

Fostering a Love for Reading among 9th Grade Students at Gomtu Higher Secondary School, 2022

ABSTRACT

In today's digital era, cultivating a reading habit has become increasingly rare among students, leading to a decline in their reading skills. Despite the significance of reading habits, many Bhutanese students remain unaware of their importance. This research paper addresses the need to nurture a love for reading among 9th grade students at Gomtu Higher Secondary School. Utilizing observation, survey questionnaires, and interviews as data collection tools, the study first assesses the current situation through pre-data collection. Subsequently, interventions such as situation analysis, guided reading sessions, book review compilations, book talks, and reader's theatre are implemented. Post-data collection is then conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions. The findings reveal that students develop reading habits when provided with opportunities to choose books based on their interests. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of offering a diverse range of reading materials to stimulate student interest, highlighting the pivotal role of the school library in this regard. The study also identifies significant improvements in students' daily reading habits post-intervention, with 25.8% strongly agreeing and 48.4% agreeing to engage in daily reading practices, compared to 11.3% strongly disagreeing and 46.8% disagreeing during the preliminary phase. Moreover, 35.5% of students strongly agreed, and 38.7% agreed to read out of curiosity after the interventions, compared to 9.7% strongly agreeing and 35.5% agreeing during pre-intervention. Practical suggestions drawn from the study include tailoring book selections to individual interests, empowering students with autonomy in choosing reading materials, and optimizing the school library to provide a diverse range of genres and enjoyable reading materials. These findings emphasize the significance of fostering a love for reading among students and offer actionable insights to promote literacy initiatives effectively.

Keywords: Digital era, decline in reading skills, reader's theatre, book talk.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of reading in enhancing language skills, cognitive abilities, and overall knowledge cannot be overstated. Despite global efforts, such as Bhutan's National Reading Year initiative in 2015, cultivating a reading culture remains a challenge, especially among today's youth who are increasingly drawn to digital media. In the past, books served as both a source of knowledge and entertainment; however, modern distractions like social media have diminished adolescents' interest in reading.

This paper aims to explore the journey of fostering a love for reading among 9th-grade students, with the ultimate goal of instilling a lifelong passion for reading. The objective is not only to highlight the importance of reading but also to cultivate a genuine affinity for it and enhance reading skills among students.

Initial research uncovered several challenges contributing to students' lack of interest in reading. These challenges include limited access to diverse genres in the library and the pervasive influence of social media, which often competes with traditional reading practices.

To address these challenges, engaging interventions were implemented. These interventions aimed to create a more conducive environment for reading and spark students' interest in literature. Strategies such as book talks and reader's theatre were introduced to make reading sessions more interactive and enjoyable for students.

By the end of the semester, post-intervention data showed promising improvements in the reading habits of the class IX students. These interventions not only encouraged students to read more frequently but also fostered a deeper appreciation for literature among them.

RECONNAISSANCE

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Upon discovering that students struggled with impromptu speaking during assembly speeches, I conducted inquiries to identify the underlying causes. Students attributed their difficulties to poor reading habits, largely due to the limited availability of diverse genre books in the school library. Moreover, I observed that the pervasive influence of social media further deterred students from cultivating reading habits, ultimately affecting their proficiency in English.

To address these challenges, I initiated preliminary research through a questionnaire survey focused on grade IX students. Targeting this age group aimed to instill good habits early, following the adage that nurturing the roots ensures the blossoming of the tree. Recognizing the crucial role of schools in shaping lifelong habits, particularly among children from illiterate backgrounds, I sought to understand how parental influence and household dynamics impacted students' access to reading resources and engagement in educational activities.

COMPETENCY

RESEARCHER

During my academic tenure at Lovely Professional University in Punjab, I engaged in a research module that offered extensive insights into the process of conducting educational action research. As part of my master's program in Leadership Management, I conducted a study titled "Risk-Taking Behavior among Middle School Students in Relation to Family Environment and Peer Influence." This research endeavor played a pivotal role in fulfilling the requirements for my master's degree.

Building upon my academic foundation and prior research endeavors, I embarked on the current study. The research aimed to explore the interplay between risk-taking behavior, family environment, and peer influence among middle school students.

