How can we improve the reading habit of the students in grade IX and X?

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ABSTRACT
The study was carried out to assess the reading habits among students of grade IX and X students of Pakshikha Central School under Ministry of Education. A questionnaire was used for the data collection. The data collected were analyzed quantitatively with the use of Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet. A total of 82 students' trends on reading habit were examined through survey questionnaire. The pre-data collected were analyzed and based on the data intervention strategies were developed and implemented. Post data were collected using the same survey questionnaire. Finally, conclusions were drawn upon comparisons. The study confirmed that reading habit of students can be improved through a whole school approach intervention. The study recommended among others that professional workshops for teachers on reading habits, implementing book carrying culture, maintaining reading logs for students and starting a culture of recognition of ardent readers in the school to improve the reading habit of the students in general.

I. INTRODUCTION

An innovative and realistic schooling system involves students for personal investigation which requires self-study, self-thinking and analysis. This kind of study at one's own accord, requires a habit, which is known as reading habit. Reading paves way for a clearer understanding of one's own experiences leading to exciting voyage to self-discovery. Reading habit is best formed at a young impressionable age in school, but once formed it can last one's life time (Green, 2001).Every daystudents are taught by teachers and sometimes even by parents to convert reading to a habit which will help them develop their language skills and improve academic performance. Reading books, newspapers, magazine or other materials are all helpful and important in building a sustainable reading habit. Researchers say, more reading brings better academic performance. This study aims to give a reading trend of grade IX and X students of Pakshikha Central School. The study followed a quantitative approach using data collected through survey questionnaire. A total number of 82 students took part in the study.

Reconnaissance

Reconnaissance is derived from a French word reconnoiter which means to look at. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary the origin of the word reconnaissance was derived in "early 19th century, from French, from the word reconnoiter which means recognize". The following three aspects are covered for this study under reconnaissance:
1. Situational analysis
2. Competence
3. Literature

Situational analysis

Reading is one of the most important strands in acquiring language skills. The school gives top priority to enhance this skill. Children are encouraged to read as many books as possible. The school also provides 10 minutes of general reading time every morning besides regular academic study hours. The school allocates one library period per week and observes a reading week every year. However, the records maintained by the librarians show that lesser number of books are being borrowed by the students. On an average, each student reads only 2 books in a year. At the same time academic performance of the students for the last three years is not satisfactory. Teachers believe it is because of the poor reading habit of the students. It is also observed that the students hardly carry books for reading during their leisure time. Therefore, this action research is intended to improve the reading habit of the students.

Competencies

The researchers have undergone master's degree where they have done conventional research as a partial fulfilment of their Master's programme. As the members of Pakshikha Central School Action Research Team (PCSART), the authors have also been actively involved in carrying out various action researches in the recent years.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is one of the four language skills. It is also a very important component for vocabulary enrichment, personality building and better academic performance. Reading is the basis of creating and developing a well-prepared character. People read for pleasure, knowledge, necessity, information, studies etc. Reading, according to Florence et al. (2017), boosts the quality of life, reinforces and merges people together in a unifying force (p.106). Braunger and Lewis (2006) believe that reading is a collection of many things much further beyond the skill within the language. They define reading as a process which is active, cognitive and affective. Syahputra (2016) considers reading as "one of the best receptive skills in language learning concerning to get better knowledge" and as an exciting experience which leads to new experiences.

Reading gives broader and enriched vocabulary, helps in character creation, and widens the mental horizons and our way of thinking. However, when it comes to its scholarly proven importance, Noor (2011) believes that reading is viewed by higher institutions as the most important academic skill. From the basic tool of education, Noor claims that reading is everything related to personal satisfaction, self-discovery, it is an art, source of information and most importantly an enjoyable source of knowledge for everyone. After passing all the stages, reading becomes a habit. Researchers believe that reading habit of people depend on their age, gender, job and lifestyle.

According to Blaha and Bennet (1993) as cited in Erdem (2015), reading habit enters our life slowly and as time passes, if we don't quit those habits, they become needs. Florence et al. (2017) state that reading is a mechanic process involving the brain and other organs, which if frequently carried out becomes a habit. Reading has been confirmed to help in achieving a better academic performance by students. A study by OwusuAcheaw (2014) reveals that most of the students claim they have seen improved academic performance after reading more books. Reading is also found to be helping students express themselves better.

