

Importance of Developing Reading Habits for the Survival of the Information Society

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Abstract

Reading is an active attempt on the part of the reader to understand a writer's message. The aim of the paper is to examine the role of reading in a society that places great emphasis on information and communication technologies and to examine the factors to be considered in developing the reading habit. It describes some methods to promote the habit of reading. Reading habit in the paper means a behavior which expresses the likeness of reading of an individual. It also describes the importance of reading especially in this information society. Parents' educational level, economic level of the family, atmospheric condition of the reading environment, availability to access reading materials, language fluency, reading skills of an individual, facilities available in libraries and availability of time for reading are some of the important factors affecting the habit of reading. Parents can make reading a part of the family's lifestyle. Public libraries, schools and other educational authorities should play an active role to develop not only a reading society but also 'want to read' society.

Keywords:

Introduction

Reading is the ability of identifying and recognizing printed or written symbols that stimulate the recall of familiar concepts (Mohamed, 2003). Reading is important for everybody in order to cope up with new knowledge in the changing world of the technological age. The importance and necessity will hopefully continue to increase in the years to come. However, the number of those who know how to read but do not read enough is also increasing. We are now living in the information age. The new age is largely characterized by the development that has taken place in technology and, in particular, information and communication technologies. The convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting and computers has had significant impact on society, comparable with previous major societal changes such as the industrial revolution or the advent of the printing press. Reading today is a

commodity essential for survival. In this information age, reading and reading skills will enable users not just to survive, but to thrive.

Lifelong learning is important because continuous learning is essential for the survival in a changing information society. The information society is a term frequently used to describe the social environment and the impact of information and communication technologies on the way people live. The transition of society from an economy based primarily on manufacturing to one that is predominantly based on information compels the people to develop reading habits to know about the new knowledge. Now the information is used as an economic resource. It is possible to identify greater use of information among the general public. People use information more intensively in their activities as consumers. Reading today is a commodity essential for survival. Reading is an activity that can be done anywhere, anytime whenever people have the spare time and the interest for reading. The ultimate goal of reading is to be able to understand written material, to evaluate it, and to use it for one's needs.

Importance of Reading

Reading is an activity characterized by the translation of symbols or letters, into words and sentences that give meaning to the individual. It is more important today than it ever was. Reading is crucial to be an informed citizen, to succeed in one's chosen career, and to personal fulfillment. There are more access to text than ever, more specialized magazines, more books being published, more news papers and more articles to read on the internet. A world of information may be physically and politically available but there is no value of it, if it cannot be accessed due to an individual lacking the habit of reading.

Reading exposes people to the accumulated wisdom of human civilization. Mature readers bring to the text their experiences, abilities, and interests; the text, in turn, allows them to expand those experiences and abilities and to find new interests. Reading is one of the most fundamental building blocks in a child's development. Children who read well do better in other subjects and in all aspects of schooling and beyond. In addition, reading can be a fun and imaginative activity for children, which opens doors to all kinds of new worlds for them. Unless reading develops as an automatic activity, outside and unrelated to the classroom, it can make little contribution to the intellectual growth of the student and hence to his overall personality. Reading and writing are important ways of using language to communicate. As the world becomes more complex, reading is increasingly important for children trying to find their place in it. The ability to read has economic consequences. Adults who are better than average readers are also higher than average earners. The growing technicalization of society has brought increased demands for literacy, which the schools are hard

pressed to meet. A higher level of literacy is needed in business and industry, and even everyday life. The reading ability needed to comprehend materials important to daily living. Therefore the lack of sufficient reading ability definitely impairs a person's capacity to function in the modern society.

Reading has been a lifelong joy of an individual. To the individual, 'reading' is an important measure for emotional purification and recharge of knowledge, and to the country or society, it is the foundation of maturity and development. Good readers rapidly recognize words without having to think about what the words are and they automatically activate the meaning of the words they are reading. They can construct the meaning of sentences, paragraphs, and even larger units of text without undue effort. Readers who are not fluent readers of words have comprehension difficulties that increase in severity as words and sentences become more complex and as they increasingly are asked to read subject matter text such as science, social studies, and literature. This creates a sense of having to work much harder than peers to complete reading assignments and it sometimes results in students essentially giving up an academic accomplishment.

