

Identifying the Reading Habits among Secondary School Students in Northern and Eastern Provinces in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Reading removes educational barriers, allowing more equal chances in education by promoting language development, intellectual training and enhancing the possibility of adjustment to one's personal situations. Education is a deliberate act and a systematic process of learning and it generate knowledge, attitudes, skills and critical, innovation mind through the practice of reading. Bamberger (1975) mentioned that the development of life-long reading interests and reading habits is a constant process and begins at home, improves systematically in the school, culture and public education. The school pupils' interest in reading books and their settings show the type and the procedure of acquiring information. This study addressed the main situation of reading and reading preferences of secondary school students in Northern and Eastern Provinces, Sri Lanka. This study is very important because a research of this nature has not been conducted in Northern and Eastern provinces in recent past. Survey method was applied for this research and structured questionnaire was prepared and data collected from the sample of students which selected from various schools in Northern and eastern provinces. People of Northern and Eastern provinces suffered due to the conflict situation for more than three decades. National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB) conducted this survey with the objective of understanding the situation of reading habit of school children in Northern and Eastern provinces. It helps to understand the situation of reading habit and plan solutions to the problems related to reading habit and library facilities in Northern and Eastern provinces. Findings of this survey will be helpful for the future programme of educational development programmes.

Key Words: reading habits, acquiring information, secondary school students

Introduction

Reading habit is one of the fundamental building blocks of learning as well as reading proficiency is the key to knowledge. Through reading, information can be obtained through reading printed and non-printed type of materials. For instance, books, magazines, electronic journals etc. Walia & Sinha (2014) assert that reading is regarded as a process, a mode of thinking and a kind of real experience, and it involves many complex skills: the ability to perceive printed words, to skim for information and then perhaps to read intensively. A Wan Dollah et al. (2017) specified that reading habits play important role in enhancing students' academic performance in schools. In order to face the 21st century, education has to prepare these learners to adapt to social and technological changes that are taking place at an unprecedented rate. In this context reading especially is a resource for continued education, for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Reading habits are calculated as how much a person read, how often do they read, when do they read and what do they read. Therefore, they differ in the pattern of reading habits. (Bashir &Matto, 2012).

In Sri Lanka education is provided free of charge from kindergarten to university level since mid-1940s and is given in the mother tongue of the pupil. The constitution of Sri Lanka treats education as a fundamental right, making primary education compulsory for children aged five year and above. Therefore, reading and reading habits are more important role playing on Sri Lankan education system. Generally reading and reading habits are used to decide different attribute of the readers.

National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB) conducted this survey with the objective of understanding the situation of reading habit of school children in Sri Lanka. The first stage of this survey was conducted in other provinces except Northern and Eastern provinces in 2010.

This survey conducted in Northern and Eastern provinces is the second stage on the survey. This is the first survey conducted on reading habit of school children after war situation prevailed in Northern and Eastern provinces. People of northern and Eastern provinces suffered due to the conflict situation for more than three decades. Presently the peace has been restored in these areas and this is a good opportunity for expediting the socio economic and educational development. Then this survey is very important because it helps to understand the situation of reading habit and plan solutions to the problems related to reading habit and library facilities in Northern and Eastern provinces in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

The survey research method was used for this study. This study was based on the latest information revealed from the survey on Reading Habits of School Children in Northern and Eastern Provinces conducted by National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB) in 2016. The primary sampling units (the schools) were selected randomly stratified by sector, location of the school (urban, rural and estate sector), ethnicity (Sinhala, Tamil and Muslims), category of school (girls, boys, mixed/grade of schools) and the number of students. Secondly students were selected randomly with probability proportion to size on the basis of Grades. Altogether 2240 students (grade 6 & above) were selected for the survey from 106 schools in eight districts in Northern and Eastern provinces. Data collection was done by survey research method using structured questionnaire and done by trained National Library staff members and teacher-librarians in the relevant areas. Data analysis was done by the author using the Microsoft Excel.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine understand the situation of reading habit of secondary school children in Northern and Eastern provinces in Sri Lanka. Other objectives are determining the level and status of reading habits, identifying the facilities available in schools, identifying the types of reading materials, identifying the obstacles faced by school children in reading and identifying the suggestions, recommendations for those problems.