The participants in this action research were students from Grade IX at Gomtu Higher Secondary School. Given their relevance to the research topic and their capacity to comprehend and complete questionnaires, Grade IX students were deemed suitable participants for the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading, defined as the cognitive process of extracting meaning from written text, necessitates active engagement, analysis, and critical thinking (Blaha & Bennett, as cited in Erdem, 2014). Habit, as defined by Blaha & Bennett, is a learned behavioral pattern that becomes automatic over time, highlighting the foundational role of cultivating a reading habit from an early age in lifelong learning. Research by Okundu (2005), as cited in Otike (2017), emphasizes the significance of instilling a reading culture in children early on, as habits formed during childhood tend to endure. Encouraging students to select books based on their interests motivates reading, as individuals are more likely to engage with material that resonates with them. Additionally, providing students with autonomy in choosing reading materials fosters a sense of ownership and investment in their reading habits.

The pivotal role of the school library in promoting reading habits is underscored by Otike (2017), who emphasizes the importance of allowing students to freely select books from library shelves to preserve their autonomy. Libraries should offer a diverse range of genres to cater to students' varied interests and stimulate the development of reading habits. Taiwo (2011) asserts that access to enjoyable reading materials in libraries enhances students' knowledge and skills.

Voluntary reading, facilitated by access to engaging reading materials, cultivates reading skills and comprehension, ultimately benefiting academic performance. However, the pervasive influence of social media poses a challenge to developing reading habits among students. Chen & Bryer (2010), as cited in Kojo (2018), highlight the prevalence of social media use for non-academic purposes among students, indicating its potential to distract from reading activities.

In conclusion, early promotion of reading habits lays the groundwork for lifelong engagement with literature. Once ingrained, a habit of reading is resilient to the distractions posed by social media, enabling individuals to sustain their commitment to reading.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

1. How might tailored book selection based on individual interests enhance reading engagement among Grade IX students at Gomtu Higher Secondary School?
2. What strategies can be implemented to empower students with autonomy in selecting reading materials, thereby fostering a sense of ownership over their reading habits?
3. How can the school library be optimized to provide a diverse range of genres and enjoyable reading materials to stimulate the development of lifelong reading habits among Grade IX students?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

By the conclusion of the research intervention, Grade IX students will:

- Elevate their reading skills through consistent daily practice sessions.
- Cultivate a genuine passion for reading, integrating it seamlessly into their daily routines.
- Master the art of reading with precision, demonstrating fluent pronunciation, nuanced intonation, and an appropriate reading pace.

METHODOLOGY:

In this action research, a mixed-method approach was employed to gather comprehensive data. Qualitative methods, including observation and interviews, were utilized to gain insights into students' reading abilities and challenges. Observations were conducted in the classroom to assess students' fluency in reading, with detailed notes taken to document areas of difficulty. Additionally, situational analysis was carried out to provide context for the observations. Interviews were conducted with a total of 30 Grade IX students, comprising 20 males and 10 females. These interviews aimed to delve deeper into students' reading habits, preferences, and

perceived challenges. Quantitative data was gathered through a survey questionnaire administered to the same cohort of 30 Grade IX students, maintaining a gender-balanced representation. The questionnaire was designed to capture quantitative insights into students' reading habits and preferences. Data analysis was conducted using a combination of statistical tools, including SPSS and Excel, to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of students' reading behaviors and needs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

During the preliminary research phase, it was observed that Grade IX students encountered challenges in reading fluently and struggled with correct pronunciation. Many students exhibited signs of hesitation and stuttering while reading aloud, indicating difficulties in expressing comprehension of the text. To validate these observations, survey questionnaires were administered, and interviews were conducted with the students. The findings confirmed that a significant portion of Grade IX students lacked a consistent reading habit, contributing to their reading difficulties and limited verbal expression. To assess the situation and identify the core problem, reading sessions were conducted to evaluate students' ability to read fluently and accurately pronounce words. The findings revealed a clear correlation between students' lack of a reading habit and their reading skills.