Information literacy is a basic human right to lifelong learning. It is a prerequisite for participating effectively in an information society. To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information (ALA, 1989). Success in information literacy is mainly dependent on reading materials. Information literate students are competent, independent learners. They know their information needs and actively engage in the world of ideas. They display confidence in their ability to solve problems and know what relevant information is. They operate comfortably in situations where there are multiple answers, as well as those with no answers. They hold high standards for their work and create quality products (Doyle, 1994).

Reading is essential in helping young people to develop self-esteem, and to become socially and educationally successful. If we want to get on in life we need to have developed the ability to interact with others and to manage our own emotions. Reading literature will help us to develop the habit of understanding and respecting others' ideas. It will lead to face the societal challenges. Reading biographies of good people can make changes to an individual's life style and behaviour. Younger generation can be aware of religious and cultural aspects of life pattern mainly by reading literature.

Reading is an indispensable tool for achieving emotional stability, enjoying leisure hours, sharing the difficult experiences, which are encountered in books and for keeping abreast of happenings in the world at large. (Ogunrombi and Adio, 1996)

“Reading expands the mind, it stokes the imagination, it exercises your brain, it challenges your thinking...there’s so much *good* that reading can do - and yet it seems to be a dying activity in today’s electronic, media enhanced world ” expressed by Williams and Rose(2004). Books offer ideas, thoughts, and knowledge that can spark action with a power to overcome even the most despicable evil. We need those ideas now more than ever. It is clear the need to communicate these ideas and reading puts us in direct contact with those ideas.

Recreational reading show better development in reading, writing, grammar and enlarges vocabulary and builds fluency. These results hold for the aspects of language competence and build a person’s knowledge of the world. In other way, it develops a better written communication skill (Stephen, 2004). The more and more you read you can improve your language proficiency.

Factors affecting the habit of reading

There are many integrated factors affecting the habit of reading.

Parent educational level

Parents’ educational and occupational levels will affect the reading habit of their children. Where parents are illiterate, children who are trying to form meaningful reading habits cannot obtain help or understanding. The attitude of the parents to children who are making efforts to read is very important in helping them to form the reading habit. If parents do not know the value of reading, they will not be able to appreciate or encourage their children’s reading. In some homes children who make concerted efforts to read are often scolded and branded as lazy.

Economic level of the Family

For economic reasons, child labour predominates in some places. Parents prefer their children to work with them as a help rather than reading books, when they are not in school. These activities not only take time but sap the energy of the affected children and consequently militate against the cultivation of reading habits. In this type of situation, interested children begin to think that the habit of reading is not suitable for the economical status of the family, and give up the habit of reading. How can those parents who are unable to satisfy their family food requirements, purchase reading materials to encourage their children’s reading habits? So, parents’ economical status directly affects the habit of reading.

Atmosphere

The right atmosphere is necessary for developing and sustaining good reading habits. If children are living in rented apartments which are overcrowded with large families, noisy and poorly lit without electricity, this is not conducive to reading. Failure in electricity supply leads to reading with hurricane lanterns, an un-pleasurable way to read as a result of the accompanying heat and perspiration. Certainly, this does inhibit the development of good reading habit. The life style of the neighbours and friends of an individual also affects the habit.

Availability of reading materials

The acquisition of a good reading habit depends largely on the availability of the right type of reading material. Availability of greater amount of materials of different varieties is positively encouraging a person to read. A study shows students who come from homes where there is a variety of reading materials tend to read variety of magazines, spend more time reading in a week, and read a variety of newspapers (Pandian, 2000). Shortage of interested reading material directly affects the habit of reading.

Language fluency and Reading skill

If a person is fluent in a language he can read. In another way, reading increases a person's language fluency. Reading skills are essential to become functionally literate. Lack of reading skills also inhibits the formation of good reading habits. Dearth of trained language teachers and reading teachers to teach reading inhibit the habit of developing reading. If the teaching in schools is bored and uninteresting, students will not be able to develop the habit of reading.