Guthrie, Benneth& McGough, (2007) consider that "reading" involves obtaining knowledge and ideas from printed or written words, which is the basis for learning and one of the most important skills in everyday life. It means that through reading, the individual is able to build or fix things, enjoy stories and discover what others believe. Therefore reading provides the key to all forms of information necessary for our day-to-day survival and growth.

According to Palani (2012), reading habit is an important aspect for creating a literate society in this world. It shapes the personality of individuals and it helps them to develop high level thinking skills and creates new ideas. However, in today's era of technology and social networking, students are found to be lesser interested to read hard cover books. The possible reasons could be because technology and social network has become too much of a distraction. The developments in the mass media have continued to influence interest in reading hard copy of books, magazines and journals, among others.On the other hand, Akarsu and Dariyemez (2014), argue that the role of technology has become greater in people's life with no exception even for reading. The digital age has provided platform for digital reading which means interested readers are still having privilege to read on their gadgets.

Studies have confirmed that once a child develops love for books, hecan explore for himself the wealth of human knowledge and experiences through reading (Deavers, 2000). Thus children who miss the opportunity of getting in touch with books in their early stages in life, find it hard to acquire good reading habits in their later years.

Action Research Question
How can we improve the reading habit of the students in class IX and X?

Methodology

The research was carried out using a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire related to reading was developed and 82 students of IX and X grades were pretested to find out their status of reading habit. The answers provided were analyzed and accordingly intervention strategies were developed. The various intervention strategies were

implemented for four months. After the intervention, the same questionnaire was distributed to the same respondents. Their responses were analyzed and compared by using a simple statistical tool, percentile.

Analysis Tools
The data were analyzed by using Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet in which percentile was generated to interpret the data.

Base line Data Analysis
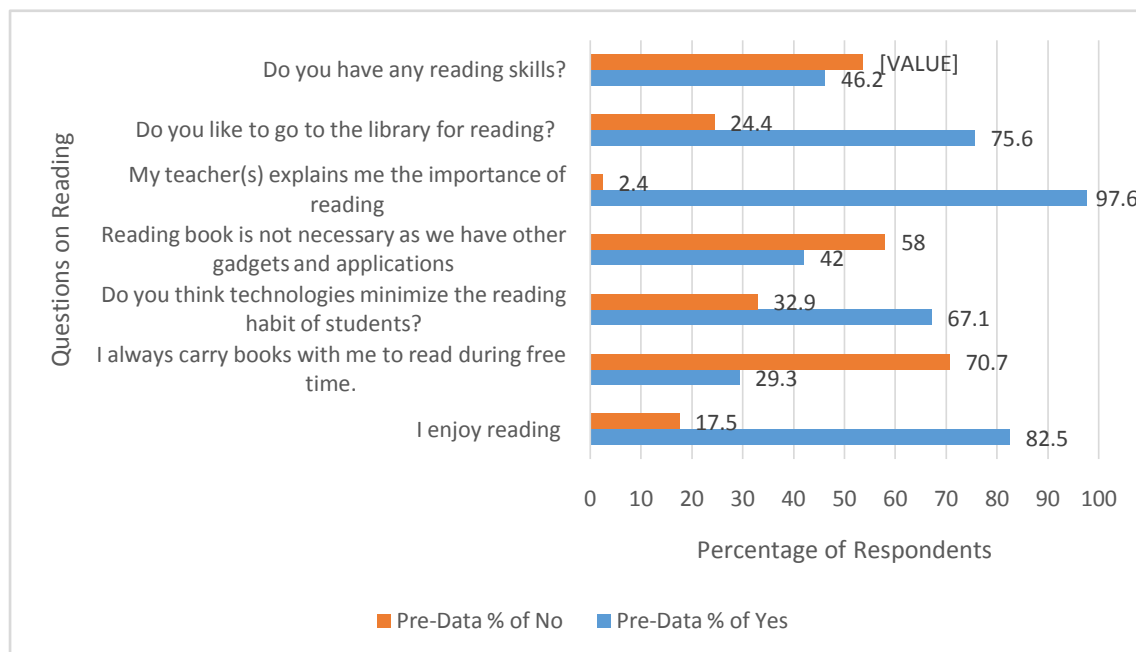The following figure shows the analysis of base-line data collected from the respondents.

