

A Case Study on Reading Habits of Students Studying in the Secondary Schools of Trincomalee Educational Zone, Sri Lanka

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Abstract - The purpose of the study is to examine the environmental factors influencing in reading habits of the students studying in the Secondary Schools of Trincomalee Educational Zone of Sri Lanka using the survey method. A total of 200 respondents from schools of the said Educational Zone are included in the study. Proportionate stratified Random sampling method was utilized for the selection of sample. These 200 students were selected from grade seven and eight for the study and questionnaires were distributed to them. Students have agreed that they have enough time to read books in spite of tuition, Television, radio, theater visit and other kind of activities. Their reading attitude is highly positive towards the leisure reading while parent support is at very low level to involve in reading activities. Attitude of class teacher and Librarian shows their positive support for recreational reading. Attitude of principal is at moderate level for the reading habit promotion among the school curricula. It is recommended that parents should encourage their children by reading good storybooks, moral stories to help them towards developing good reasoning power and to keep them abreast with the latest information. Further to say that the library collection for encouraging students to be increased as the collections is inadequate in the schools.

Keywords: Reading Habits, Reading Promotion, Reading Culture, Recreational Reading, Leisure Reading

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a means of communication. It is an element of freedom where the society develops. The society, the people in this unit, has the ability to elaborate existing knowledge and produce another (Mercado, J. *et al.*, 2015). The aim of promoting a reading habit is to get the children to read as part of daily life and to establish the reading of books as a habit that would always be needed and enjoyed throughout one's life time. There is much interest in reading habit of children the world over. Most of technologically advanced countries like UK and USA have stressed the need to upgrade the reading skills and have recognized it as a national priority (Koroglu and Guzel, 2014). They have taken several steps to promote effective learning and to raise the reading standard in school.

Reading creates a knowledge based society that strives for economic development and social harmony. The practice of reading enables students to learn about their culture and values and the world around them. Koda (2005) had mentioned that reading is also the principal method of acquiring knowledge and expanding one's academic

context. At the same time, reading a complex process habit take time to develop. Literature confirms a lack of reading culture or habitual reading in the Sri Lanka.

A major survey conducted by UNESCO (1982) confirms that television enjoys marked success among children, illiterate adults and poorer families. Adults and children now-a-days prefer to watch TV programmes that reading a book. More emphasis is laid on computer literacy and reading on internet than on reading books in the traditional way.

Vidanapathirana (1996) mentioned that 'the downward trend in reading habits in many Asian countries is due to the lack of awareness. Most parents and community do not consider because they do not read. Teacher, parents and community do not give consider promoting reading habits as a serious matter. Mass media do not give sufficient priorities to book reviews to cultivate the reading habit. Educated people both young and old have moved away from leisure time reading habits. It is essential to encourage the young generation by creating a conducive environment to promote reading habits'.

Promoting the lifetime love of reading should be the most important goal among secondary school children. Students need opportunities in school and at home to enjoy real reading as a valued and worthwhile entertainment activity. Secondary school children need exposure to a variety reading materials including novels, plays, poetry, essays, drama books, religious books, scientific collections, biography etc. The school libraries are expected to help in promoting reading culture among children. It is necessary that today's children should be in touch with the library. Educational system should take necessary actions to attract secondary level students to consider reading as a serious part of their lifestyles. The school library and school administrators can use various strategies to promote reading culture. Reading offers endless pleasure. Story book reading help the readers to learn morals, values, good habits, behaviors and to gain experiences, share emotions and feelings.

Availability of the right type of books especially the beginning for the reading stage is very crucial to the acquisition of good reading habit. Reading materials should be constantly made available to children.

Yapa (2004) in her article on “Do children Read” had mentioned that ‘ results of research shows that children to love reading and they will read if they have access to reading material despite the pressures and time demands of a very competitive based education system. In Sri Lanka as in other parts of the world there is a growing public concern about the decline in reading habit. According to Ministry of Education recent research studies has shown that “the present generation of children is moving further away from reading habit because they are addicted to TV. Over the last few years the ministry has tried to address this problem with the help of International organizations. Their strategy includes programme like “Books in Schools” and developing school libraries under the World Bank “General Education Programme (GEP II)”. These Programmes are aimed at promoting the reading habit through the provision of books, training teachers, teacher librarians, improving the state of school libraries and setting up of a few school libraries’.

