

**ENHANCING EDUCATION THROUGH READING HABITS:  
AN ASSESSMENT OF READING HABITS AMONG ARTS COLLEGE STUDENTS IN  
TIRUCHIRAPALLI CITY, TAMILNADU.**

**Authors**

V.Vijay Harish, Ph.D. Research Scholar and Dr.K.Premkumar, Assistant Professor,  
P.G. and Research Department of English,  
Bishop Heber College (Autonomous), Trichy -620 017, TamilNadu.  
(Affiliated to Bharathidasan university, Trichy)

**I. Introduction**

“Reading makes a full man, conference a ready man and writing an exact man,” says Francis Bacon. It is well known fact that when there were no televisions, handsets and computers, people spent hours reading books and travelled to lands far away in their minds. The problem is that with time, people have lost their passion to read because there are several other exciting options available, aside from books these days. Reading offers a productive approach to improve vocabulary and word power. The acquisition of reading skills does not only affect or improve confidence in language arts, but also in other subjects such as social studies, science, and mathematics and so on. Poor reading skill can make a child develop poor attitude in behaviour and it can create self-esteem problems later in life. “It (reading) requires effort, concentration, and attention. In exchange, it offers the stimulus to and the fruit of thought and feeling....The electronic media, on the other hand, tend to be torpid. Despite the existence of good television, fine writing on the Internet, and video games that test logic, the electronic media by and large invite inert reception” (Vatz).

Due to technological development, reading habits are changing. In our society today, while technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is fast vanishing into thin air. Students now lack the skill of reading, instead they spend more hours on electronic media. Ganguly has observed, “Browsing the net, playing with funky handsets and passing non-stop SMSs seem to be the order of the day, and thereby making reading a book or any other piece of written material in a quiet or peaceful corner of a library or home become an archaic idea for most school children and adults” (4). Shabi and Udofia have also commented that “active learning from books is better than passive learning such as watching televisions and playing games” (259).

In the present Indian context and in a specific way in Tamilnadu, the youngsters are becoming more and more captivated and even addicted to the media, the internet, and software consisting of games and animation, to meet their needs for information and entertainment. With the dazzling advances in technology and the alluring diversity of the media, it is no wonder that a young person’s fancy turns more readily to such attractions than to books. Among the four language skills, the ability to read academic text is considered one of the most important skills that university students need to acquire (Levine, 2000). To understand and complete the large amount of reading material by means of contributory reading strategies is essential for college students. Unfortunately, many students enter universities unprepared for the reading demands placed upon them. Reading requires reader’s coordination of attention, memory, perceptual and comprehension processes.

Rajeswary, the Educational Officer (academics), writes in a CBSE circular dated 10<sup>th</sup> January 2013 that in order to foster the ability and desire to read among students, CBSE has written to schools to espouse, in letter and spirit, the mandate outlined by the National Curriculum Framework 2005. The CBSE circular states:

While reading is readily accepted as a focus area for language education, school syllabi are burdened with information-absorbing and memorizing tasks, so much so that the pleasure of reading for its own sake is missed out. Opportunities for individualized reading need to be built at all stages in order to promote a culture of reading, and teachers must set the example of being members of such a culture. (1)

This curriculum framework is applicable to college students too. The habit of reading, when nurtured from childhood, moulds and enriches the growing minds, shapes their nascent values and develops the right perspectives. Reading is timeless and is recognized as an art, capable of transforming an individual's life and an entire society. Thus, the paper traces out through a pilot study of Arts college students' fostering ability and desire to read in Tiruchirappalli city.

### **A. The Context of the Research**

The system of education in India and in particular in Tamilnadu tends to promote a rote memory attitude among students to gain grades and marks. The students are asked to memorize passages or even mathematical calculations which prevent them from free thinking and analyzing. Every parent wants their sons and daughters to get educated having the aspiration of making them speak the languages fluently both English and Tamil. The focus of this study is on the reading habits of Arts College students with reference to their love for books. The paper explores the student's attitude towards books, their preference in spending their time out of college hours, the motivating factor for reading habits, leisure reading habits and determines whether these are related to reading ability and other related competencies.

### **B. Selection of Sampling and Sample Size**

Random sampling method is adopted for this study, as sixty participants are randomly selected from three Arts Colleges in and around Tiruchirappalli City. The population of this study comprise of Arts College students. Twenty participants were randomly drawn from each of the selected colleges. This gave a total of 60 students who have taken part in this study. In terms of gender distribution, 30 of the participants were female while 30 were male.

