READING HABITS AND FACTORS AFFECTING READING HABITS OF ADVANCED LEVEL GRADE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is regarded as an absolutely necessary 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. Therefore, teachers, parents, librarians and all the other parties concerned with shaping the emotional, cultural and educational growth and development of students must inculcate and nurture in them good reading habits which in turn will stimulate and inspire their interests in reading.

According to Wagner (2002) the activity of reading is regarded as a habit when it is repeatedly carried out and reading habit is often considered in terms of the amount of material that has been read, the frequency of reading and as well as the average time spent on reading. According to Eze (2004), reading habit is the process of building up positive reading attitude among children and students over a period of time which requires a lot of perseverance and determination.

In Sri Lanka, the National Library and Documentation Service Board carried out a broad survey in 2002 and found the following situations - reading habits of students were poor, the condition of the school libraries was not encouraging as book collections were old and most students read "light" materials such as magazines, novels, comic books and newspapers (Abeyrathna & Zainab, 2004).Recent studies done worldwide have shown that, modern day children do not show that much of interest in reading due to a number of reasons; the pivotal reasons being the mass media and social media. The online environment has contributed in bringing down the quality reading time, browsing through valuable reading materials as well as use of language skills (Bamidele, 2020).

In the modern context teachers and parents often complain that the children have poor reading habits and it might be a reason for poor academic performances. Many studies have shown that reading habits of students have a great influence on student performances in academic activities (Owusu-Acheaw, 2014). Experiencing the same scenario at AIS school it is clearly noticeable that there is a decrease in library books borrowing rate, students tend to spend less time on reading, the AIS library is not used up to the maximum despite its available facilities and a decline in exam grades and students are not performing up to their potential especially the students who are in exam preparation grades.

Teachers and librarians have a major role to play in developing and inculcating positive and good reading habits among school children and especially the children who are in exam level classes in order to help them perform well academically.

The purpose of this research was to identify the reading habits among Advanced Level students of AIS International School and suggest appropriate measures for improvisation.

The specific objectives of the study are focused on the following aspects.
1. To find out the types of information materials read by A/L students.
2. To find out the purposes of reading.
3. To find out the frequency and time allocated for reading
4. To determine the preferred places and formats for reading
5. To find out the factors influencing reading habits.
6. To find out students' attitudes and perception toward reading.

2. METHODOLOGY

The target population of the study was the first year & second year Advanced Level students of Asian International School, following the EDEXCEL syllabus in two subject streams, namely science and commerce. The study was conducted as a descriptive survey using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire contained fifteen questions out of which fourteen questions were close ended questions while one question was open ended where the student's perception and attitudes towards reading were assessed. Total population sampling (n=120) was carried out during the first semester of 2020. Data were analyzed by Descriptive statistics using MS excel 2007.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The response rate of the study was 66% (80 respondents). Sample demography shows fairly equal number of female students follow the commerce stream (22) and Science stream (23). Out of the male students 16 followed the commerce stream while 19 followed the science stream. Overall, the number of female students (45) were greater than the male students (35) in the study.

Table 1 : Types of materials read by Advanced Level students

Type of material	Total responses	% Frequency
School textbooks	40	50.00
Subject related magazines	14	17.50
Subject related books	34	42.50
Story books	51	63.75
Newspapers	12	15.00
E-books	26	32.50
Web pages	39	48.75
E-articles	33	41.25
Others	02	2.50

Students were asked to indicate five types of material they read most without any order of preference. Frequency of responses were tabulated. Results (Table 1) indicates that majority of the students (63.75%) are interested in reading Story books.

Students have close preference for school textbooks (50%) and web pages (48.75%). Growing interest on subject related books and e-articles was observed. Only a few have interest in reading subject related magazines (17%) and News papers (15%). In addition 2.5% are more interested in reading notes, handouts given by teachers.

Students were asked to identify the types of 'library material' they prefer to read. The results show that 76.28% prefer to read story books of the type of fiction (66.25%), thriller, comics, romance, science fiction and classics (18.75%) in decreasing order. Out of the total responses 23.71% have indicated that they read other material of the type of non-fiction, biographies, general knowledge.

Similar findings were reported by Kutay (2014) on Turkish High School students in London. 89.7% of the students prefer to read storybooks which consist with novels/fiction/ non-fiction, etc., while 70.2% prefer magazines, while 66.5% of the students like to read materials on websites.

Table 2 shows the different purposes why students tend to read. A majority of 72.50% says they read for leisure, pleasure and relaxation followed by 61.25% who read to gather knowledge in general areas of interest. Important to note that 77.5% read for different academic purposes such as finding information for assignments or gathering extra knowledge on subjects. The other reasons denoted by 3.75% were, simply love to read and intrigued by famous authors.

Table 2 : The purpose of reading among Advanced Level students

Purpose of reading	Total responses	% Frequency

Gather information for assignments	33	41.25
Gather extra knowledge on subjects	29	36.25
For leisure/ pleasure/ relaxation	58	72.50
Gather knowledge in general areas of interest	49	61.25
Other	3	3.75

How often do students get engaged in reading and the time spent on reading at a time is
shown in Table 3 and 4 respectively.