Figure 1: Baseline data

Questions on Reading Habit
The Figure 1 shows 82.5% of the respondents agree that they enjoy reading. However, 17.5% of them do not enjoy reading. 29.3% of the respondents always carry books to read during leisure time and about 70.7% of the respondents do not have a book carrying habit.

The finding also shows that the availability of modern technologies and gadgets minimize the interest of reading books. As per the pre-data, 67.1% respondents feel that technologies hamper their reading interest, while 32.9% of the respondents believe that technologies do not affect their reading interest. It is also seen that only 42% of the respondents agree that reading book is not necessary as they have other gadgets and social sites such as Facebook and YouTube. However, 58% of the respondents assert reading book is necessary as they do not have access to such ICT facilities.

About 97.6% of the respondents support that teacher emphasize on the importance of reading and only 2.4% of the respondents say that teachers do not explain the importance of reading to the students. 46.2% of the respondents responded saying that they do have reading skills where as 53.7% confess that they do not have proper reading skills. The pre data also reveals that 75.6% of the respondents love to go to library for reading and 24.4% do not like to go to library reason being unavailability of enough library books and poor ventilation.

Intervention strategies
The intervention strategies were designed and implemented to improve the reading habit of the students. This was done based on the findings from the baseline data. Following are the intervention strategies developed and implemented by the research team for a period of four months.

1. Model reading

During the morning assembly teachers take turn to read to the students a piece of writing from any book or magazine. This was done to arouse the curiosity and interest of the students in reading.

2. Maintain log book for reading
The students of the sample group were oriented and encouraged to maintain individual reading log where students keep record of all the books and articles they read mentioning the topics and author.

3. Seminar
A seminar on reading skill was conducted for the sample group by the research team where the following skills were imparted:
1) Emphasized the importance of reading books.

2) Provided reading skills such as scanning and skimming.
3) Introduced the SQ3R (survey, questions, read, recite and review) technique to the students while reading.

4. Book-talk
The book talk programme is introduced to motivate students to read books. Every Friday, one member from the sample group is made to give book-talk in the assembly.

Comparative Analysis of Data and Discussion
The Table below shows comparative findings of the base-line and post data.

Parameters	PRE-DATA		POST-DATA	
	% of Yes	% of No	% of Yes	% of No
I enjoy reading.	82.5	17.5	98.8	1.3
I always carry books with me to read during free time.	29.3	70.7	52.5	47.5
Do you think technologies minimize the reading habit of students?	67.1	32.9	63.8	36.3
Reading book is not necessary as we have other gadgets and applications such as Facebooks, YouTube, televisions etc.	42.0	58.0	36.3	63.8
My teacher(s) explains me the importance of reading	97.6	2.4	97.5	2.5
Do you know any reading skills?	46.3	53.8	77.5	22.5
Do you like to go to the library for reading?	75.6	24.4	79.2	20.8

Table 1: Comparisons of baseline and post data

According to the data presented in table 1, the percentage of respondents who enjoy reading has increased from 82.5% to 98.8%. The number of respondents carrying books during leisure time has also increased from 29.3% to 52.5%. The introduction of book carrying culture has brought significant increase of 23.2% in the number of respondents carrying books.