Results and Discussions

Basic Information and Demographic Characteristics of the Study and Students

According to the survey, considering about gender distribution of the students in the sample majority of the respondents are female which account for 50.72% of the total while 48.70% of the respondents are male. Data regarding the religion of the majority of the respondents are Hinduism (48.2%). A noticeable rate of Islamic 30% from the total can also be identified. The rate of Buddhist respondents is 12% from the total and others are Catholics. The reason behind this fact is that the research was conducted in Northern and Eastern provinces in Sri Lanka. The survey was conducted among school children and hence it is clear that the average age of the respondents is 14.28 years. Minimum age of the respondents have been recorded as 10 while owing to the above situation the maximum age has been recorded as 20years.

Questions were raised regarding the speaking and writing ability of the respondent students in different languages. In Sri Lanka ethnicity, religion and language are closely related to each other. Language proficiency of student was also explored. 53.8% of all students were capable of speaking Tamil only and 6.9% of the students can handling all three languages including Tamil, Sinhala and English. But Sinhala language handling accuracy is very poor. Therefore that system automatically creates a language barrier among students and it may occur to gain language obstacles among school children. As well as 32.4% of the total were capable of writing in both English and Tamil. It should be noticed that 25.6% of the respondent students were capable of writing in all the three languages while 53 have not mentioned their response regarding their ability in writing with the three languages.

Reading Material and Reading Habits

Data was gathered regarding the language used by the respondents mostly for the students are reading in Tamil (86.3%) and least number of the students reading Sinhala (12.22%) and English (1.43%) respectively. In this study we noticed that the respondents' preference of different mode of media such as printing materials, television, radio and computer related items. Majority of the respondents have given their first priority to the printing materials (49%). According to the data school students in Northern and Eastern provinces preferred to read books: academic, religious, reference books, novels and short stories, Magazines, CD, internet web pages and other reading materials to get pleasure through reading for enhancing their learning for life and attitude to gain and construct new knowledge. Therefore students' responses indicates that their reading habit is mainly confined to books. In this study over 500 names of books were given by both Tamil and Sinhala students in all grades in two provinces. Ramayanaya, Mahabaratham, Thennaliraman, Madolduwa, gamperaliya, Ambayaluwo and Amma were very popular books among students. Sothi, Martin Wickramasinghe, KumarathungaMunidasa, Bharathithasan, Barathiyar and Abdul Kalam were very popular authors (Local and Foreign) among the students irrespective of the grade of the student and province.

Considering about reading other materials or books except text books of school students, the data reflected that the majority of school students (77%) were continuing reading other books except the text books followed by 23% were not. It is clear that students need an extra knowledge and experiences to understand to text books, lessons also think to practical way of that.

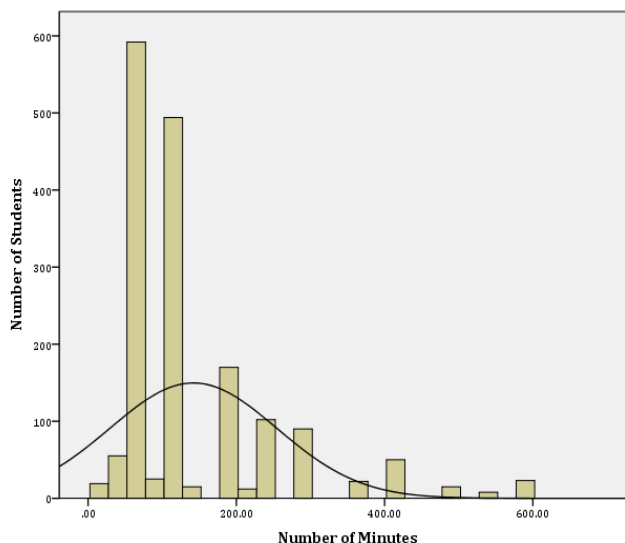


Figure 1: Number of Hours Spent by Respondents

Source: Survey on Reading Habits of School Children, 2016

The Figure 01 illustrates data regarding the number of hours spent by students for reading other books, it is clear that the minimum time allocated by the respondents 15 minutes while the maximum time is 600m (9 hours) and average time spent is 142 minutes. The study was inquired regarding the students preference of using the library. Majority of the students have selected **School library** as the source of obtaining reading materials as their first preference (86.0%). Second preference is **Class library** (42.7%) and others are **Book corner** (23.4%), **Box of books**. Public library (68.1%), children society library (28.8%) and young society library (18.6%) are other libraries in addition to the school library using by students. Therefore we need a pay attention on develop to school library system.

Students’ Attitudes on Reading

The study was raised from the students regarding the purposes of reading. Majority have identified is improving knowledge as their first purpose (51.3%) and second purpose is passing examinations through reading (37.7%) and third one is reading use as for fun and getting entertainment.