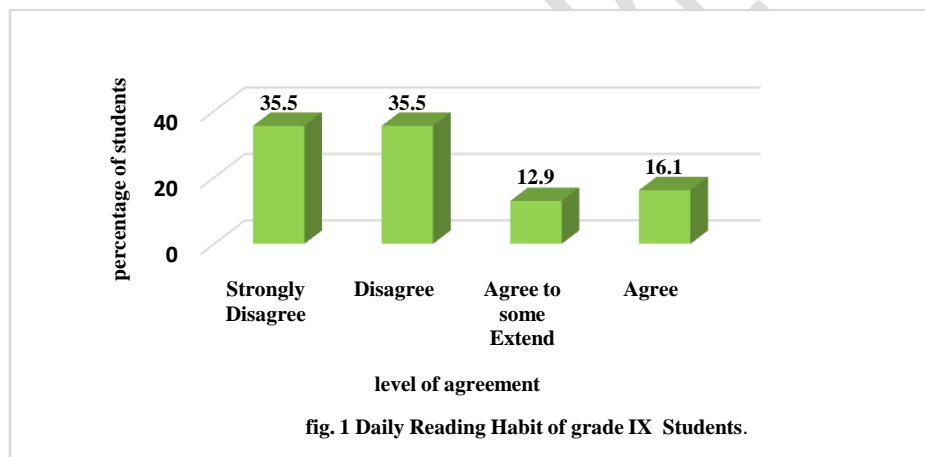


Figure 1 illustrates that a substantial portion of students (35.5%) strongly disagreed with having a daily reading habit, while an equal percentage (35.5%) simply disagreed with reading on a daily basis. Only a small fraction (12.9%) admitted to reading to some extent daily, and an additional 16.1% agreed to the statement. Among the students who lacked a reading habit, 11 strongly disagreed, and another 11 simply disagreed. Conversely, 4 students admitted to reading to some extent daily, and 5 claimed to read daily. This discrepancy underscores the evident lack of interest among students, as confirmed during interviews. For instance, student number 1 expressed, "I visit the library only during library period," indicating a lack of intrinsic motivation to engage in reading. Similarly, student number 7 mentioned, "I visit the library to renew books because it's mandatory during library period," revealing a compliance-driven approach rather than a genuine interest in reading. Students attributed their disinterest in visiting the library to its limited collection of books in interesting genres, prompting them to resort to online platforms like Any Book, Webtoon, and Facebook for reading.

Furthermore, the lack of curiosity and the pervasive influence of social media were identified as contributing factors to poor reading habits.

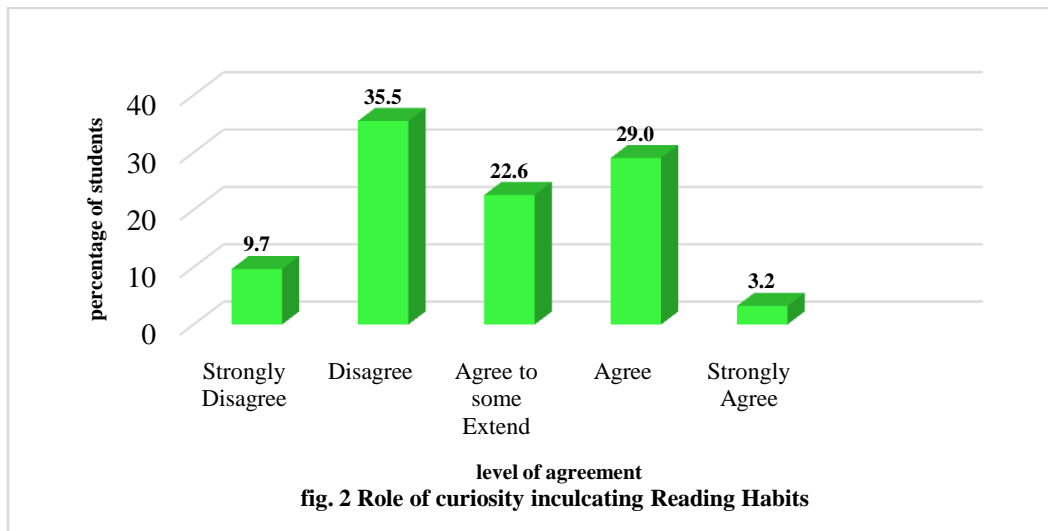


Figure 2 illustrates that 9.7% of students strongly disagreed, and 35.5% simply disagreed when asked about the role of curiosity in stimulating reading. Conversely, 22.6% admitted to reading to some extent out of curiosity, with an additional 29% agreeing with the statement. A small percentage (3.2%) strongly agreed. During interviews, students revealed that their lack of curiosity stemmed from the limited time allocated for library periods and the scarcity of books in various genres. However, some students acknowledged reading out of curiosity when they came across articles on social media platforms like Any Book, Webtoon, and Facebook.

