

Reading Habits of VI to VIII Grade Private School Students

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Abstract

This study examined the reading habits of VI to VIII grade private school students in Thoothukudi district. A survey was conducted among 145 students selected through random sampling, using a structured questionnaire to assess their reading behaviours. Findings indicated that students primarily read for knowledge enhancement rather than linguistic development or leisure, with a strong preference for fiction over non-fiction. While print reading dominates, digital reading remains limited. Additionally, newspaper reading is not a consistent habit, with only 29% reading newspapers daily. The study highlights the role of parental support and home book collections in fostering reading habits. To enhance reading engagement, schools should promote diverse reading materials, structured reading routines, and a balance between print and digital resources.

Keywords: Reading habits; Thoothukudi; school students.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a vital skill that contributes significantly to all around development of individuals. It enhances vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking abilities while fostering creativity and intellectual curiosity (Gambrell, 2015). High school is a formative period where students develop reading habits that can influence their academic success and lifelong learning attitudes. Engaging in reading activities not only supports academic achievement but also improves concentration, problem-solving skills, and overall intellectual engagement (Mol & Bus, 2011). According to Rutherford (2023), younger readers often struggle to find books they are interested in within the digital environment, leading to reduced reading frequency. Additionally, a survey of 350 teachers from Australia and other countries revealed that 89% of respondents believe social media has negatively impacted children's reading habits, and 84% observed a decline in students' willingness to read for pleasure due to digital media (Tutor Doctor, 2023). Understanding the reading habits of high school students, including their preferences, frequency, and motivation, is essential for educators, parents, and policymakers. By identifying patterns and challenges in students' reading behaviours, effective strategies can be developed to promote

a strong reading culture and enhance literacy levels among adolescents (Cull, 2011).

RATIONALE

The ability to cultivate strong reading habits plays a vital role in both academic success and personal growth, as numerous studies have demonstrated. Students who engage in regular reading tend to achieve higher academic performance, enhance their analytical thinking, and develop stronger language skills (Kirsch et al., 2002). At the upper primary level (Grades 6 to 8, ages 11-14), students transition from learning to read to reading to learn, making this stage critical for fostering lifelong reading habits. Strong reading habits contribute to enhanced vocabulary, comprehension skills, critical thinking, and overall academic success (Gambrell, 2015). However, with the increasing influence of technology and digital media, traditional reading practices are evolving, and students are engaging in various forms of reading, including digital, social media-based, and auditory reading (Baron, 2015).

Private school students often have greater access to diverse reading materials, including printed books, e-books, educational apps, and library resources, due to better infrastructure and parental involvement. However, the preference for digital reading over printed books, the impact of recreational screen time, and external

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academic pressures may influence their reading habits. Identifying these factors is crucial for educators and parents to implement strategies that encourage deep reading, comprehension, and engagement with literature beyond textbooks. This research will provide valuable insights for teachers, parents, and educational policymakers to design interventions that cultivate a balanced and effective reading culture among VI to VIII grade students in private schools.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population for this study consisted of VI to VIII grade students enrolled in private schools in Thoothukudi district, Tamil Nadu. A sample of 145 students was selected using the random sampling technique to ensure an unbiased representation of students across different private schools.

METHOD

The study adopted a survey research design to examine the reading profile of VI to VIII grade students in private schools. This design was chosen as it allows for the systematic collection of data from a large sample, providing insights into students' reading habits and preferences. A structured questionnaire was developed to assess the reading profile of students. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was administered to the 145 VI to VIII grade students and the data was collected and analysed.

RESULTS

From the survey results (Table 1), it is inferred:

- 53.8%, 26.9% and 19.3% of students have read less than 5, 5 to 10 and more than 10 books in the last one year respectively.
- 77.9%, 17.2% and 4.8% of students read fiction, non-fiction and both fiction and non-fiction books respectively.
- 57.2%, 24.8% and 17.9% of students spend less than 1 hour, 1 hour – 2 hours and more than 2 hours in reading everyday respectively.
- 80.7%, 13.8% and 5.5% of students read through printed, online and both print and online resources respectively.
- 58.6% of students have a book collection at home and 41.4% of students do not have book collection at home.
- 13.8% of students read books to develop their linguistic competence, 26.9% of students read

book to pass their time and 59.3% of students read books to develop their knowledge.

- 29% of students read newspaper every day, 50.3% of students read once in a week, 14.5% of students read once in fortnight and 6.2% of students do not read newspapers.