Table 1: Ways of Searching Books from the Library by Respondents

Preference	1st	2nd	3rd
Checking the Library Index	523 (23.4%)	531 (23.8%)	332 (14.9%)
With the Assistance of Library Staff	840 (37.6%)	613 (27.4%)	456 (20.4%)

With the Assistance of Friends	212 (9.5%)	578 (25.9%)	665 (29.8%)
Checking the Library Rack	589 (26.4%)	395 (17.7%)	566 (25.3%)

Source: Survey on Reading Habit of School Children, 2016

We considered about their other purposes of reading books in the library, They using library for doing creative works, for competitions, for learning and getting relaxation. The study was data gathered regarding different attitudes toward reading within the respondents. Majority of the respondents have agreed that reading is more important than having fun with friends (84.1%) and significant thing is students have agreed that reading gives happiness (89.5%) also 73.7% of the total have disagreed that reading is tiresome.

Obtaining Reading Materials

In this study revealed about the different ways of obtaining reading material that they require. Students' first preference of obtaining their reading materials is from library. It account of 60.2%. Their second and third preferences are obtaining the books from friends and family members. The study was considered about other ways of obtaining reading materials required by them and the relevant data pertaining to their needs from their relatives and siblings.

Reading Environment and Obstacles for Reading

Questions were raised from the respondents about the obstacles that they are facing on reading environment. According to data thus collected, it is clear that majority of the respondents have mentioned their first obstacle as insufficiency in time for reading (27.5%). When analysing the second preference of the respondents, they mentioned that majority have again selected insufficiency in time for reading and it accounts for 22.3% of the total. That is a major obstacle they are facing in their reading environment. Students have mentioned those language barriers, economic barriers, insufficiency in reading materials and some difficulties in home environment as the other problems they faced by when reading. As we considered about reasons for not purchasing reading materials by students, majority mentioned finance difficulties as the main reason for not purchasing books. Northern and Eastern provinces have different types of economic, social, educational and health issues due to the war situation. It was critically affective to the change of lifestyle of people of Northern and Eastern provinces. Those barriers are always reflecting their lives as well as the study provided suggestions for encouraging students' interest for reading.

Table 2: Being Supported for Encouraging Respondents' Interest for Reading

Activity	Yes	No	AING	Total
Having a reading group	1622 (72.6%)	515(23.1 %)	97(4.3%)	2234 (100%)
Books being printed attractively	1593 (71.3%)	511(22.9 %)	130(5.8%)	2234 (100%)
Having reading competitions	1933 (86.5%)	220(9.8%)	81(3.6%)	2234 (100%)
Do you think that having an opportunity to express your ideas	1524 (68.2%)	560(25.1 %)	150(6.7%)	2234 (100%)

Source: Survey on Reading Habits of School Children, 2016

According to the table majority that account for 86.5% of the total agree with the fact that having reading competitions would be supportive in improving the interest for reading while least number of respondents that account for 68.2% of the total agree with the fact that having an opportunity to express their own ideas about the book would improve the interest for reading among the respondents. We gathered data from school children in Northern and Eastern provinces about other ways in improving their interest for reading. Then the respondents think that celebrating the library day, having internet facilities in the school library, maintaining a good environment around the library, library exhibitions, religious songs and using the public library would be supportive in improving their interest for reading.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conclusion based on the survey is mainly on the different areas covered by the study. Following recommendations are proposed based on the study for implementation for the benefit school children in Northern and Eastern provinces.

- Attitude on the importance of reading should be improved among the students through various awareness programmes.
- Encourage students to maintain a book collection their houses because a large number of students have no book collection in their houses.
- The proficiency of English language among student is not adequate and this seriously affects the reading of children. Therefore, the English language proficiency of students should be improved.
- Adequate training should be provided to school librarians, teacher librarians or the teachers in charge of school libraries on library management and information technology.
- Students should be made aware on how to use the library properly through user education programmes.
- Information facilities and other library facilities should be improved and students should be motivating to use information technology tools as well as library functions.
- Public libraries the mostly utilized library by students apart from the school library and therefore a close relation should be maintained by school libraries with public library and thereby make aware the libraries about information needs of students.

The study has revealed very important facts relevant to the students reading and library usage. It is clear in general that school libraries in Northern and Eastern provinces need rapid improvement. It is the duty and responsibility of the educationalists, child psychologists, teachers and parents to come out with their suggestions on improving reading habits of school children.

The library system in these provinces faced serious difficulties due to the conflict situation. Therefore library resource development in school libraries, human resource development, introduction of new technology, changing of attitudes of student's information literacy development of students are needed in these areas.

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