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THE ROLE PLAYED BY PARENTS AND TEACHERS IN SHAPING THE READING
HABITS OF CHILDREN IN AN AGE OF CHANGING BOOK FORMATS WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MANGALORE: A STUDY

Abstract

One of the primary concerns of parents/wards and educators is the nurturing and shaping of reading skills in school-going children. What the former must recognize is that reading is integral to many other skills that need to be developed simultaneously in the child pupil. Consequently, if a child's reading skills are poor or under-developed, the child will be disadvantaged in several ways. Reading, in fact, involves both psychomotor and cognitive skills. For instance, a child needs to be able to listen and receive auditory feedback when reading aloud. Research has shown that experimentally delayed auditory feedback of a child's oral reading can lead to stuttering and other speech problems. This study analyses the reading habits of high-school children in Mangalore City and the role played by the parents and teachers of these children in augmenting their reading skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is universally acknowledged that reading, no matter the format of the reading material, is an indispensable skill. However, many Indian pupils even in senior classes struggle to read. This is particularly so because the Indian education system lays emphasis on prescribed

textbooks and not enough on the reading of extra-syllabic texts. Generally speaking, pupils are not motivated to develop an interest in reading books on which they will not be examined.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reading is a complex process, involving more than one skill and faculty and results in the extraction of meaning from a written or printed text. In linguistics, the text is defined as, “A coherent stretch of language that may be regarded as the object of critical analysis”. (Nordquist, Web). Again, *English Club*, a website for learners and teachers of English, defines reading as:

... the process of looking at a series of written symbols and getting meaning from them.

When we read, we use our eyes to receive written symbols (letters, punctuation marks and spaces) and we use our brain to convert them into words, sentences and paragraphs that communicate something to us.¹ (*English Club*)

The website goes on to state that reading can either be silent or aloud. It also declares that reading is a receptive skill in that through reading we receive information. But it also involves the skill of speaking for we have to be able to pronounce the words we read. In this sense, reading is also productive because we both receive and transmit information through reading, even if the ‘transmitting’ is only to ourselves.² (*English Club*)

Reading has also been defined as “an interactive, problem-solving process of making meaning from texts”.³ (Literacy for Learning pp 61) Dr Janette M. Hughes adds that reading is a complex interaction between reader, text, and the purposes for which the reading is being done with the purposes being shaped by the prior knowledge and experiences of the reader. The reading process, according to Hughes, involves five stages and an array of strategies, often multiple strategies employed simultaneously, in order to facilitate the acquisition of meaning from a text by a reader. Hughes lists the stages of reading as pre-reading, reading, responding, exploring and applying; and the reading strategies as activating prior knowledge, predicting, visualizing, questioning, drawing references, finding important or main ideas, summarizing, synthesizing, monitoring comprehension, evaluating. I shall only focus on the reading stages of responding and exploring because these are central to my enquiry in this study of school-going children’s reading habits and knowledge acquisition. Further, I shall examine the impact of the changing formats of books on the above.⁴ (Hughes)

Hughes avers that there is a wide array of ways in which to engage [pupils] in the reading process. She emphasizes that a balanced approach on the part of the teacher makes for the teacher support necessary to [pupils] (my word). The ways in which [pupils] may learn to read are enumerated by her thus: modelled reading i.e. teacher reading aloud to [pupils]; shared reading; guided reading and independent reading.⁵ (Hughes, Web.)

The benefits of shared reading are also pointed out by Dr Hughes, though she does not always label them as such. These benefits may seem obvious to us, but they are still worth noting. One is that reading helps [pupils] to make connections between what they read and their own lives or other texts that they have read or things and events that occur in the world. They compare themselves with characters and situations that they have encountered in books and recall similar situations and experiences in their own lives. In short, reading helps [pupils] to make sense of the everyday life through the connections that they succeed in making between the text and the world. It keeps them grounded in reality.⁶ (Hughes)

Secondly, reading draws [pupils] into active participation in the learning process by leading them on to making informed guesses. The guesses they make are based upon their prior knowledge of the topic, the genre of literature that they are reading and, of course, their knowledge of what went before in the very text itself. This ‘predicting’ is, in fact, an important strategy and skill in the acquisition and attaining of higher levels of literacy.⁷ (Hughes)

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The habit of reading print material and traditional books, which used to be well-established among urban middle and upper-middle-class children even two decades ago, has unarguably been in jeopardy ever since electronic media became an established part of our everyday life. Incidentally, this is true of adults as well as children.

