repeatedly carried out. Measurable reading habits include the amount of books read, the amount of books read frequently, and the average amount of time spent reading. Reading habits can be cultivated. The main entrance to the knowledge room is reading, which is a long-term habit that starts at a young age. It can be assumed as a practice that assists individuals to gain creativeness and develops their critical thinking capacities. In this sense, reading habit is an important tool for the development of personalities and mental capacities of individuals. In addition to personal and mental developments, reading is an access to social, economic and civic life. Moreover, all reading patterns in terms of emotional response enhance emotional satisfaction of individuals. As a result, the researcher is interested in learning how school students exploit their reading habits.

Key Words: Reading, Interest, School Students, Habits, and Factors.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an important part of a man's life. Reading opens the doors of the treasures of knowledge. Reading is a fathomless resource for learning. It is one of the most important aspects of language, art and the most effective means of communication. It is a crucial method for exposing the child to the world around him. The individual's knowledge and desire to be a well-read person are illuminated by reading. "Reading is a man's bulwark against loneliness- his window on life, his unending delight. It brings yesterday and tomorrow into now". Reading provides the individual with an opportunity to broaden his knowledge base, identify, broaden, and intensify his interests, and gain a deeper comprehension of himself, other people, and the world. In today's highly literate society, reading has taken on the most significant role in education as a means of communication. Carnegie Conference of Reading Experts Report (1962) declared that "reading is the most important subject to be learned by children, a child will learn a little in today's world if he does not first learn to read properly".

The reading habit influences in the promotion of one's personal development in particular and social progress in general. Regular and systematic reading sharpens the intellect, refines the emotions, elevates tastes and provides perspectives for one's living; and thereby prepares a person for an effective participation in the social, religious, cultural and political life. The individual's imagination is stoked by reading. It adds new sight to eyes and new wisdom to mind. A person who reads well has a way to expand their mental horizons and increase their chances of success. Reading is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth.

STUDY OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Hijack (1971) noted that teaching children how to read takes a significant amount of time, effort, and money. But teaching reading alone without emphasizing developing interest in reading is useless and a waste of money. because doing so will only result in "a nation of illiterate literates," which means people who are literate but do not read on their own. Therefore, for a reading program to be successful, students must not only learn to read, but also "read" on their own for their own personal growth, as well as for the growth of their communities and society.

Ross et al. (1982) surveyed and compared the reading interests of 300 tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students to those found in previous studies. The results indicated that the amount of time students reported reading outside of school per day has decreased slightly since a 1961 study by P. witty, and women continue to read more than men. As in the Witty study, science fiction and sports were popular with the male students in the present study, with romance stories preferred by the female students. Sports Illustrated was voted the most popular magazine by men, while fashion magazines were voted the most popular by women. The boys preferred thriller comics and the girls preferred humorous comics. The students reported friends, teachers, and bookstores as the main sources of ideas for reading material selection. Going to the movies, listening to the radio, and watching television were the most popular leisure activities for students, although listening to the radio took the top spot from watching television.

In this regard, Deighton (1971) made the observation that motivation, purpose, and interests are necessary components for successful comprehension, but they are frequently overlooked in favor of requirements. The reader's comprehension is governed by his attitudes and interest in the material. It was

discovered that reading materials that do not appeal to them or are presented in an appealing format are typically difficult for poor readers to comprehend. Interest influences both comprehension and reading itself. One of the root causes of poor reading is a lack of interest in reading.

READING HABITS

Reading habit refers to the behaviour which expresses the likeness of reading of individual types of reading and tastes of reading (Sangkaeo, 1999). It is a pattern with which an individual organizes his or her reading. Similarly, Shen (2006), identifies reading habits, as how often, how much, and what students read. Over the past ten years, researchers have focused on studying students' reading habits. With their endeavours, these researchers have discovered that reading habits are associated with students' gender, age, educational background, academic performance and professional growth. Readers have been attempted to be categorized. Beers (1996) categorized 7th grade students into 3 groups. The "dormant readers" were those who liked to read and considered themselves readers but did not take the time to read regularly or update their knowledge. They were not negative to reading but gave priority to other activities such as sports, social life and school work. They would read when it was convenient, like during breaks from school or after major projects were finished. The readers who were not motivated or committed belonged to the second and third groups. People in these two groups dislike reading and have a negative attitude toward it. The non-committed readers were open to suggestion of reading in the future and have positive attitudes towards other readers. The unmotivated readers were not open to the suggestion of future reading and were negative towards people who do read.