Facilities available in a library.

Libraries which are poorly provisioned with outdated books; uncomfortable seats; poor ventilation and light, and lack of services of a professional librarian will affect the habit of reading. If a library is well stocked with new material it will encourage the people to visit the library.

Lack of time

Children do not have time to read. And most children are sent to additional classes after school hours giving no time for them to relax, let alone to read. Wherever the equipped library is available, students must be given enough time to use the library.

The lieu of electronic media

Television potential effect on children's reading performance has become an issue of growing concern among education and often cited as a cause for the decline in reading if children spend their viewing time only on programs which entertain rather than educate. (Sangkaeo,1999).

Cultural pattern and personal attitude

We are not a reading society but a chatting society. Many people spend more time on chatting. The cultural habit of people prefer to listening and chatting more than reading. Personal attitude towards reading affects the development of reading habit.

Effective methods and some successful programs for reading habit promotion

Roles of Family

Parents are clearly important socializing agents. Parents, who spend time reading to their children, give them the best possible start on the road to literacy. Many research studies have pointed out that the children who do best in literacy skills at school are those who come from homes where there are books, where their parents spend reading time on reading to their children and where children see their parents and old siblings engage in reading activities (Sangkaeo, 1999).

Parents can make reading as part of the lifestyle of the family

a. Visit the library

Libraries have a wide selection of books to borrow. Many libraries have fun activities, computer games for children to attract them to visit the library. Let the kids to choose what they want to read. Get the membership from different types of libraries. Visit these libraries frequently especially during the school holidays.

b. Lead by example

Read the newspaper at the dining table; pick up magazine at the doctor's clinic when waiting for the doctor. If kids see the adults around them reading often, they will understand that literature can be an important part of their life.

c. Turn off the Television

Limiting your family television viewing time will save some time for reading. Many people say that they don't have enough time. Television is one of our major time consumers. People should make their television watching more conscious and less habitual. There is nothing wrong with watching television shows you really enjoy. Where the time gets lost is

turning it on, and scanning to find “something to watch.” Those are the times to turn it off and pick up a book.

d. Help kids find time to read

Always remember to leave some time in their schedules for reading. Let the kids choose what they want to read.

e. Talk it up

Talking with your kids on you have read also let them know the value of reading. Read the same book your child is reading and discuss it.

f. Create a learning environment

Create a learning environment by setting up a mini reading corner and flood with reading materials. Be sure to have newspapers, magazines and informational materials on hand that spark the interest of a young reader. Good light and posture are associated with effective reading. In other words, sitting up in a comfortable chair will keep a person more alert than curled up or stretched out in a bed. Good lighting and correct posture are needed for serious reading.

g. Read aloud with kids

Read story books aloud enthusiastically with children. Don't forget to improvise different voices or wear a silly hat to make the story much more interesting.

h. Shared reading with a parent

You start off by reading books to your child. You first read a page and then let your child read a paragraph. You continue the process until your child is reading to you, rather than the other way around. The selection of the book should be the interest of the child. The philosophy is to provide them with whatever they are interested in and let them hone their reading skills on that content. If they find that reading is not difficult it will lead to an interest in reading other kinds of content, and that in turn might lead to less difficulty in reading textbooks and other academic material.

i. Make the availability of reading materials

When the children are flooded with books they automatically tend to read books. Always have a budget to purchase books for children. Subscribe to reading material in your child's name. Magazines like sports, or serial story books etc. It will encourage them to read at least the particular material.

While traveling encourage the child to read the traffic signs, notices and other prominently visible signs. Show your children what those signs represent.

Reading is the most important skill, children learn in their development. Reading can be a fun and imaginative activity for children, which opens doors to all kinds of new worlds for them. Boyse (2007) explains in his research five early reading skills which are essential to develop the habit of reading.

- Phonemic awareness - Being able to hear, identify, and play with individual sounds in spoken words.
- Phonics – Being able to connect the letters of written language with the sounds of spoken language.
- Vocabulary- The words kids need to know to communicate effectively.
- Reading comprehension- Being able to understand and get
- Fluency- Being able to read text accurately and quickly.