With print books, there were distinctive patterns in the reading preferences of toddlers/very young children and those of older children of twelve years of age and above. The former enjoyed stories of fantasy and imagination, most often read/narrated to them by their parents and teachers who gradually sought to initiate their wards into the habit of

independent reading. As children grew older, they tended to favour realistic books about the world around them while still retaining pleasure in books or stories involving imagination and fantasy. However, a distinct difference in reading preferences could be observed between the genders. Girls would be seen to prefer school/boarding-house stories as also those dealing with animals, history, adventure, teen romance, the supernatural, mystery, and non-fiction books based on fashion and travel, to name a few. Whereas, boys were seen to prefer adventure, spy, thriller and sports stories and non-fiction books based on science, technology, hobbies, history and war.

Among young school-going Indian girls popular authors included Enid Blyton, Agatha Christie, Nancy Drew, R.K. Narayan and the classics of English literature as also Indian classics in translation. Among boys, favourite fiction writers were R.K. Narayan, Dickens, P.G. Wodehouse, and James Hadley Chase, among others.

4. NEED FOR THE STUDY

The fact remains, as I have repeatedly emphasized, that reading is an indispensable skill and without it, no knowledge acquisition is possible. It is not the format of the books that counts so much as the fact that they are books, in the first instance.

Therefore, what should teachers/parents/adults in general do in order to create a more literate, knowledgeable, and socially aware society? They should facilitate the acquisition of reading skills, which augment a child's knowledge and make him/her more academically competent, thus promoting success and well-being at the individual level. Such a child will have a greater sense of emotional and psychological well-being and be far better socially adjusted, growing up, eventually, to be a stable and contributing member of society. Taken at the level of society, this would make for a society which is safer.

Reading skills and the acquisition of knowledge going hand in hand as they do, the level of educational success of society as a whole is raised as more and more children hone their reading skills and enhance their knowledge. Rates of juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, crime and imprisonment and teenage pregnancy are more likely to drop in a society where children grow up to be confident, purposeful, gainfully employed and well-balanced members of society. Increased rates of literacy and improved standards of knowledge make for better opportunities for employment and thereby higher standards of living.

Finally, this study has not, to the best of my knowledge, been carried out in a two-tier city like Mangalore, so far.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the reading habits of school-going children and measure the extent to which reading of books is pursued as a hobby in this fast changing digital world.
- To analyse the extent to which the parents and teachers augment the reading skills of children

6. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The foundational year for the development of reading skills is Class I. This is the time when a child should be initiated into the habit of reading and when the honing of the child's reading skills should begin. However, the system tends to fail them resulting in pupils with not only unsatisfactory reading skills, but inadequate skills of comprehension. Of course, India is a huge and heterogeneous country with varying standards of education, several Boards of Secondary Education and vastly differing methods of teaching and teacher quality. So it is not only difficult but also inaccurate to make sweeping generalizations about the skills imparted to school-going children and their level of competence with respect to the same.

However, one fact holds good for children all over India and elsewhere: once the habit of daily reading is inculcated in the child, the adult is most likely to sustain the habit for life. Again, true learning begins at home. So parents who themselves do not read can hardly expect their children to be avid readers. Further, when homes are richly equipped with books, the chances of the children being drawn to the habit of reading, including daily reading, are much higher than when homes have a paucity of reading material.