The Table shows decline in the respondents who agree that technologies minimize

the reading habit of students from 67.1% to 63.8%. This change in the opinion of the students is due to the inspiration they could draw from the seminar. Positively, there is also a fall of respondents from 42% to 36.3% who say that despite the availability of modern electronic gadgets, reading book is still very important. The data also shows that reading skills of the students have significantly improved by 31.2%. Such improvement on reading skills is believed to be the result of the seminar conducted on reading skills.
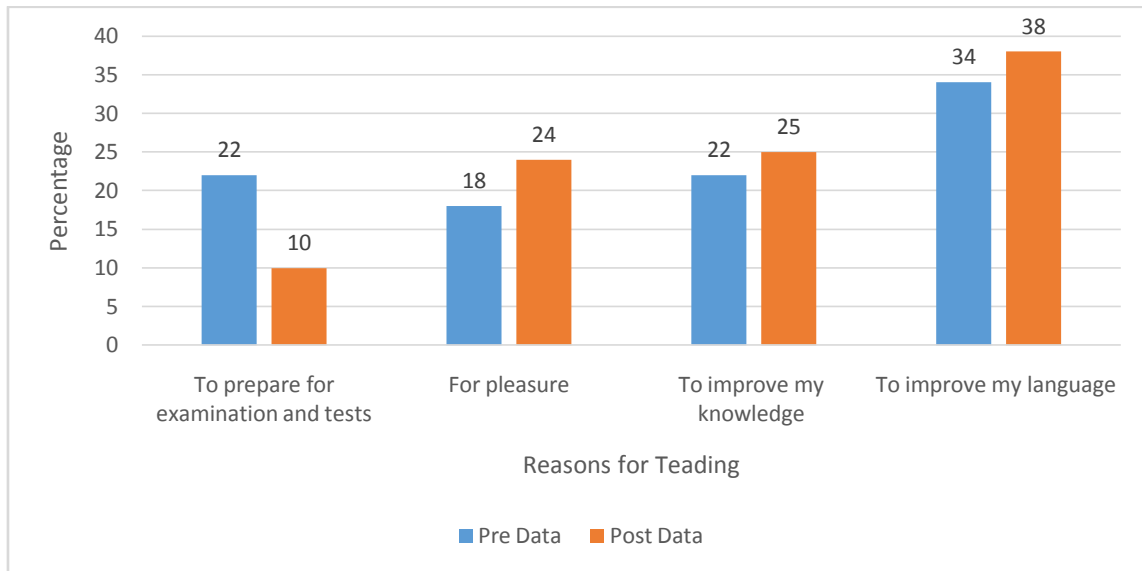
Reasons for Reading

Figure 2: Reasons for reading

As reflected in the Figure 2, the number of respondents reading books to prepare for examination and tests have decreased from 22% to 10%. However, percentage of respondents reading for pleasure, to improve knowledge and language has increased from 18%, 22%, 34% to 24%, 25% and 38% respectively. This shows that there is a shift in objective and purpose of reading.

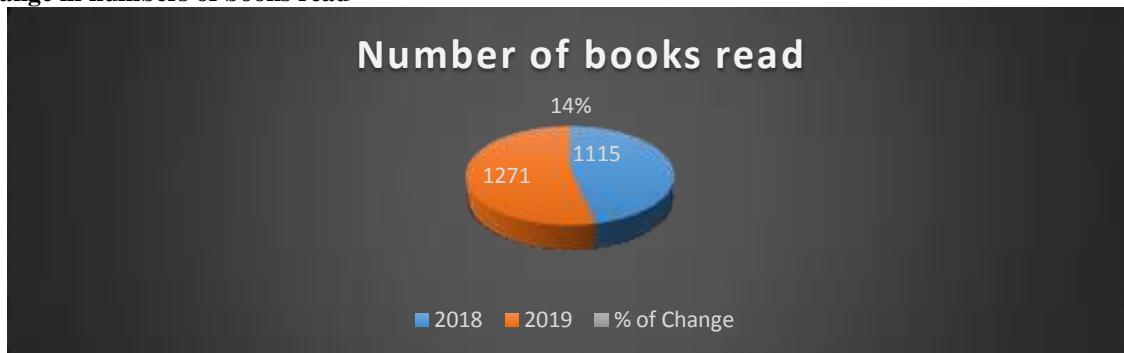**Change in numbers of books read**

Figure 3: Change in numbers of books read by respondents

Figure 3 show the percentage change in the number of books read in 2019 when compared with 2018. The percentage of number of books read by the respondents has increased from 47% in 2018 to 53% in 2019.

Students' preference of Genre

I mostly read	No. of Respondents	Ranking
Short Stories	68	1
Novels	51	2
Text Books	36	3
Journal and articles	20	4
Poems	19	5
Newspapers	19	6
Essays	3	7

Table 3: Students' preference of Genre

Table 3 shows the students" preference of genre. Short Story is the top most prefered genre and read by 68 respondents followed by Novels, Text Books, Journal and Articles, Poems, Newspapers and Essay with 51, 36, 20, 19, 19 and 3 respectively.

It is evident from Figure 2 that there is a shift in the reasons and purpose of reading. Respondents intend to read for pleasure, improvement of languages, knowledge and not just for enhacing their academic content. This indicates that the intervention strategies implemented were effective.