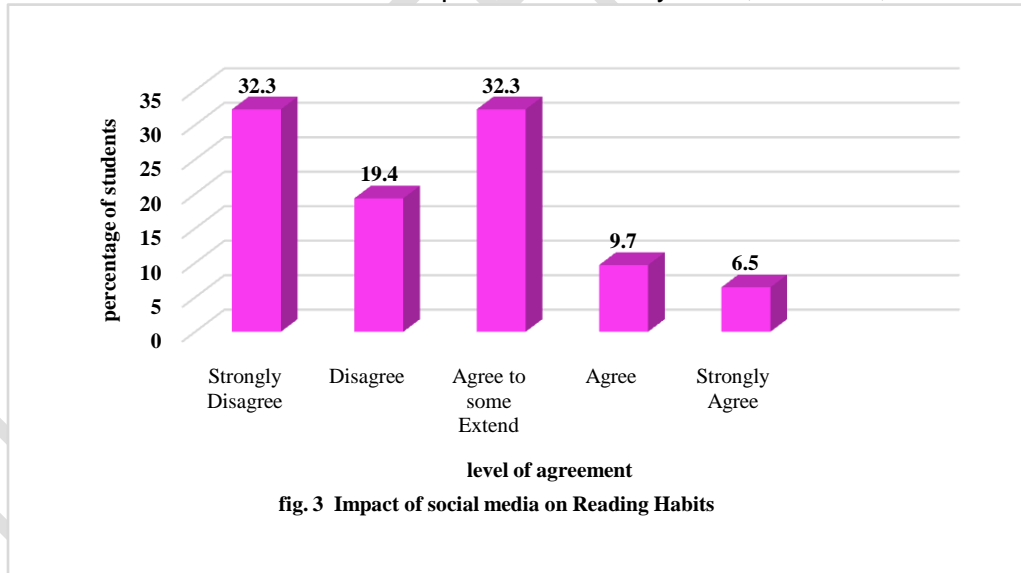


Figure 3 highlights the dual role of social media platforms in both promoting and hindering students' reading habits. A notable percentage (32.3%) of students admitted to being somewhat distracted from reading by using social media apps. Additionally, 9.7% of students agreed, and 6.7% strongly agreed with this assertion. Conversely, 19.4% of students disagreed with the idea, with an additional 32.3% strongly disagreeing. These findings suggest that while some students acknowledge social media's potential to distract them from reading, others actively choose to engage with reading content on these platforms.

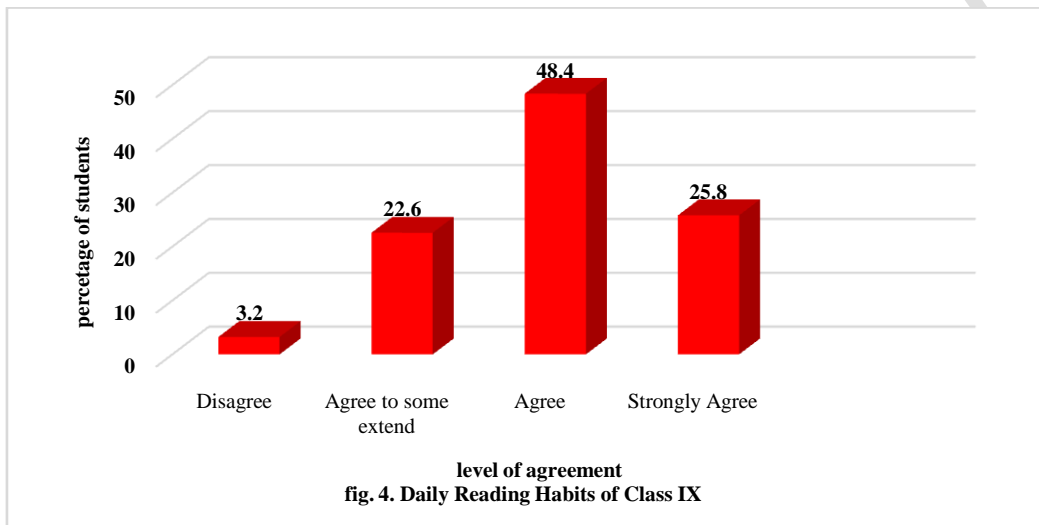
INTERVENTION PROGRAM

After conducting preliminary research, the following intervention programs were implemented:

1. **Diverse Genre Reading Sessions:** During library periods, students were exposed to a variety of short articles spanning different genres. These sessions included demonstrations of correct pronunciation and reading styles by the teacher or a designated student, followed by opportunities for all students to listen and repeat. Additionally, students were encouraged to select their own short articles based on their interests to read aloud during English periods. This intervention aimed to promote reading engagement by allowing students to choose materials that appealed to them while also providing regular opportunities for practice and peer interaction.
2. **Review Writing Assignments:** During library periods, students received assistance in selecting books tailored to their interests. During reading periods, support was provided to help students understand and interpret difficult sentences and words encountered in their chosen books. Upon completing their reading, students were assigned to write reviews and reflections on the books they read as part of their portfolio assignments. These assignments served as evidence of students' reading habits and interests, allowing for the examination of abstract ideas such as their level of engagement. Furthermore, the practice of writing reflections alongside reading enhanced students' language competency by reinforcing comprehension and critical thinking skills.
3. **Facilitated Students in Conducting Productive Reading Sessions:** A diverse selection of books and articles tailored to students' interests is available. Each Friday during the first period, I led reading sessions in the classroom, assisting students with their reading and providing demonstrations when necessary. Feedback and positive reinforcement were offered to encourage continued engagement with reading. Additionally, I provided support by interpreting difficult words and sentences as needed. Through guided readings, students were able to identify areas for improvement and actively work towards enhancing their reading skills.
4. **Book Talk Extravaganza:** In addition to reviewing books and honing their reading skills in class, I spiced things up with lively book talks straight from the heart of each student's portfolio. Imagine the excitement as students passionately shared about their favorite reads, bringing their chosen books to life for their peers. To add to the fun, we turned it into a friendly competition, with the best presenter walking away with some fabulous prizes!
5. **Reader's Theatre Spectacular:** Harnessing the power of imagination, I introduced Reader's Theatre as a dynamic tool to ignite students' passion for reading. Recognizing that children thrive when given the opportunity to embody different characters, I assigned roles from plays and novels, encouraging students to bring the dialogue to life through dramatic readings. To add an extra element of fun, students were provided with props like false noses, further enhancing their engagement with the text. These interactive interventions proved highly effective in inspiring students to cultivate a love for reading.

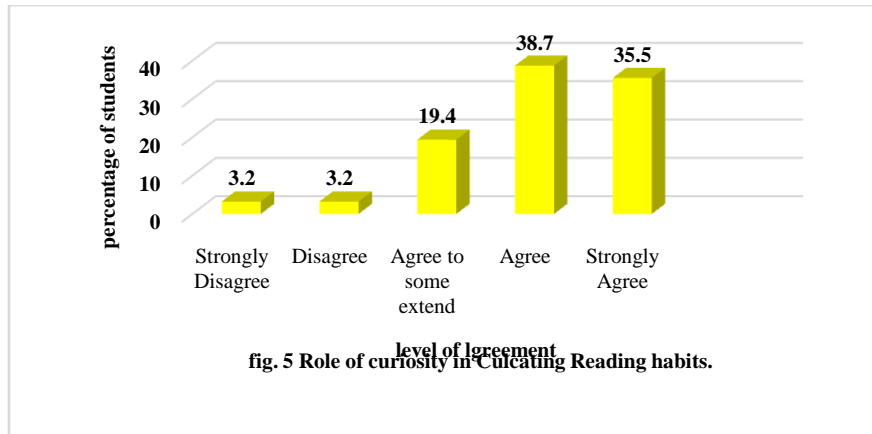
POST-INTERVENTION DATA ANALYSIS

Following the implementation of interventions, a post-research analysis revealed a notable improvement in students' reading habits compared to the preliminary findings. During one-on-one interviews, students reported a newfound curiosity and interest in reading, particularly when given the autonomy to select books or articles aligned with their interests. Many students expressed that their language competency had improved as a result of regular reading. However, despite these positive developments, social media continued to pose a significant challenge and barrier to reading. Students reported feeling constantly distracted by online platforms, which hindered their ability to engage in sustained reading activities.