Table 1. Survey Results

| Variable | | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Number of books read in last one year | Less than 5 | 78 | 53.8 |
| | 5 to 10 | 39 | 26.9 |
| | More than 10 | 28 | 19.3 |
| Genre | Fiction | 113 | 77.9 |
| | Non-Fiction | 25 | 17.2 |
| | Both | 7 | 4.8 |
| Average time spent every day on reading | < 1 hr | 83 | 57.2 |
| | 1 – 2 hrs | 36 | 24.8 |
| | > 2 hrs | 26 | 17.9 |
| Modes of Reading | Printed | 117 | 80.7 |
| | Online | 20 | 13.8 |
| | Both | 8 | 5.5 |
| Having Book Collection at Home | Have | 85 | 58.6 |
| | Do not have | 60 | 41.4 |
| Reasons for Reading | To develop linguistic competence | 20 | 13.8 |
| | To pass time | 39 | 26.9 |
| | To develop knowledge | 86 | 59.3 |
| Reading Newspaper | Everyday | 42 | 29 |
| | Once in a week | 73 | 50.3 |
| | Once in fortnight | 21 | 14.5 |
| | Do not read | 9 | 6.2 |

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that a majority of students (over half) engage in limited reading beyond their academic requirements. The relatively small percentage (19.3%) of students who read extensively suggests that deep reading habits are not prevalent among VI to VIII grade students. The decline in extensive reading could be influenced by academic workload, digital distractions, and lack of motivation to read outside of school curriculum. The strong inclination towards fiction suggests that students enjoy storytelling, imagination, and creative narratives over informative or factual content. The lower

percentage of non-fiction readers indicates that students may not be actively exploring biographies, self-help books, or educational texts outside of textbooks.

A majority of students engage in minimal daily reading, indicating that reading is not a regular and sustained activity for many. Students reading for longer durations may be self-motivated learners, while those reading less than an hour might be influenced by screen time, lack of interest, or limited access to reading materials. The overwhelming preference for printed books suggests that students are still comfortable with traditional reading methods. The relatively low percentage of online reading may indicate limited access to digital reading platforms or a preference for tangible books over screen-based reading.

A personal book collection at home is often associated with stronger reading habits, as it provides continuous access to books (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). The 41.4% of students without a home book collection may have limited exposure to leisure reading outside of school, which could contribute to lower engagement in independent reading.

The fact that knowledge enhancement is the primary motivation for reading suggests that students view reading as an educational tool rather than just a leisure activity. However, the low percentage of students reading for linguistic development indicates that reading is not commonly seen as a tool for improving language skills. The low percentage of students reading for linguistic development implies that students may not fully recognize the role of reading in enhancing vocabulary, grammar, and overall language skills. This could be due to a lack of awareness, limited exposure to language-enriching books, or a stronger emphasis on textbook-based learning rather than extensive reading practices. Encouraging students to read a variety of materials, such as novels, essays, and poetry, could help them understand the linguistic benefits of reading and motivate them to engage with texts beyond academic purposes.

Regular newspaper reading helps students stay informed about current affairs, develop critical thinking, and improve language skills. The fact that only 29% read newspapers daily suggests that newspaper reading is not a consistent habit for most students. The declining interest in

newspapers could be attributed to the growing influence of digital media, social media consumption, and a lack of newspaper-reading culture at home or in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educators and parents may need to encourage more leisure reading through engaging activities, book clubs, and personalized reading recommendations. Introducing more engaging non-fiction books, such as biographies, science exploration, and adventure-based knowledge books, may help broaden students' reading diversity. Schools and parents can integrate structured reading time within the curriculum and home routines to help students develop more consistent reading habits. As digital reading continues to grow, exposing students to a balance of both print and digital resources can help them develop skills in online information retrieval, e-book reading, and digital literacy. Schools could encourage parents to build small home libraries or introduce book exchange programs to make books more accessible to students. Teachers can emphasise the linguistic benefits of reading, such as vocabulary expansion, grammar improvement, and comprehension skills, to encourage more students to read for this purpose. Schools can introduce newspaper reading activities, discussions, and summary-writing exercises to encourage students to engage with news regularly.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that students primarily view reading as an academic tool rather than a leisure activity or language development aid. While fiction is preferred, reading engagement remains low, with minimal newspaper reading and limited exposure to digital resources. The availability of books at home positively influences reading habits, but access remains uneven. To foster lifelong reading, schools should promote diverse materials, structured reading routines, and parental involvement.

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