Table 3: Frequency of reading among Advanced Level students

Reading frequency	No. of students	%
Almost daily	22	27.50
Once a week	8	10.00
Several times a week	17	21.25
Whenever I need occasionally	31	38.75
Other	2	2.50

Most of the respondents (38.75%) denoted that they cannot define the time precisely but they read whenever they need occasionally. Interestingly, 27.50% of the readers tend to engage in reading almost daily. The 'other' category which is the least commented that if they got hold of a good book to read they engage in reading.

Table 4 : Time spent on reading at a time

Time spent on reading	No. of students	%
Less than 30 minutes	6	7.50
30 minutes to an hour	28	35.00
Few hours	17	21.25
Depends on the purpose	28	35.00
Other	1	1.25

Equal responses were received for two statements. Accordingly most students prefer to spend 30 min – 1 hr for reading, or the time cannot be clearly defined but depends on the purpose of reading.

The places and formats of material preferred by students for reading are also assessed. The results revealed that the majority of the respondents,72 in number (90%), prefer to read at home. 40 students (50%) preferred the school library and 32 respondents (40%) expressed they would like to read while travelling whereas, 6 numbers (7.5%) would like to go to other libraries as and when they want. The numbers that prefer to use the school library is relatively less since the Advanced Level students do not get any free periods during school hours. A study conducted on reading habits among higher secondary school students in Tamil Nadu by Sivasubramanian and Gomathi, (2019) too shows that most of the students preferred reading at home (57.10%), and the rate of respondents used the school library for reading was comparatively less (22.10%). Further, Hassen, (2016) too found out that secondary school children in Addis Ababa and Dessie preferred to read at home.

Findings with regard to preferred material format, revealed that 56% of the students preferred reading print books and 16% preferred reading by using a computer/ laptop. Although, 28% preferred reading by using iphone/ smartphones/ tabs, etc due to easy access, retrieval and mobility, they prefer to lay their hands on traditional print book hardcopies since they find it difficult to stay focused on electronic devices for a longer period and it is strenuous.

It is quite evident that students not only read for different reasons but also display different levels of enthusiasm during their reading activities and there are many factors that motivated them to read. Table 5 shows the factors which motivated the students to get engaged in more reading. Self motivation/ self need and recommendations from friends were found to be equally important factors that influence reading among students (65-66%). Teachers and parents have comparatively less influence on engaging students in reading (20-22%).

Table 5 : Factors which motivate students to read

Motivational factor	No of responses	% Frequency
School assignments	33	41.25
Recommendations from friends	52	65.00
Advise by Teachers	18	22.50
Advice by Parents	16	20.00
Need for information for myself personally	53	66.25
Other	6	7.50

Table 6 : Factors which hinder reading habits of students

Hindering factor	No of responses	% Frequency
Lack of time	71	88.7
Inadequate material	16	20.0
Place not attractive	17	21.2
Reading difficulties	2	2.50
Other	2	2.50

As shown in Table 6, 88% of the respondents agreed that lack of time is a major factor that keeps them away from reading due to busy schedule in school especially. Only 20% commented that place is not attractive for them to do their reading or inadequacy of material keep them away from reading. The responses under the 'other' category were watching TV, playing video games as reasons that prevent them from reading. A similar survey done by Chettri and Rout (2013) found out that watching TV and playing computer games were the two most preferred leisure activity over reading.

Table 7: Perception about reading among students

Statement	No of students	%
Very much enjoyable	31	38.75
Quite Enjoyable	23	28.75
Average	13	16.25
Enjoyable, Only when it is my choice	7	8.75
Not at all enjoyable	6	7.5

When a total of 80 students were asked about their perception on reading, most (67.5%) were of the view of that reading is enjoyable (table 7).

The open-ended question yielded many responses from students on their attitudes towards reading and they were broadly categorized as follows. 1. Good reading habits improve writing skills, 2. Improves knowledge, 3 Improves vocabulary 4. Sparks imagination and creativity 5. Better thinking and analysis when answering questions 6. Releases stress 7. Excessive reading for pleasure eats up time.

4. CONCLUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fairly satisfactory reading habits were observed among Advanced Level grade students of the current study. A majority has accepted that reading is enjoyable and they read mostly for leisure, pleasure, relaxation. However, they also read for academic purposes and for general interest. Apparently, story books were the most preferred reading material in relation to the purpose. However, academic text books are also referred and online resources shows a growing interest among students. Most prefer to read from printed material and find their homes to be the more comfortable space for reading. Students tend to read whenever they want and the time spent for reading depends on the purpose. Self-need and recommendation from friends were the common motivational factors for reading whereas, lack of time was regarded as a hindering factor. Most students perceived that reading can affect their academic performances positively. Based on the findings, recommendations were made on how to improve the reading habits of the Advanced Level students of AIS

International School,

1.   The school library should encourage the students to use the library more by amending working hours of the library so that the students may feel free to utilize the leisure time in a useful manner, enhancing the ambience of the library, developing a suitable and attractive collection including e- resources and introducing diverse lending facilities.
2.   As recommendation from friends is a factor that influence students to read, the library should introduce innovative programmes such as reading clubs, reading circles, competitions where students can socialize and collaborate.
3.   Sufficient budgetary allocations can be made by the school management to acquire age appropriate pleasure reading material which can be used to improve students' vocabulary, quality of writing, creativity, imagination, etc.

Further studies should be carried out to assess the relationship between reading habits and academic performances of students.

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