## **II. Review of Literature**

Since India is becoming a chatting society rather than a reading society, reading habit has been a subject of investigation in librarianship, journalism, education, psychology, literature and history. Reading is important for everybody in order to cope with new knowledge in a changing world – that of the technological age. Various researches have been done in India and abroad about the boon and whither of reading habits and the technological impacts on it. But then, each research reveals the impacts depending on the nature, place and the respondents.

Menaxi Jain says that inculcating good reading habits in students has always been a concern for all stakeholders in education. "It is not enough to offer children what is considered a

good selection of reading text but a conscious attempt needs to be made to help children to relate to the text in a meaningful way” (1). Parashar stresses the point that good reading habits are a source of wonder and joy for children and adults alike. “Reading does not mean reading for leisure only but also for information, analysis and synthesis of knowledge” (Parashar 1).

Irvin describes the reading process as “The interaction of what is in the head with what is on the page within a particular context that causes students to comprehend what they read” (45). McKool’s research has found that there is a “strong relationship between the amount of out-of-school reading a student engages in and his or her success in school” (111). It has been found by Hughes-Hassell that “students’ academic levels do not remain the same with no growth, but their academic levels actually drop if they do not read in their free time” (39).

Panigrahi opines that “reading does not only enrich the mind but also sharpens the intellect of the reader” (117). Devarajan’s finding reveals that reading is regarded as one of the most effective processes of conscious learning (14). According to Panigrahi and Panda, reading influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as the attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgment and action of readers. As the child is exposed to reading and develops the love for books, he finds it easier to explore the wealth of human experience and knowledge (59). Dave asserts that reading is an intellectual action which is possible only if a person has formed a habit of reading and practicing it since childhood (82). The roles of parents and teachers are found to be crucial to the development of an appetite for books. Studies have shown that leisure reading increases fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, cognitive development, verbal skills, content knowledge, and much more (Wolthy 568).

Abidin notes that the widespread global use of the internet and the use of alternative reading resources notably using hypertexts and multimedia resources have made drastic changes in reading patterns in normal language teaching and learning. Students have been found to be unmotivated and uninterested in learning the language. Thus, educators are very much concerned to integrate human and computer capabilities as efficiently as possible. “When children read for pleasure, they involuntarily and unconsciously improve their language skills” (Abidin 33).

The review of literature provides an impetus to the study and research on the topic that reading habits do enhance the learning and education of students in tertiary level and thus promotes them to be efficient in facing the competitive world of today.

### **III. Findings of the Study**

To understand students’ reading habits of printed or online books, their perception of total number of printed books read and average time spent on reading them was surveyed. Regarding the respondents access to technological devices, majority of students have access to hand-held devices like a cell phone, Black berry, iPhone or other devices like iPod, and in the same way the students have access to a desk top or lap top computers. And here it should be noted that large number of them have access to handle a tablet computer like iPod, Samsung Galaxy and Motorola Xoom and only few of them do not have access to these devices. This shows the technophilic effect on the students that is merely loving the devices and not using for the purpose of developing a good reading habit or educational purpose. The following are the finding of the study:

1. The study finding shows a shocking result that majority of the students have not read any books in last six months of duration and one notices reasonable number of the students read printed books and hardly any of them listen to audio books and not many of the students have read from electronic books or so called e-books.
2. Regarding the influence of electronic media in students' reading ability at home and at college, one comes across in this data that only some of the students get encouragement on reading habits through electronic media, few believe that the electronic media creates poor reading habits in them and most of them state that such electronic media keep them well informed on local and international current affairs. And it is very clear that the students hardly get influence on their reading habits through electronic media.
3. The students read only the textbooks or the prescribed syllabus books. The findings indicate that the leisure time reading is done by the minority students and majority of them do not read during the leisure time. This is an indication that the culture of reading loses its ground among students.
4. Few preferred watching a movie of a literary book rather than reading it and most did not like. Today no one likes to watch a drama or a novel displayed on the screen. Digitalized world and music bonanza capture their interest.
5. The result of the present study reveals that a large majority of the students' reading materials are related to their subjects. The majority say that they read to learn and most of them read for fun and read to gain the habit of fast reasoning. Few of them say that the reading is the channel for gaining real world knowledge and for half of them reading habit has positive effects of success during the exam times and for others it is not agreeable. Though students are aware of the fact that reading helps them to improve their LSRW skills, but then the barriers are more than they could digest.
6. The study has revealed that only few develop multiple reasoning through reading and most of them have an attitude that it does not help to develop imaginary world of theirs and that very few notify that reading opens the door of unknown world.
7. The mark out of time spent on reading per day, almost half of the students spent 15 minutes every day for reading, and spend 30 minutes of time each day to read. Very few read every day for 1 hour, and few of the students have the habit of reading more than one hour. It is partly that they read textbooks and prescribed syllabus. Majorities of them do not have the habit of spending time for reading. This is well noticed in the study.
8. Students enjoy watching TV, or operate computer more frequently and so students have little time for extra reading as compared to other activities like sports, music, drawing and watching TV. The result of the present study reveals that for majority of the students, their reading motif is to collect information, and to improve general knowledge and never making reading as a joy generating affair.
9. Students have more access to all kinds of digital media, and are spending more time during the day with them than ever before. The advancement of technology is a boon and not bane. But for some students it is becoming a whither or bane. The technology does not serve the purpose for which it has been created. Television, computer and mobile continue to exert a strong hold over students, who spend more time with these media than any other.

### Recommendations

1. Good reading material can be provided both at home, during journeys and at college, considering their likes and dislikes to make them more interested in reading.
2. Reading campaigns may be organized in colleges, and community centers to establish a foundation for future.
3. Educated parents should try to inculcate values in their children by reading, good storybooks, moral stories to help them develop good reasoning power and at the same time keep them abreast with the latest information.
4. Future study may control the differences in students' academic qualifications to eliminate the effects of academic achievements on reading habits.
6. There must be a provision of appropriate reading materials at home and at libraries. controlling television viewing and helping the children in their routine to include enough time to both play and read may help the children develop reading habits. However, children should not be forced to read or forced to choose a particular book(s).
7. Teachers need to appreciate the importance of reading. They need to become the models themselves for the students. This will afford them the opportunity to motivate and encourage their pupils to read widely. Fluent reading comprehension skills are the basis of quality educational attainment.
8. The Projects should lead to independent learning/reading skills, hence the chosen book/selection should not be taught in class, but may be introduced through activities and be left for the students to read at their own pace. Teachers may, however, choose to assess a student's progress or success in reading the book by asking for verbal or written progress reports, looking at the diary entries of students, engaging in a discussion about the book, giving a short quiz or a worksheet about the book/ short story. The mode of intermittent assessment may be decided by the teacher as she/he sees fit.
9. In order to promote the reading habits among college students, one can organize a number of activities like:
  - Dramatization of the story
  - Debating and defending the actions of characters in the story.
  - Interacting with the author
  - Holding a literature fest where various characters interact with each other
  - Symposiums and seminars for introducing a book of an author to the students
  - Critical evaluation of the characters, plot and the storyline book reviews of the book of any genre chosen by a student that can be assessed by the teachers and even displayed on the notice board.
  - Refresh the library books as often as is practical. Students love to discover new things and the easiest way to discover are those closest to hand. Sometimes refresh can simply mean moving the books around.

### Conclusion

Reading plays an important role in the thinking process. The objectives of the process are: acquiring *knowledge* – recall of previously learned material; *comprehension* – understanding of the material and ability to explain it; *application* – ability to use what has been learnt in other situations; *analysis* – separating the content into its different parts to understand the relationships between them; *synthesis* – combining parts to form a new whole idea; *evaluation* – making judgements on the value of material for specific purposes.

Reading is not an isolated activity. It comes from awareness and relationship with collection of books. It is nurtured by exposure and experiences. In a school library, reading is also linked with teachers, librarians and parents who introduce children to good books. In a college library, reading is linked with teachers, librarians and reading ambiance. It is love for books that can enhance extensive reading habits among Arts college students. The Arts college students can develop good reading habits, if their teachers and librarians can act as good models who establish good reading habits. Thus, one can say that television and internet, in general, have less influence on reading time and habits of students. "I believe through books we empower children and children in turn can empower us through books," (1) said Kabil Sibal. It means that whenever one thinks about treasure, one thinks about money. But the real treasures are books as they impart a never-ending knowledge and promote free thinking and creativity.

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