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A study on adolescents' perception towards reading in Golaghat district of Assam

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Abstract

Independent knowledge acquisition and lifelong learning are dependent on a culture of reading books. It instils in a person the necessary traits for personal growth, increasing their chances of expanding their mental horizons and becoming more successful in life. However, today's youth prefer to spend their free time on the internet, mobile phones, social media sites, television, entertainment programmes, and reading a book in a quiet corner of a library has become a thing of the past for most people. The present study was an attempt to explore the reading habits of adolescents (15-19 years) in Golaghat district of Assam. By using a multi-stage sampling procedure, a sample of 342 numbers of adolescents from eight schools of the East and South educational blocks of Golaghat district were drawn randomly from classes 9-12, considering the students belong to the age group of 15-19 years. A self-constructed questionnaire was prepared to collect the required information from all the respondents. The collected data were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS. The results revealed that adolescents' 'purpose of reading' had the highest mean value (Mean=23.88), followed by their 'preference for reading' (Mean=13.54), and factors militating against reading habits' (Mean=22).

Keywords: Adolescent, perception and reading habits

Introduction

Reading is one of the most important and beneficial habits that an individual can develop to foster their positive growth and development. It is a great way to keep the mind active, engaged, and healthy. Reading can facilitate in developing and providing a new perspective on life. Good books can have a positive impact on a person's life and lead one in the right direction. Reading is a source of learning and enjoyment too (Nation, 2005) [14]. It helps to improve vocabulary and language skills and is also a way to unwind and release stress; it boosts self-esteem; improves mood; shapes personality and also helps to develop one's imagination and provides a wealth of information. Books are indeed our best friends, as reading aids in the developing wisdom and reasoning abilities. Self-improvement comes from reading, and it is a pleasurable experience that cannot be described in words. Reading culture is important not only for individual development but also for the betterment of society and national development. Leisure reading makes a child adroit and nibbles to have a rational attitude, and without proper reading, a child cannot achieve the skills of patience, fraternity, progress, and equality. Furthermore, consistent reading habits give children free access to culture and empower them to become valuable members of the society.

When reading is done on a regular basis, it is considered a 'habit'. (Abeyrathna and Zainab, 2004) [1]. So, when reading becomes an involuntary action, it is referred to as a 'habit'. This habit is usually evaluated in terms of the number of books read, the frequency with which they are read, and the amount of time spent reading on an average (Wagner, 2002) [18]. Therefore, in order to instil this habit in someone, it is best to start at a young and tender age. So, every parent, educator, higher authority and academic institutions should strive to develop a good and smart reading habit at the school level.

Today, in the era of internet, a large number of teenagers have access to new technology and make full use of it (Kaur and Medury, 2011) [12]. As a result, they have discovered new ways to spend their time – posting on social networking sites, instant messaging on mobile phones, watching videos on the Internet and mobile, playing online games, and so on. At the same time, it has opened up multiple channels for transmission while also providing valuable information in a cost-effective and user-friendly manner. Electronic books and electronic resources are gradually replacing traditional books (Chaudhry and Low, 2009; Ramaiah, 2006) [5, 16].

The digital revolution has had a significant impact on how students read, write, and access information. The interest in reading in general and literature in particular, are said to have diminished in favour of image and computer-based media. Children may have grown up reading comic books and short stories, but as they reach adolescence, they are surrounded by numerous distractions, the most prominent of which is digital gadgets. Technology is primarily to blame for today's children's decline in reading habits. Digital devices, in some ways, are responsible for diverting children's attention away from their studies and reading habits. There is no doubt that staying updated with the technology is critical, but the addiction that the present generation has for electronic gadgets and devices might turn out to be dangerous. Reading can be an excellent tool for improving children's cognitive abilities in today's world, where their attention span is decreasing due to increased use of the internet, social media, and video games. Furthermore, reading should be enjoyable rather than frustrating, and no one should force them to do so. Because children are human, they may resent the "excessive pressure" to read and seek alternatives. The goal is to make reading a habit rather than a school assignment that they must complete at all costs.