Every State, community, and school authority, every teacher, parent, and pedagogue must be seriously convinced of the importance of reading and books for individual, social, and cultural life if they are to work toward improving the situation be transmitted to students of reading in a manner appropriate to their stage of development. An examination of variations in reading habits across nations demonstrates that the place occupied by books in the scale of values of those responsible for their promotion is of primary importance. The very few in ancient times before the discovery of printing, and even after the Age of Humanism it was accessible only to an educated elite and economic development makes continuous demands on the intellectual collaboration of a majority of people, has the question arisen, how the "right to read" for all can be made a reality of science, has thrown a new light on the significance of reading, not only with regard to the needs of society but also for the individual. The "right to read" also means the right to develop one's intellectual and spiritual capacities, the right to learn and make progress. Reading was once valued merely as a means of receiving an important message but, today reading research has defined the act of reading in itself as a multi-level mental process which contributes greatly to the development of the intellect. Great demands are made on the brain by the process of transforming graphic symbols into intellectual concepts; an infinite number of brain cells are activated during the storage process of reading.

Psychological studies have shown that improvement in the ability to read also leads to improvement in learning ability as a whole, going far beyond mere reception. Good reading is critical confrontation with the material and the ideas of the author. At a higher level and with longer texts, the comprehension of relationships, of construction or structure, and interpretation of the context, becomes more significant. If the new material is brought into relationship with already existing conceptions, critical reading is apt to develop into creative reading, a synthesis leading to completely new results of systematic development of language and the personality.

IMPORTANCE OF READING HABITS

One of the three R's that a child begins his or her education with is reading. In fact the success and failure of his academic life depends to a large extent upon his reading ability. Reading may be regarded as a basic skill to be acquired by every learner and hence every effort should be directed towards its development in children from early life. According to research, parents and friends have a greater impact on children than teachers and schools. Children's thoughts and future paths are influenced by the adults they spend the most time with. To be around people who propagate learning and reading is always a good thing for a child. There are many benefits to picking up such reading habits, especially when it comes to matters that pertain to the child's mental growth. If a child doesn't develop a habit of reading, they may have trouble in life, especially if they work in a field that requires reading at any level. According to Reyhene (1998), children's language skills improve involuntarily and unconsciously when they read for pleasure. A healthy reading routine is essential for healthy intellectual development and greatly contributes to practical efficiency. In addition, a person's interests are significantly influenced by the amount of reading he does and the level of commitment he shows to his reading routine. By reading books, one gets confirmation or rejection of one's own ideas, which makes one think more critically about right and wrong in the society. Reading provides people with a sense of values, which enable them gradually to develop the greatest of all virtues, that is the ability to understand rather than condemn. Books can also be very reassuring, especially when one is having doubts about themselves and their beliefs. Some of the primary reasons why reading habit is important can be discussed with the help of the following points. They are: An Active Mind, Fundamental Skills, Improves Vocabulary, Concentration & Focus, Increased Self-Esteem, Memory Boost, Expertise Builder, and Stress reliever.

According to Shelfelbine (1998), pleasure reading promotes the development of reading as a lifelong habit that improves language skills and fluency. Royce (1995) noted that children improve their reading skill when they read for pleasure. According to Cunningham and Stanovich (1998), the amount of reading done both inside and outside of the school has a significant impact on the development of reading speed and fluency, vocabulary, overall verbal ability, and academic success. On the other hand the significance of reading habits can be broadly classified under the three areas. They include:

In Academic Life

The teaching of reading holds a very important place in the school curriculum today. A shorter lag in the availability of more comprehensive reading materials in various languages has been necessitated by the expanding frontier of knowledge. This makes it abundantly clear that efforts must be made to make the expanding knowledge accessible to the general public. In the words of Thorndike (1973), "There would be little argument that reading has been and will be the central part of the school curriculum". Deschant & Smith (1977) emphasized the importance of teaching reading, pointing out that it is the key to a child's success in school, the development of school interests, leisure enjoyment, and social and personal adjustment. It helps him to adjust to his age mates, to become independent of his parents and teachers, to select and to prepare for an occupation and to achieve social prestige. Thus, reading is so interrelated with the total educational process, that academic mastery cannot be imagined on the part of the learner without their mastery on better reading and better understanding of the reading materials.