General reading skills are practiced at reading. The more we read, the better we get at it, and the more we enjoy it. Focus on literacy activities that your child enjoys, so that reading is a treat, not a chore. Reading is an integral part of people's lives from infancy to old age. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends daily reading to children beginning at the age of six months. Talk about pictures with your little one; sing the text to keep baby's attention; help your baby touch and feel in the texture of books.

School Environment

The school is the center in promoting reading habits and information skill among children. The teacher is the key factor who integrates all activities of children's learning. Individual schools could provide opportunities for children to read through carefully planned opportunities, time and materials. School libraries are the first library contact students get before graduating in to adult life. A well stocked school library with a pleasant professional teacher librarian is an encouragement to develop the reading habit among students in their school life. Providing a wide range of resources is very important if students are to read for pleasure. Reading materials must start at children's level and must include carefully planned programs for broadening their interest and elevating their taste. A library period should be created in the school time table for each class. Professional teacher librarian should be appointed to guide the students regarding the usage of the library resources. Some reading activities are suggested in the manual for teacher librarians by Yapa (2002). Reading activities for primary children are story telling, silent reading and reading aloud. Reading activities for junior secondary and senior secondary school children are book share, silent reading in the class, literature circle and read aloud.

Public libraries

In addition to the common library services, public libraries can provide extension services to develop reading habits among the community. For example - organizing story hours for children, mobile libraries, arranging talks regarding the importance of reading, arranging reading system, encourage public to know about books and book sources both reading and non reading groups, and promote the production and distribution of easy to read pamphlets and low price printed material which would encourage the interest of the public.

Establishing children's libraries

Organizing of activities and facilities for children's libraries is also important to encourage them to read. Each local and state government should encourage the children by setting up children's libraries in villages and towns and stocking them with reading materials for the use of children. Not every child can afford to buy books. Therefore it is necessary for the children's library to be a place for collective reading and community life.

Educational reforms

Teacher training institutions should equip prospective teachers by offering comprehensive courses in the teaching of reading and make it one major area of specialization. Specialization in reading should be offered at the postgraduate level of teachers' courses. Educational departments should provide opportunities to teachers to participate in seminars and workshops on the promotion of reading conducted locally and internationally in order to be trained in teaching reading activities. Most teachers forget that all teachers are reading teachers. Students who have problems in studying mathematics might have reading problems as the real cause. It is not only the duty of the language teachers to promote the reading habit. Changing the present educational system is also an important factor to be considered; e.g. shifting the school curriculum from routine learning to a more creative oriented approach. More emphasis must be laid on allocating time for general reading in the school curriculum and time tables so that students will invariably have to devote some time in reading books on their chosen subject.

Introducing Family Literacy Programs

This program is to ensure that families at the lowest ends of both literacy and economic will have opportunities to improve their education, economic and social well-being through quality family literacy programs. It is adopted in developed countries addresses the basic educational needs of parents and children from low income families by providing a unified program of

- Adult basic or secondary education and literacy programs for parents educational development.
- Assistance for parents to effectively promote their children's
- Early child hood education for children.

Main goals are

To help parents improve their literacy or basic educational skills.

To help parents become full partners in educating their children and

To assist children in reaching their full potential as learners.

Adult education focuses on increasing parents' literacy skills in reading. It will help their children's reading habit. The Family Literacy Program tries to promote reading within the family. As a part of each class curriculum, children's books on various levels are regularly read and discussed in class. The adults then borrow the books to read with their children. This project has been enthusiastically endorsed by the adults (parents), and feedback from the parents and children has been very positive. By providing a definite activity for parent and child, the literacy program helps to set the habits of family reading by providing integrated services for families, where children and their parents learn together to develop habits of lifelong learning; and support families committed to education and to economic independence.

Book prize as gift

Giving packets of good books to the child as a gift on festive occasions like birthday, New Year's Day and X-mas is another good tradition which promotes and sustains the reading habit in the child. Once child becomes interested in books, he would be excited on receiving books on such occasions and would like to develop a library of his own. There could be other school competitions also for gifting books. Books can be perfect gift in all occasion.