Post-research findings depicted in Figure 4 reveal a significant improvement in students' daily reading habits compared to the preliminary data. A substantial portion of students, 25.8%, strongly agreed that they engage in daily reading practices, with an additional 48.4% agreeing to the statement.

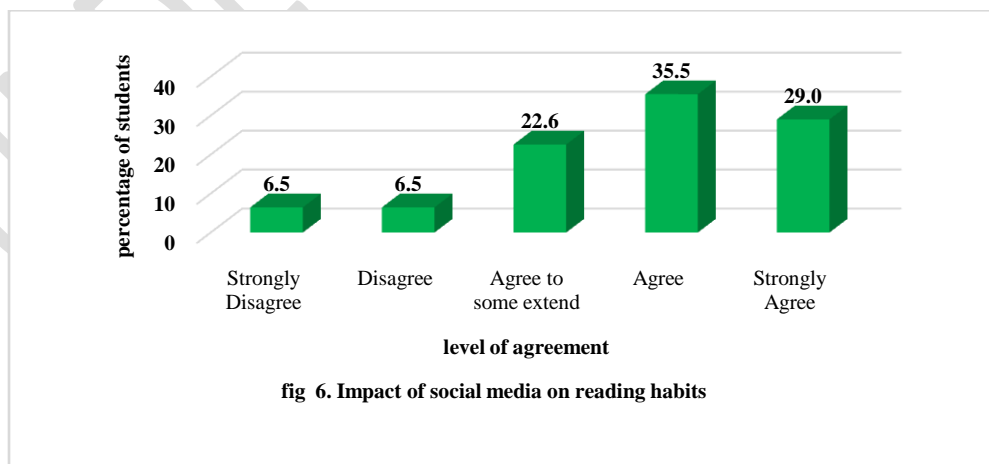
In conclusion, the interventions implemented were highly effective in fostering and nurturing reading habits among Grade IX students. During individual interviews, students attributed the enhancement of their reading habits to the autonomy granted in selecting their own reading materials, such as articles, magazines, or books, for writing book reviews and personal reading. Figure 5 illustrates that 35.5% of students strongly agreed that they read out of curiosity, followed by 38.7% who agreed, and 19.4% who agreed to some extent.



Conversely, 3.2% of students strongly disagreed, and 3.2% disagreed with the statement "I read out of curiosity."

Furthermore, students shared during interviews that their reading habits are often sparked by curiosity about new topics encountered in their daily lives. For example, student number 12 stated, "I tend to read more when I'm intrigued by things I enjoy. I especially like reading Korean drama reviews before watching them." Similarly, student number 2 mentioned, "I indulge in thriller books and comics only when I feel compelled to." In contrast, student number 1 admitted, "I only read when it's necessary; otherwise, I don't feel motivated to read."

In addition to serving as a potential source of reading materials, social media was identified as a significant distraction for students. Several students mentioned during interviews that online games like PUBG and Mobile Legend often divert their attention from daily reading habits. Student number 2 noted that although he prefers reading on social media apps like ANYBOOK, he finds himself easily distracted by gaming apps such as PUBG and Mobile Legend. Similarly, student number 1 admitted, "I only read when it's necessary; otherwise, I prioritize playing online games during my free time." Figure 6 below provides visual evidence supporting these findings, with 29% of students strongly agreeing that social media distracts them from reading books, followed by 35.5% who agreed with this sentiment. Additionally, 22.6% agreed to some extent.