Justification: With the rapid growth of electronic media and the increased use of social media, the reading habit is declining at an alarming rate, particularly among adolescents. Furthermore, students are forced to deal with a plethora of requirements and must divide their time between academic and co-curricular activities. Instead of reading, many adolescents prefer to spend their leisure time watching television, playing games on computers, tablets, and surfing the web and social networks. The shift is significant, and it affects an entire generation that spends the majority of its time staring at a screen. The main aim of the research is to explore the reading habits of late adolescents (15-19years), as children

during this period start navigating their own lives, their curiosity increases and they strive to increase their knowledge of the world.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in the Golaghat district of Assam. A multistage sampling design was used to carry out the study, where a sample of 342 numbers of adolescents from eight schools of the East and South educational blocks of Golaghat district were drawn randomly from classes 9-12, considering the students belong to the age group of 15-19 years.

Tools used: A self-constructed questionnaire was used to elicit information on the reading habits of adolescents.

Scoring: Mean and Standard deviation was used to measure the areas of perception of reading.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Distribution of areas based on adolescents' perception towards reading

Area	Mean	Std. Deviation
*Purpose of reading	23.88	2.558
*Preference for reading	13.54	1.696
*Factors militating against reading habits	22.00	3.482
Average mean	19.80	

From Table 1, it can be interpreted that adolescents' purpose of reading (i.e., their reading motive), and the militating factors against reading habits strongly determines adolescents' reading habits and their perception towards reading, since their mean values are higher than average mean.

Table 2: Distribution of respondent's perception towards reading

Dimensions	Sl. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	SA + A (%)	Undecided (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Purpose of reading	1.	I read to score good grades in the examination	31.0	51.2	82.2	7.9	7.6	2.3
	2.	I read for self-development.	44.4	47.1	91.5	5.6	1.8	1.2
	3.	I read to expand my horizon of knowledge.	43.9	49.4	93.3	5.0	1.8	-
	4.	I read for pleasure and relaxation.	21.9	58.2	80.1	16.7	3.2	-
	5.	I read to overcome my boredom.	1.2	40.6	41.8	13.2	35.4	9.6
	6.	I read to impress my parents.	-	6.7	6.7	11.4	53.2	28.7
Preference for reading	7.	The appearance of a book (thickness, font size, illustrations, etc.) determines my preference for reading.	10.2	43.0	53.2	13.7	24.6	8.5
	8.	I usually read a book that is recommended by my friends or by someone who has read it earlier.	8.2	50.6	58.8	16.7	21.9	2.6
	9.	I am more interested in reading my textbooks and class notes.	23.4	45.9	69.3	19.9	8.2	2.6
	10.	I am more interested in reading other books than my school textbooks.	15.8	19.9	35.7	29.5	31.3	3.5
Factors militating against reading habits	11.	I spend much time on watching television, playing games, etc.	-	55.0	55	16.4	25.1	3.5
	12.	I spend much time on social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.)	-	50.6	50.6	10.8	35.4	3.2
	13.	The reading materials I have an access to are not interesting.	19.0	52.9	71.9	14.6	13.5	-
	14.	Whenever I try to concentrate on reading, I go to an imaginary world.	9.1	36.5	45.6	17.0	33.0	4.4

The findings revealed that adolescents' reading purposes had the highest mean value (23.88). It was found that the majority of the adolescents (93.3 percent) read to expand their horizon of knowledge, with the highest mean value (4.32). This can be supported by the study of Thanuskodi *et al.* (2014) ^[17], where it was found that more than half of the students read to increase their general knowledge.

It was found that the majority of the adolescents (91.5 percent) read for the purpose of self-development. This could be due to the fact that self-development is closely related to self-awareness, and reading allows one to take an honest look at the areas of one's life that need improvement, allowing one to know who they truly are, what their true values are, and where they want to go in life. It was also found that the majority of the respondents (82.2 percent) read to score good grades in examinations. This is also consistent with the findings of Oriogu *et al.* (2017) ^[15], where it was discovered that the majority of students (86.7percent) agreed or strongly agreed that they read for self-development and 81.1 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they read for examination purposes.

It was discovered that the majority (80.1 percent) of adolescents read for pleasure and relaxation. This could be because many children had the habit of buying books and they are likely to read the books they bought. This can be supported by the findings of Clark and Poulton (2011) ^[7], where it was discovered that children who have their own books enjoy reading more and read for pleasure more frequently. This is also consistent with the findings of Clark (2011) ^[6, 7], which discovered that young people who enjoyed reading were six times more likely than those who did not enjoy reading.

It was found that 41.8 percent of adolescents read to overcome boredom. The spread of the pandemic COVID-19 in recent years has deprived children of their education, sports activities, and all friendship and relational contacts, making them feel bored at home. This could be one of the reasons why adolescents began to read more books to relieve boredom. This is consistent with the findings of Balan *et al.* (2019) ^[4], where it was found that 47.2 percent of adolescents agreed that reading helped them to overcome boredom.