Ethical Considerations
Ethical issues in research refers to certain norms and code of conduct for the researchers. According to Hornsby (2003) ethics means "moral principles that control or influence a person's behavior" (p.427). It is important for the researchers to follow certain ethical norms. Following ethical considerations were considered for this study:
1) Permission for the study was obtained from the school authority to carry out the action research.
2) The participants were informed about the purpose of the study.
3) The questionnaire was distributed to those respondents who were willing to respond after obtaining their consent.
4) Confidentiality of the answers they provided was strictly maintained in order to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the individuals involved in the research.
5) The action research did not hamper their regular classes. It was done during their free times.
6) No sensitive issues were raised as the aim of the research was to improve the system and not to find the weaknesses of the individual.
7) The medium of instructions used were English and Dzongkha (national language) to bring more clarity to the meanings and concepts of questions asked.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS
It was found that the intervention strategies were effective. The study showed that the students' reading habit improved significantly after the implementation of the intervention strategies. Therefore, the authors would like to recommend the following policy changes and practices in the overall schooling system.

1. Professional workshops for teachers on reading habits
The school can conduct professional development program for teachers on importance of reading and reading strategies so that they become the immediate partners and agents for bringing the new culture of reading in the school.

2. Book carrying culture
The school can initiate book carrying culture amongst students as a whole school approach. Students can be importance of carrying a book so that they can flip the page and read at least few words or sentences in the free time.

3. Maintaining reading logs
The school is encouraged to start a system of maintaining reading logs for the students to generate more reading interest in students. Teachers could also ask few questions to make sure that students are really reading.

4. Recognition of ardent reader
A committee of teachers can nominate an ardent reader from amongst the students every week, month or year and award token of appreciation.

5. A rich school library
The school management should work on procuring more books that are popular among students for which students and teachers can be involved in the selection of books while procuring them.

IV. LIMITATIONS
1. This research is limited to only grade IX and X students at Pakshikha Central School and the results could have varied according to the class levels and location of the schools.
2. The data collection was done through only survey questionnaire and the findings may vary according to methodologies used and size of respondents.

V. CONCLUSION
Reading is closely linked to learning and it enhances mental, professional and human development. Through reading, a reader not only gains new ideas, information and insights but also helps them to lead healthier and happier life. With students showing less interest in reading, it is imperative that the stakeholders find new ways and means to instill love for reading and reading habit in them. Habits cannot be developed overnight. We need concerted efforts from all stakeholders to

create healthy reading culture at home, schools, and workplaces. This study has shown that with proper research and intervention strategies in place, reading habits in students can be cultivated.

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Appendix
i)   Survey Questionnaire
Dear participants,
The questionnaires below are developed to know the reading habits of class IX and X students. Therefore, your honest response to the questions is solicited. The confidentiality of the responses will be strictly maintained.

1.	Gender (Please Tick)		
2.	I enjoy reading (Please tick)	Yes	NO
3.	I read _____ books in 2018	Yes	NO

4.   I mostly read (please tick appropriate ones)
a)   Text books
b)   Short stories
c)   Poems
d)   Novel
e)   Journals and articles.
f)   Newspapers
g)   Essays
5. I read
a)   To prepare for examinations and tests
b)   For pleasure
c)   To improve my knowledge
d)   To improve my language
e)   The teacher advises me to read

6.	I always carry books with me to read during free time.	Yes	No
7.	Do you think technologies minimize the reading habit of students?	Yes	No
8.	Reading book is not necessary as we have other gadgets and applications such as face books, YouTube, mobile phones, television, etc.	Yes	No
9.	Do you like to go to the library for reading?	Yes	No
10.	My teacher(s) explains me the importance of reading.	Yes	No

11. The reasons why I don't read are: (please tick appropriate ones)
a) I have no time
b) I don't get reading materials
c) There are no books in the library which I like to read
d) The librarian is not very friendly
e) I find no reasons for reading as we get everything ready made from the internet
f) We have lots of text books to read

12. Do you have any reading skills? (Yes)   (No)

ii)   A sample reading log for students

Date	Name of the Book	Author(s)	What is it about?	Would you recommend others to read? Why? Why not?