Unfortunately, school curricula in India are designed to burden children with tasks and assignments which involve mere memorization, absorption and reproduction of information. Therefore, the pleasure of reading and knowledge acquisition, each for its own sake, is often lost.

Again, as some argue, only a small number of publishers in India invest in publication for children and fewer still focus exclusively on children's books. They aver that the dearth of reading material for children is testimony to the failure of the publishing industry. However, this is perhaps where technological advancements and the burgeoning number of digital reading resources for children become significant and have a very important part to play.

During the recent past, scholarly and popular articles in the Press and discussions on other forms of media, as also earnest debates in academic circles have focused on how children and young adults are simply not reading anymore. Of course, one realizes upon closer examination that what is often meant is that children and youngsters do not read traditional books and print material, and do not favour narrative books. Many young adults will, in fact, admit to not having read a single novel or book of poetry, short stories or plays in several years.

Again, it is true that both children and young adults do not read as much for scholarly and literary reasons as did the equivalent age groups a generation ago. This is because there are too many other competing forms of entertainment and enjoyment for youngsters to spend time reading, no matter the medium. In short, from shopping malls with their overabundance of consumer goods and opportunities for conspicuous consumerism, T.V. serials, movies, music channels and video games, fine dining and travel, leisure activities and adventure sports, the range and variety of entertainment available are so great as to prove to be a distraction to both children and young people. Sports, movie, music and fashion icons occupy more space in the young mind, so to speak, than do authors, scientists, journalists and even statesman and political leaders.

However, the non-fictional and the non-print-based reading engaged in by young people is not taken into account. By discounting the nonfiction reading, digital reading and audio-book listening that young people partake of, it becomes inaccurate to say that today's teens are not readers at all.

Therefore, the issue is quite a complex one and there are no easy answers to the question of whether children and young adults read as much as previous generations did, or whether they read at all. Even youngsters themselves who report high levels of literary activities do not consider that their reading may be labelled 'literary' or 'scholarly'. Their dismissive attitude towards their own literary activities which are digital-based is actually absorbed by young people from the attitude, beliefs and mindsets of their teachers and parents.

In fact, if one were to take into account the participation of older children and teenagers in online creative activities from reading, writing, sharing fan fiction, to reading and posting to blogs, remixing online music, images and videos, the percentage of young people involved in online 'reading' would significantly increase. The point, of course, is: how much of what is read and shared would be considered nurturing to the intellect, scholarly/academic or literary? As a matter of fact, much of it is more for entertainment and pure social networking.

Teachers and parents need therefore to begin with the enhancement of the school child's reading skills, reading to children, encouraging them to read aloud and, in time, to read silently. They need to supervise a child's reading whether this be in the digital or print medium, by exploring reading resources with their wards, helping them to choose reading resources, taking them to book sales and exhibitions, enhancing the resources of the school/home library. They should also be 'visible' readers themselves for children learn best by emulation and should speak to children about books and authors of fiction and non-fiction and thereby inculcate in children a respect for the knowledge to be obtained from books and delight in the entertainment that books have to offer.

Having said this, I will now focus briefly on the demographic details of Mangalore in which my survey of the reading habits of children and the impact of the changing formats of books on them was carried out.

Mangalore or Mangaluru is a port city on the Arabian Sea coast in a region known as Tulunadu. According to the last known figures the population of Mangalore was 623,800 in 2011. This was 0.05% of the total population of India. Given a steady population growth rate of +1.47% in the period 2001-11, Mangalore's population in 2018 will stand at approximately 690,709.

In recent decades Mangalore has earned a reputation nationally and internationally for being an educational hub. It is favoured with easy accessibility through road, rail, air and sea transport making it convenient for students seeking education herein.

Today Mangalore houses diverse educational institutions from those offering basic degrees, specializations and super-specializations in the health sciences, engineering and technology, management sciences, law and hospitality.