In Individual Life

Failure in learning to read is great handicap to the progress and upliftment of the individual life. It is a skill which is very much essential to professional life. Today, a certain level of reading proficiency is absolutely necessary for a variety of jobs. Even for those who are sluggish readers or have disabilities, reading is an essential skill for those who live in a democratic society. Reading enables an individual to participate effectively as a citizen in a democratic country. In this regard, the report titled "Right to Read" from the Forum 7 White House Conference on Children (1972) can be cited. Individuals also read for prestige specially to improve their own self image. Sometimes people choose to read to reinforce their opinions or feelings on particular ideas or beliefs. People may read for various aesthetic experiences too. It can also give respite or temporary relief from mental tension, sorrows, discomforts etc.

Social VALUE

Values of reading in today's democracy quickly over reaches the purely personal and merges into social value. In fact the general attitudes towards reading are largely pragmatic seeing it as an avenue to and social status. For the welfare of the society the citizens must be educated or capable of reading to some extent. Various surveys show that it is the neo-readers and poor readers that generally become delinquents, unemployed and misfits in the society. Therefore, reading is essential to the development of a democratic society. By motivating learners for reading, educators can direct learners to gain awareness in their social interactions as well as self-esteem. In this perspective, positive attitudes are created by motivating individual habits and interests, and they are all interrelated and supportive items for boosting reading habits (Calkins, 2001). Thus, learners can also increase creative and free thinking abilities with tolerant perspective towards other people (Williams & Burden, 1997).

Factors that Influence Reading Styles

The reading habits of children have long been a matter of much interest to educators, parents, librarians' publishers and other stake holders. An understanding of reading habits and preferences of children would help them to take necessary measures for promoting reading among children. It is widely acknowledged that life- long habit of reading can best be inculcated and nurtured at the early stage. It is however a general observation that there is over emphasis on study reading rather than recreational or voluntary reading among children. Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown (2002), Huck, Hepler, & Hickman (1992), McKenzie & Warlow (1977), and Huck, Hepler, & Hickman (2002) provided a list of some of the factors that influence students' reading habits. They were:

- Appearance and format have an effect and should entice the reader to pick up the book.
- Credible, up-to-date, and accurate information. • People and things presented as they are, not as stereotypes.
- A clear distinction between opinion and facts • Diagrams, illustrations, and other elements of book design that aid in clear comprehension • Accessible information through the efficacious use of table of contents, index, glossary, charts, and bibliographies.
- Clear and direct styles, appropriate for the intended audience, which involves the reader, and employs vivid and interesting language.

The following broad categories encompass the factors that influence reading habits:

INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS ON READING

Teachers encourage pupils to read large amounts of materials of interest to them. Thus children learn to read widely for information, to solve problems and for pleasure. At the upper primary and college level, young children are guided by teachers towards better literature and better sources which help them solving their social and personal problems. Schools and colleges help and aim to develop refined reading as a permanent interest, taste and a habit. Powell (1976) explores the relationship between teachers' knowledge of reading and teachers application of reading knowledge in simulated classroom situations. There was significant relationship between total knowledge score in reading and the ability to solve classroom problems.

Motivating Oneself to Read: Reading pedagogy has some trends that have affected other aspects of education and psychology. Reading as other types of learning requires activity on the part if the learner. All learning theorists emphasise the importance of reinforcement in learning and here reading should be given its due importance. Anyone who sees people buried in books, magazines, or newspapers on a bus or train also gets inspired to read. The need to read is universal phenomenon. Certain important motivation have been considered by Robeck (1974): imitation of adult models, entertainment, need for novelty, need to know and feeling of power.