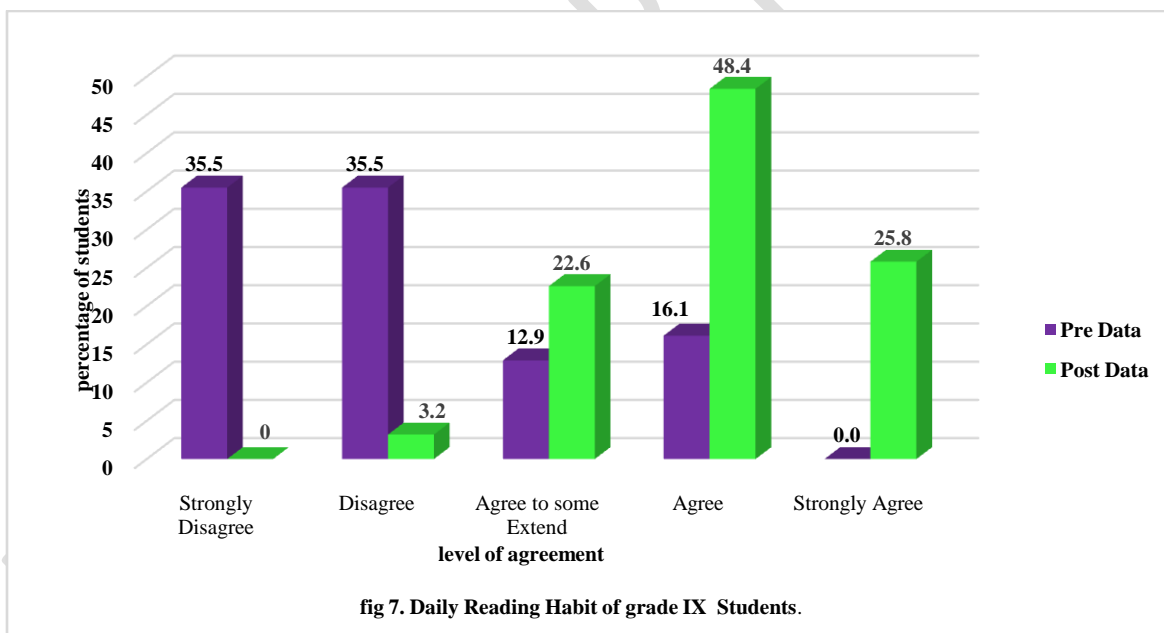


However, a minority of genuine readers, comprising 6.5%, strongly disagreed that social media serves as a distraction, with an additional 6.5% of students holding a similar view by simply disagreeing with the aforementioned point. Notably, student number 16 and 11 expressed their preference for reading on social media platforms due to the convenience and interesting content available. For example, student number 12 mentioned enjoying reading Korean drama reviews on Facebook and Google Chrome, while student number 2 highlighted the appeal of the ANYBOOK app for accessing a variety of captivating books.

STUDENT INTEREST

The study's findings underscore the importance of catering to students' interests when promoting reading among adolescents. Interviews revealed that students are more likely to engage in reading when given the opportunity to select materials that align with their interests and curiosity about a subject.

A graph comparing students' daily reading habits during the preliminary and post-research phases reveals a notable improvement. In the preliminary research, 35.5% of students strongly disagreed, and another 35.5% disagreed with the notion of having a daily reading habit. However, in the post-research findings, a significant shift was observed, with 25.8% of students strongly agreeing to have a daily reading habit, and an additional 48.4% of students agreeing. This substantial improvement indicates the effectiveness of the interventions in promoting and fostering reading habits among grade IX students.



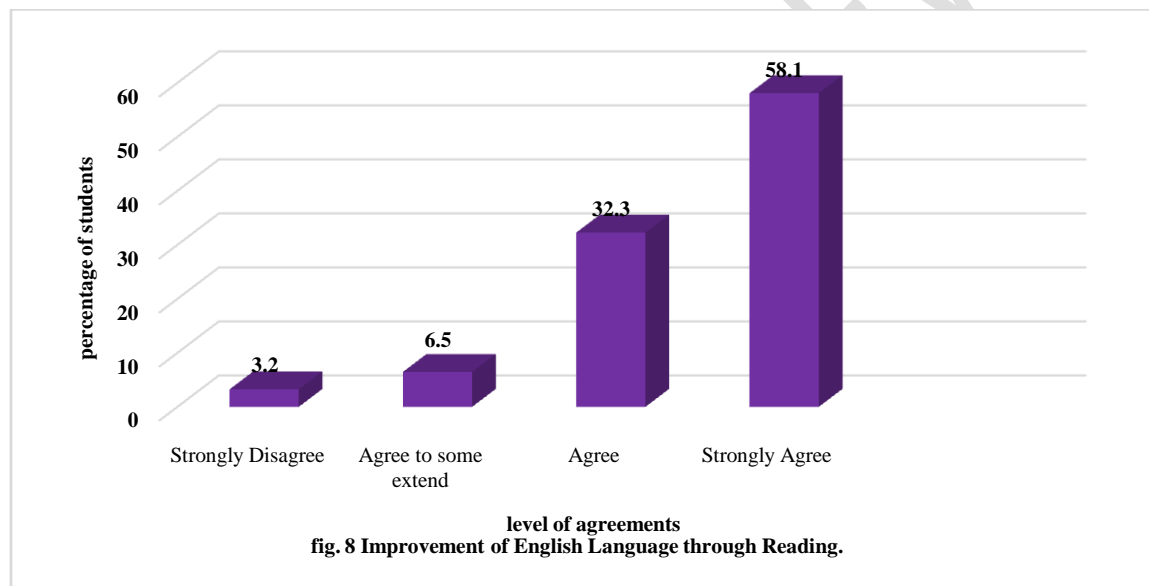
INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