As children learn many things in schools, it is wise to create conducive environment first at the school level by establishing a very attractive library for reading. The school and the parents must collectively provide a rich environment where students should be encouraged to read continuously as a learning process to enhance and enrich their knowledge, personality and outlook. This would bring in return the reading culture among children to have them good citizens for benefitting our nation.

The task of encouraging positive reading interest and sustaining a love for reading which will in turn promote a reading habit is not an easy task. This is where the school library comes in. The unique role of school and libraries is that they are fundamental to the development of reading habit. This in turn provides a background for a lifelong learning. Children can acquire wide variety of knowledge and experience by reading books, newspapers, and other magazines. Since school is the foundation of education system of a nation there is no better place to start the initiation process of reading habit.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find Children involvement towards recreational reading habit.
2. To examine the contribution of school environment in promoting reading habit.
3. To identify the factors influencing reading habits of secondary students.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It appears that there is lack of research study to induce reading habits among school children in the Trincomalee District. Research studies available in Sri Lanka to improve reading habits are insufficient. People think that reading is taught to utter the right noises when confronted with printed words and ask to translate them into sounds and reading is mostly a mechanical skill.

Present education system is mostly centered on text books and general reading habit is not promoted. A child leaves from school has not developed a habit of reading for entertainment or for pure pleasure. Reading is not given high priority in daily life of children.

Internet and mobile phones seems to be the fashionable trend and a symbol of up to date in modern world. Reading a book in a peaceful corner of a library has become an obsolete unfashionable task among parents and young generation. Technology is taking a large portion of children’s life and reading habit is not given prime importance by parents. School environment support is insufficient. Children have abandoned book reading habit. Many of today’s young people have not been trained from childhood to develop the skills of reading for pleasure. Hofferth (1999) says ‘reading is a critical skill early in life and less than one-third of elementary school-age children read for pleasure on a daily basis and the amount of time spent on reading is quite modest about one hour per week’.

Parents do not encourage their children’s reading as much as they are supposed to do. The home often does not supply the child with good books from the moment the children are able to understand a story. Greater problems lie in the parent’s side and in their attitude towards story book reading. There are too many middle class income parents who have no understanding at all toward the importance of the reading habit in their children’s life.

There are fairly a large group of children who have the reading skills but do not choose to read books outside school time. Teacher’s guidance and advices are not provided in a proper way among the curriculum work to encourage the children to use reading materials other than text books. Teachers’ and librarians are supposed to play quite an effective role in developing reading habits among secondary level children. Encouragement and assistance for the children is not enough at school level for cultivating and developing reading habits.

At present children believe that books are for school lessons. It is up to the school library to build up the habit of reading for pleasure. The school library struggle with the acquisition of new books and updating its collection and it has mostly the text books and few books for extracurricular reading. Another problem is the inadequate time for library periods in schools. School libraries are opened during the school hours. School libraries do not have suitable materials to interest secondary students.

School libraries have no separate staff and the responsibility for running such a library is usually assigned to a teacher in addition to his teaching duties. Such teachers may seldom be expected to maintain the library with a sense of devotion. Authorities in most schools consider a school library as a mere formality and hardly bother to provide adequate support. The library managed by a single person more often fails in coping with the pressure of varied duties required

for running and the maintenance of an efficient library. The main problem is that school libraries do not have enough suitable materials to make the secondary level children.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is carried out since the reading habit should blossom among the school children first. Once the children are attracted by the books they will love them and cling to this habit throughout their lives. Promotion of reading habits is one of the most essential areas to be introduced at secondary school children the wonderful world of knowledge and information. Recreational reading habit can improve intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual developments among children. This study will help to improve positive reading interest to foster a love for reading which will promote a reading culture society. Today's children are the future generation of Sri Lanka and they should grow with knowledge in all fields of discipline than relying on curriculum based examination and job oriented education.

The study examination in depth how reading habit among secondary school children could be improved in the future. The study is also important because retaining reading habits among children at this stage would induce to use books and to use children's libraries in a better way. The study would be a guide line for all concerned with guiding the children to develop his total potentiality for the welfare of the individual child and for the welfare of the entire society and nation.