Book Markets

An important area in which the government can help to foster the reading habit is the establishment of book markets in all important towns. The way we make provision for vegetable markets, grain markets, cloth markets, etc., no book market is available. A lover of books has to go from shop to shop and locality to locality in order to buy books of his choice and interest. The book market should have attractive and specially designed stalls for youngsters. Such a market can also be a center for national integration, bringing under one roof publications in all major languages available in the country. It would also develop into an attractive social and educational center. Establishing book stalls at vital

points in collaboration with the agencies concerned (example railway station, post office, petrol shed and children parks) is another way of promoting reading habits.

Book Fairs and Festivals

Book weeks, Book fairs and special book releases organized by professional bodies are also important. They not only provide information about books but also help in fostering book-mindedness in the people. They lead prestige to the book as a commodity and create the kind of psychological atmosphere which is vital to the reading habit. Educational institutions also organize special library days such as library day, library week, and national reading month etc.

Using new formats in computer and mass media to promote reading

Mass media nowadays plays an important role in people's life. Television seems to have had a positive impact on children's reading habits despite the popular belief that it has a negative effect. Most of their favorite books have appeared as TV series, which brings up the possibility that this media could be very effectively promoting reading among children. (Yapa, 2004). Proper steps should be taken to promote the use of electronic media like TV, radio and video as a tool to promote reading. 'The importance of reading' and 'the reasons why we have to read books' etc can be produced as drama, an advertisement for the betterment of the public and documentaries which are both interesting and informative. These programmes should be telecasted at children's time on the educational channel and the video to be distributed among schools and libraries as a new educational material. Reading promotion activities can be carried out in many ways by using mass media. Telecasting newly published materials, reading lists of books for children, book reviews, book talks and list children's book awards are effective ways to encourage reading.

Developing the reading skills may be aided by the use of the web. A school in Clarkesville, U S A, recently won an award for using technology to enhance reading skills. There are actually huge numbers of stories online, and a wealth of web sites that can be accessed by children searching for their favourite authors and characters (Eyre, 2003). We can create a web site which provides link to series of stories. It will make the children easy access to sources and encourage them to read. The web design should be in an attractive manner.

Production of children's literature

Government encourages the publishers to create and develop easy, attractive and interesting books for children. It is urged that publishers put more emphasis on quality than commercialism. Government should take steps to bring down the cost of printing materials. Some schemes have to be devised and implemented to make printing materials available to the printers and publishers at a comparatively low rate with some subsidy facility to enable them to reduce the prices of their books and publications. There should be a central body set up for distribution of books and publications by the publishers and printers, so that they will be free from the grip of the established monopoly distributors. Make the good quality new printing techniques available to the printers especially for children's books to produce high quality attractive books. The academic world, the media and the publishing circles should try to help improve children's reading environment by spreading information about the importance and need for reading. Books for children have to be written on widely different fields of experience and knowledge within the range of children's comprehension and reading ability for all levels. The story books should be of diverse kinds such as animal stories, folk stories, stories related to child's environment etc. Measures have to be taken for the production of books of diverse kinds to suit different age levels. Educators and writers have to think of producing books for the disabled children, especially for the mentally backward also. Steps have to be taken to train writers to become more creative and awaken child's imagination and curiosity so that children begin to read for pleasure, which is a stepping stone for a life long interest in reading.

Arranging Competitions

Competitive programs can be arranged by schools, public libraries and various educational organizations to encourage the people to read. Arranging reading programs and reading camps which cover various activities with local writers and film shows and slides shows, reading contests, Book talks, Creative poetry, Quiz competitions, Puppet shows and drama activities related to reading interests should be organized.

Conclusion

It will be seen from the discussion so far that reading is the most important skill that the children learn in their development. Parents play a critical role in helping their children develop not only the ability to read but also to enjoy reading. Teachers, parents, librarians and other educational authorities are all involved in promoting the reading habit. Reading has to be strongly promoted as an interpersonal and social or family related activity. Unless reading develops as an automatic activity it can make little contribution to the intellectual growth of the student and hence to an individual's overall personality.

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