Indeed, Mangalore stands at the cutting edge of education and has carved a niche for itself in the field of both primary and secondary, and higher education; and both professional and

non-professional education. In the field of primary education, the Basel and Catholic missionaries have played a pioneering role, especially in the field of primary and secondary education, establishing as they have a network of well-developed schools. The Basel missionaries besides made an entry into technical education with founding of the Hebich Technical Training institute while the Catholic nuns of the Apostolic Carmel, the Bethany sisters and the Jesuit priests took the lead in establishing colleges for non-professional higher education. These continue to be among the most respected degree colleges in Mangalore. Jesuit and Diocesan efforts have led to the founding of professional colleges for engineering, medical, and IT-related and management studies. The other communities followed suit and have now founded many highly reputed schools and colleges, with colleges at the pre-university level providing students with excellent training in competitive examinations for seats in professional colleges. There are also old and venerable Government schools, colleges and technical training institutions. 226 colleges of Mangalore and its purlieus, including autonomous, government, constituent, private, and B.Ed./B.P.Ed. institutions come under the parent Mangalore University.

There are now a host of pre-university colleges which specialize in giving their students intensive training for competitive examinations into professional colleges. The results obtained year after year by these colleges have been extremely impressive even on the national level.

In most educational institutions in Mangalore, special emphasis is laid on computer literacy as also soft skills training both of which are indispensable to candidates entering the contemporary job market in the corporate world. In fact, both schools and colleges in Mangalore have introduced compulsory training in computer and IT-related courses so as to achieve the educational goal of computer literacy for all.

Apart from classroom teaching and the traditional lecture method, the educational institutions of Mangalore employ other, often learner-centred and technology-based, methods of imparting education. These include peer teaching, lecture-demonstrations, software aided language learning, group discussions, debates, problem solving, dramatization and role playing, project work, the conduct of surveys and data analysis, educational tours, industrial exposure and practical exercises in the use of technology for specific purposes, among others. Rural exposure and the undertaking of green initiatives are now part of the total curricular

experience offered by many institutions to their students. Further, distance education, educational training, online education and education through community colleges are part of the academic scene in Mangalore. Mangalore's students are technology savvy and even young school-going children are familiar with the use of electronic devices and digital books, the making of PPTs, and browsing the Internet for information and entertainment.

Tie-ups and MOU's with national and international institutions of repute, pupil and student exchange programmes with overseas institutions, and linkages with scientific institutes and industries are among the strategies that many educational institutions in Mangalore employ in order to give their students a global education and the required competitive edge in the job market.

As evidence of the well-earned reputation of Mangalore as an educational hub, the enrolment of students in its primary and secondary schools, semi-professional and professional institutions as well as those offering general education has increased manifold. Also, the number of institutions offering advanced educational facilities and programmes has also burgeoned.

Therefore, owing to Mangalore, which provides quality education in higher and professional programmes, Dakshina Kannada District continues to enjoy the reputation of being one of the most sought-after educational destinations in the nation.

FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

The students from Class 8 to Class 12 of various schools were surveyed through the administration of a structured questionnaire. The data was then analysed and subjected to statistical analysis. The following are the findings of the survey conducted on 295 school children in the city of Mangalore.

Table 1: Reading Habits of School-Going Children

Read books other than text books	Yes	279	94.6
	No	16	5.4

	Total	295	100.0
If yes, how often do you read books other than text books?	Daily	74	26.5
	Twice a Week	76	27.2
	Once a Week	73	26.2
	Once a Fortnight	21	7.5
	Once a Month	35	12.5
	Total	279	100.0
If no, what are your hobbies?	Playing Games on the Computer/Mobile phone/ Tablets/ Play Station	6	37.5
	Playing Indoor games like Monopoly/Scrabble/ Chess/ Cards/ Bowling	10	62.5
	Playing Outdoor games like Cricket/ Football/ Kho Kho / Athletics of various kinds	16	100.0
Hours in a day spend on reading books other than text books	Less than 1 hr	111	39.8
	1-2 hrs	131	47.0
	More than 2 hrs	37	13.3
	Total	279	100.0
If reading is your hobby, then what kinds of books do you read?	Story Books/ Comics	164	58.8
	General Knowledge Books	33	11.8
	Non- Fiction Books	41	14.7