Ways to Cultivate Good Reading Habits

Cultivation of reading habits should start right at the initial stage so that consequently they grow and mature and later on it becomes a voluntary process on the part of the individual. However, some of the methods listed below really help children develop good reading habits. Bed time Stories: For really young children associating awesome bedtime stories with books is the best way to get started. Reading aloud with full expression will not only help them understand the story better, it also helps them create imagery within their head, enhancing their creativity. This association of images with words is the first step to moving on towards reading books.

Reading Poems and reciting them: as the child grows in age reading of poems by the parents or the teachers not only improve the child's understanding of language and grammar but also evoke thought and which in turn creates in them the urge to read. Find out their interests: knowing what the child exactly is looking for in books is extremely important. So time and care should be taken to understand the child's interest. Read as a Family: Studies have shown that children mimic their family to a large extent. if the family enjoys spending time together, especially when reading, the child will enjoy the experience even more. Reading is a habit that people generally develop at a young age. Adults rarely develop the habit if they did not do so as children. Spending time alone, with a book, is a much better way for a child to expand her/his horizons than sitting in front of the television or computer, playing games. Reading materials: According to Gniewek (1998), empowering the classroom library collection, which could be augmented from the main library collection, promotes reading. A study carried out in Thailand (Somsong, 1999) highlighted the roles of libraries, librarians and library programmes in helping to stimulate and develop reading interests. According to a number of studies (Lance, 1994; Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000), children who attend schools with libraries and librarians read more than those who do not (Lance, 1994). Richard Bamberger in his book "Promoting the Reading Habits" (1975) has put forward the following ways:

- a. Singing and reading aloud
- b. Book discussions and displays
- c. Readings from authors' works include: meetings, classes, and other informational activities about children's reading
- d. Book and reading clubs
- e. Book exhibitions
- f. Audio visual media

SPECIFIC ROLE OF TEACHERS

According to studies, teachers and teachers can assist in improving readers' reading attitudes and skills. Wiesendanger (1994) and Valari (1995) indicated that a period of sustained silent reading in class could help develop positive attitude towards reading in schools. Cole (1999) also suggested that teachers who are motivated to learn about their students' literacy personalities may be able to increase their students' intrinsic motivation to read. Cole suggested that teachers provide students with a wide range of books on a variety of subjects, levels, and genres in order to pique their interest. Gillet & Temple (1994) as well as Fong (1997) proposed that teacher should provide book in accordance to the four stages of reading development; building fluency, reading for pleasure, reading to learn and mature reading. In addition, a study conducted by Buckingham (2002) on reading and literacy competencies in Manchester secondary schools found that encouraging students to read can cultivate their reading habits for both educational and recreational reading. The study also illustrated the role of the teachers, teacher librarians and parents in promoting reading and literacy.

CONCLUSION

For continuous and regular progress in education process, learners need to be enhanced to gain reading habits so as to fulfil individual improvement. In a study carried out for promoting reading habits by Guthrie, et al. (2000), it has been stated that one of the major contributions to reading is motivation of learners for text comprehension. According to the aforementioned study, motivation also contributes to an increase in both intrinsic and extrinsic reading. In this context, motivation can be acknowledged as an important factor for prompting reading habits, reading preferences and the nature of reading learners engage in (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Guthrie, et al. 1996; Gambrel, 2000).

References

- Abiolu, O. (2014). Reading interests among Secondary School Students in Ondo State, Nigeria. *Nigerian School Library Journal*, 13(1), 18–27.
- Barber, K. S. (2014). Reading for Pleasure: More than Just a Distant Possibility? *TESOL in Context*, 24(1), 45–66.
- Deighton (1971), *Encyclopedia of Education*, Macmillan Publishers.
- Edmonds, L. (1994). *The power of reading: Insights from research. Library & Information Science Research* (Vol. 16).
- Ross, Beth; Simone, Nancy(1982), Reading Interests of Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Grade Students. M.A. Ed. Thesis, Kean College of New Jersey.
- Sharma, S. (1988). Reading interests and Readers Interest. Shree Publishing House, Delhi, 120-125.
- Yusof, N. M. (2010). Influence of family factors on reading interests and interest among level 2 pupils in national primary schools in Malaysia Chapter-1. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5(2), 1160–1165.