V. METHODOLOGY

Trincomalee district education system has five zonal divisions. The total number of schools in the Trincomalee district is three hundred and one. Information regarding Schools was collected from the Provincial department of Education of Trincomalee district. School with library facility and girls' school are the criteria for the selection of school. Since the gender affects the research to a higher degree girls were selected as a target group. Nonprobability purposive sampling technique was used to select schools to justify that this method can lead to the most appropriate selection of schools with library facility. Statistical sample selection may lead to the selection of schools with varying degree of human and physical resources. More concentration was given to the socio economic background of schools, size, location and accessibility. Researcher has selected four girls school in the Trincomalee Zonal area. Trincomalee zonal has four girls' school and 69 mixed schools. Two schools were from girl's school and two from mixed schools for easy accessibility.

Total number of students in Trincomalee district is 47,055. Trincomalee zonal has 9018 secondary students. Two hundred students were selected by utilizing proportionate stratified random sampling method for the selection of students in each class and division of grade seven and eight.

After deciding the number of students from each class a systematic random sampling method was used to select the sample from divisions of A, B, C and D at a fixed interval.

Secondary section includes grade 6-11. Grade 6 is excluded from this study since they have just come from busy schedule of scholarship exam. They do not have time to reading book as a hobby so that they do not have any experiences. Due to the ordinary level exam oriented busy schedule grade 9, 10 and 11 students were excluded from the study. Grade 7 and 8 is the ideal group which represents intermediate level students' mentality has been selected for the study. Students in the two extreme levels are excluded from the study.

Questionnaires were distributed to the children to gather the data. Part I consists twelve questions to gather information about the students reading interest, reading interest, after school time utilization, access to reading materials and the collections in home library. Part II gathered information in Time availability, Reading attitude, Parent support, Chances to read at home, Library collection, Library environment, Library service, Lending service and Attitude of principal, class teacher and Librarian.

VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Interview schedule was organized to gather opinion from the librarians and principals of four selected girl's schools. SPSS package was used for the analysis. Decision Criteria is if the mean value is 1.5-2.5 is Low level of agreement. If mean value is 2.6-3.5 is Moderate level of agreement. If mean value is 3.6-5.0 is High level of agreement.

TABLE I CHILDREN INVOLVEMENT

		Time Availability	Reading Attitude	Parent Support
N	Valid	200	200	200
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.5525	4.3613	2.3088
Std. Deviation		.72880	.98312	.61441

Time availability has a mean value of 3.5525, it is a moderate level of agreement. Data collected from Part I of the questionnaire to check the time spent for tuition, television, radio, and computer, play and other activities for weekdays and weekend. Theatre visit is almost abandon and negligible. Summary of the results shows that 68% of children spent 1-3 hours in tuition during week days. 44% spend 1-3 hours during weekend. Results shows that 74.5% of children spent 1-3 hours in watching television in week days and 68% spent 1-3 hours in week end. Results indicate that 29.5% do not pay and 44.5% play for 1-2 hours in week days. 55% do not listen to radio during week days and 33.5% spent 1-2 hours in listening radio in week end. 60% do not spent time in computers in week days. Reading attitude value of mean 4.3613 shows positive interest in

reading habit. Results have shown that children are interested in reading in story books, essays, poems, jokes and magazines. Parents support to motivate the children in this direction in very much lacking. Mean value of 2.3088 shows that parents are not involved in shared reading with their children, appreciation for reading books, poor support for public library visit and not supporting the children to buy books. Working parents are in a position to support their children but they are unaware of this aspect.

TABLE II READING OPPORTUNITIES AT SCHOOL

		Reading Opportunities	Library collection	Library Environment
N	Valid	200	200	200
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		2.9450	2.1688	2.1688
Std. Deviation		.67444	.45868	.45868

The mean value for reading opportunities at school is 2.9450, it shows that chances to read at the school environment is at moderate level of agreement since free period is not allowed for library visit, lack of suitable books for their preferences and no chances to read books during free periods at the class room. Library collection mean value is 2.1688, it points out that material collection is very much poor to attract the students for the reading habit. Lack of children magazines, newspaper, lack of additional copies and not enough to induce them to read. Library environment has a mean value of 2.1688, this indicate that conducive environment is not provided for the students reading due to lack of seating capacity, light, ventilation, high book shelves and not enough furniture.