It was found that only 18.1 percent of adolescents read just to impress their parents. This could be because, in comparison to their childhood years, they had gained maturity and thus they read to focus on developing themselves in a real sense, instead of just trying to impress their parents.

The findings revealed that the majority of the adolescents (69.3 percent) were more interested in reading textbooks and class notes. This is consistent with the findings of Ameyaw and Anto (2018) ^[2], where it was discovered that 62.0 percent of students preferred to read lecture notes and another 25.0 percent preferred to read textbooks.

It was found that only 35.7 percent were interested in reading other books. This could be because they purchase fewer non-academic books and instead concentrate on academic books. Also, some parents may wish for their children to concentrate solely on their studies. This can be supported by the findings of Mngoma (1997) ^[13], who found that 27.8 percent of parents want their children to focus on their school work. Furthermore, it is possible that they had fewer extrinsic motivators in their life (i.e., parents and teachers were less likely to encourage them to read other books besides school textbooks). Cost may be a factor that prevents some of the

parents from investing in additional books. Some parents may rather prefer to spend their money on guide books or other reference materials that will help their children with their studies.

It was found that 58.8 percent of the adolescents preferred to read books recommended by someone who has read it earlier. This might be due to the influence of their peers or siblings. This can be supported by the findings of Cooc and Kim (2017) ^[8], where it was discovered that children's reading outcome is linked to the average level of reading skills displayed by the peers with whom they interact.

It was discovered that the appearance of a book was a deciding factor for 53.2 percent of the adolescents in determining their preference for reading. This can be supported by the study of Gibson (2011) ^[11], where it was discovered that the front cover and back-of-the-book summary are the most influential factors that students consider when selecting a book

The results highlighted that the factors militating against adolescents' reading habits had a mean value of 22. More than half of the adolescents (55 percent) admitted spending a significant amount of time watching television or playing video games. This can be supported by the study of Wright (2011) ^[19], where it was found that spending much time playing video games had affected respondents' reading habits and academic achievement. This is also consistent with the findings of Desmurget (2011) ^[9], where it was found that time spent watching TV replaces reading activities, and reduces children's interest in reading.

It was found that 56.7 percent of adolescents agreed they spent a lot of time on social media. This could be because the majority of adolescents nowadays own a mobile phone and have access to social media sites. This is consistent with the findings of Dukper *et al.* (2018) ^[10], who discovered that students' excessive use of social media has a statistically significant impact on their reading culture and, to some extent, their academic performance. This can also be supported by the findings of (Annamalai and Muniandy, 2013) ^[3], which revealed that students spend a sufficient amount of time in surfing the internet, rather than investing their time in reading.

According to the findings, 71.9 percent of adolescents agreed or strongly agreed that the reading materials available to them were uninteresting. This could be because the books in the library were old and not in very good condition. This can be supported with the findings of the survey of the National Library and Documentation Service Board (NLDB), Sri Lanka in 2002, where it was found that the condition of the school libraries was not encouraging as book collections were old (Abeyrathna and Zainab, 2004) ^[11]. This is also consistent with the study of Mngoma (1997) ^[13], who found that 37.5 percent of students agreed that the materials available in the library were either not at all suitable or fairly suitable.

In addition, 45.6 percent of adolescents agreed that when they try to concentrate on reading, their attention is diverted to an imaginary world. This could be a result of distractions from the opposite sex or their love relationships, which they might have formed recently in their adolescence. This is consistent with the findings of Oriogu *et al.* (2017) ^[15], who discovered that distraction from opposite sex, a lack of interesting reading materials, and a lot of time spent on social media and television are all factors that work against students' reading habits.

Conclusion

Adolescents are concerned in the world of competition, and they believe it is necessary to raise their bar excessively high in order to meet the requirements set by educational institutions. However, in the era of internet and technological advancements, today's youth have access to new technology and they spend a significant amount of time in social networking sites, mobile phones, computers, etc., which in turn is likely to affect their reading habits. Therefore, every parent, educator and the academic institutions should strive to instil a good habit of reading at an early age in children, so that it lasts for lifetime. Parents should encourage their children to read and provide them with a variety of books of their interests. Educational institutions need to raise awareness about the importance of reading habit as it has an impact on the future of individuals.

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