	on Science, History, Sports		
	Any other- please specify	41	14.7
	Total	279	100.0
At what age did you start reading books on general topics?	5-8 years	61	20.7
	8-10 years	125	42.4
	Above 10 years	109	36.9
	Total	295	100.0
Which of the following: books/ comics / magazines did you first start reading?	Children's Magazines like <i>Tinkle</i>	104	35.3
	Short Story Collections	115	39.0
	Comics	35	11.9
	Others	41	13.9
	Total	295	100.0
The formats in which you read general books when you first started reading	Printed Books	279	94.6
	CDs	4	1.4
	DVDs	4	1.4
	Digital Books like Kindle	6	2.0
	Any other- please specify	2	.7
	Total	295	100.0
How do you obtain the printed books that you like to read?	Purchase from a book store	153	51.9
	Borrow from the School Library	75	25.4
	Through Membership of other Libraries	15	5.1

	Borrow from Friends	21	7.1
	Download from the Net	23	7.8
	Gifts received	8	2.7
	Total	295	100.0

Hypothesis: There is no impact of selected variables on the opinion about enhancement of reading experience and reading habit

Table 2 Inferential Statistics – Impact of Selected Variables

Variables	Reading Experience			Reading Habit		
	Test Value	P value	Inference	Test Value	P value	Inference
Class	FETV=18.185	0.162>0.05	Accept	FETV=17.765	0.649>0.05	Accept
Gender	FETV=1.487	0.857 >0.05	Accept	FETV=2.020	0.760>0.05	Accept
School	FETV=30.986	0.492>0.05	Accept	FETV=43.002	0.043<0.05*	Reject
Reading of books other than text books	FETV=4.480	0.341 >0.05	Accept	FETV=2.257	0.723 >0.05	Accept
Frequency of reading books	FETV=19.313	0.138>0.05	Accept	FETV=21.231	0.094>0.05	Accept
Hours spent in reading books	FETV=8.326	0.380 >0.05	Accept	FETV=7.650	0.458 >0.05	Accept
Reading of digital books	FETV=5.538	0.476>0.05	Accept	FETV=3.343	0.592>0.05	Accept
Format of digital books	FETV=12.126	0.369 >0.05	Accept	FETV=11.664	0.424 >0.05	Accept
Percentage	FETV=16.340	0.103>0.05	Reject	FETV=25.520	0.004<0.01**	Reject

of reading through digital books						
Sources for access	FETV=17.439	0.213 >0.05	Accept	FETV=10.419	0.811 >0.05	Accept

Source: Primary data Survey

From the above analysis it is evident that there is no impact of any of the selected variables on the child's opinion of the enhancement of his/her reading experience and reading habits except for the school and the percentage of reading. Hence the opinion of the enhancement of the reading experience and the reading habits of school-going children are dependent on the school as well as the measure of reading of digital books, but are not dependent on the gender of the child, the class in which the child is studying, the child's reading of books other than text books, the hours spent by the child on reading, the format of digital books or the sources available for access.

7. CONCLUSIONS & SUGGESTIONS

While it is true that the study concludes that children of English medium schools in Mangalore and its environs have a positive experience with reading digital material and employing digital devices, and both their reading skills and knowledge levels have been enhanced as a result, the print medium cannot be set aside. Digital devices have their own disadvantages. Prominent among these disadvantages are distracting digital features, long-term deleterious effects on the eyes, and the danger of children being exposed to inappropriate material. Both teachers and parents play a crucial role in ensuring that their wards are not exposed to harmful material and that the habit of good/suitable reading is inculcated in them from the toddler stage. Significantly, parent and teacher supervision is more easily facilitated with print rather than e books /digital material. Further, technology is notoriously unreliable and does let one down at crucial times. So it is always advisable to have longer lasting print books, as a standby.

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