TABLE III LIBRARY FACILITY

		Library Services	Lending Services
N	Valid	200	200
	Missing	0	0
Mean		2.9588	2.7600
Std. Deviation		.75095	.77323

Library services has a mean value of 2.9588, it is in moderate level of agreement. Lack of attracting activities to students by the librarian such as story hours, book talks etc, lack of orientation training for students, lack of display of book activities and no indexes or reading lists for the selection of material has contributed for this results. Lending services has a mean value of 2.7600 of moderate level of agreement since lending service procedure is limited during weekdays and there are no lending services during weekends and vacations.

From Table IV Attitude of principal has a mean value of 3.1788, since there is no competition for reading, reading month celebration is not to the level of awareness to most students and only one period is assigned for library visit

during week days. Attitude of Librarian is in high level of agreement with a mean value of 3.7063 since librarian is helpful and friendly with students. Attitude of class teacher shows a mean value of 3.6275 since generally teachers encourage the students for reading than the other leisure time activities and the encouragement they give for the students for reading.

TABLE IV ATTITUDES

		Attitude of Principal	Attitude of Librarian	Attitude of Class Teacher
N	Valid	200	200	200
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.1788	3.7063	3.6275
Std. Deviation		.80917	.91657	.91229

Students have mentioned the following as their common opinion to support them to improve the reading habit. Involvement expected from teachers are discussion, encouragement for reading, advice, point out the benefits of reading and send the students to library whenever they have free period. Involvement expected from Librarian are giving suitable books, introduce new books, magazines, general knowledge books etc., friendly approach, explaining library usage method and allow the students to library if they have free period. Involvement expected from Principal are awareness, allow the students to library whenever they have free period, furniture facility to all students, purchasing useful books to library, increasing the library period and encouragement by organizing reading competition. Involvement expected from parents are purchase the books, establish a home library, and guide them with love and Public library visit.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Children should be encouraged to buy books with whatever small gifts of money they received from well-wishers. Reading story books aloud, creating a learning environment by setting up a mini reading corner with reading materials, visiting the public library, bookshops, book fair and offering books as prizes or gifts to the children at several occasions. Parents should provide appropriate reading material to induce their children. Parents should subscribe for newspapers and magazines for their homes matching the tastes of their children.

Librarians have a crucial role to play for inculcating the habits of reading from the childhood. Librarian should help the children to develop pleasant and positive attitude towards reading. This would develop habits of reading and love for books among children. A librarian could pick a book and talk on it, stimulate interest in the book and ask children to read book and could come back for further literacy analysis of the book. Reading continuously, and in a habitual manner can make children for reading in a double quick time. Reading to children will help the

students to increase the general knowledge of the world, enhance vocabulary skills, and jack up familiarity with written language step up an active interest in reading. When Students listens to words read continuously, he or she will start showing an active interest in the language. They will also feel that reading is something really enjoyable and pleasing. Repeated reading habit will not only help the children to learn how to read, but also succeed in academic activities The success of reading habit promotion among children at school depends to a large extent on school library.

Library week celebration should stress the value of reading and school library. Book exhibition can be organized to purchase the material by teachers and librarian and can be reviewed by an appointed team during the library week celebration annually. Excursions to libraries will bring awareness to students and can induce them to cling this habit. Story-talk hour of our traditional folk talk tales and legends from different parts of the country could be used which would appeal to young people's sense of adventure and imagination. Principal should organize creative writing for all children. This is an activity that induces the creativity of the child. After a reading aloud session or a story telling session, the student could be asked to write a short story or a different ending to the story they were told or read to. This would provide wonderful stimulus for reading youth. Principal should take an effort to organize reading competition, creation of more library periods in time-table per week as strategy to promote reading culture.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Students have agreed that they have enough time to read books in spite of tuition, Television, radio, Play,

computer, theater visit and other kind of activities. Their reading attitude is highly positive towards the leisure reading. Parent support is at very low level to induce this habit. Educated parents should encourage their children by reading good storybooks, moral stories to help them develop good reasoning power and to keep them abreast with the latest information. Chances to read at school are not supported by the school system of education. Library collection for reading is very poor. Library environment is not motivating the students for reading habit. Attractive reading material should be provided according to their age, considering their likes and dislikes to make them more interested in reading. Library service to motivate the students for reading has to be improved. Lending services is restricted by the procedure followed. Attitude of class teacher and Librarian shows their positive support for recreational reading. Attitude of principal is at moderate level for the reading habit promotion among the school curricula.

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