Students have expressed a keen interest in reading comics and memes on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Webtoon, preferring them over textbooks and library books due to their high accessibility and convenience. According to Kojo (2018), "Social media provides easy access to virtual space whereby students can explore online" (p. 11). However, many students have also acknowledged that social media serves as a significant distraction from reading. Choney (2010), as cited in Akussah (2015), notes that "Facebook and

other social media websites are consuming more time of students due to the society's increasing reliance on computers, and thus, students neglect reading" (p. 8). Similarly, students have shared that they often become engrossed in playing online games on social media platforms.

LIBRARY PERIOD:

A significant concern raised by 90% of students pertains to the limited time allocated for the library period. With only one period per week, lasting approximately 40 minutes, students have minimal opportunity to access materials from the library. Taiwo (2011) emphasizes the crucial role of the library in providing a diverse collection of enjoyable and informative books, stating that "Library plays an important role in provision of a varied collection of enjoyable and information-rich books is a major contribution of the library towards reading promotion" (p. 6). Access to a wide range of books stimulates the development of reading habits. Furthermore, school libraries serve as the primary source of books for students, highlighting the importance of maximizing their accessibility and utilization.



CONCLUSION:

Cultivating reading habits from a young age is essential, as these habits have the potential to endure throughout one's lifetime. The primary aim of this research was to foster a love for reading among Class IX "C" students, recognizing the profound impact it can have on their academic and personal development. The findings of this study underscore the effectiveness of targeted interventions in motivating students to embrace reading as a pleasurable and rewarding activity.

Central to the success of these interventions was their alignment with the individual interests and preferences of students. By tailoring reading activities to cater to diverse tastes and curiosities, students were more engaged and enthusiastic about participating in reading sessions. Additionally, the role of the school library emerged as pivotal in promoting reading habits by providing access to a wide variety of books across genres.

Despite the promising interventions implemented, it is evident that social media poses a significant challenge to students' reading habits. The allure of digital platforms often competes with traditional reading practices, leading to distractions and decreased reading engagement among students. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that balances the benefits of technology with the importance of fostering offline reading habits.

In conclusion, this research highlights the transformative power of fostering reading habits among students. By nurturing a love for reading early on and providing supportive environments that encourage exploration and discovery, educators can empower students to become lifelong learners and avid readers. Moving forward continued efforts to prioritize reading promotion initiatives and address the challenges posed by digital distractions will be crucial in ensuring the cultivation of strong reading habits among students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Future researchers should consider incorporating observation as a method to monitor and document students' progress in improving English language skills through their reading habits. By systematically observing students' reading behaviors and language proficiency development over time, researchers can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of reading interventions in enhancing language competencies.
2. To validate the abstract notion of the impact of reading on language competency, future studies could explore correlations between students' reading habits and their performance in English subject assessments. By analyzing test scores and academic performance data, researchers can provide empirical evidence to support the assertion that reading contributes to language skill development.
3. Given the local context, it is essential for future research to consider cultural and socio-economic factors that may influence students' reading habits and language proficiency. Conducting qualitative interviews or focus groups with students, teachers, and parents can provide contextual understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to promoting reading habits and improving English language skills within the community.
4. Collaboration with educators and stakeholders in the education sector is crucial for the successful implementation of reading promotion initiatives. Future researchers should engage school administrators, teachers, and librarians in designing and implementing interventions aimed at fostering a culture of reading and enhancing language competencies among students.
5. Utilizing digital platforms and technology-based interventions tailored to local needs can be an effective strategy for promoting reading habits and enhancing English language skills. Future research could explore the development of mobile applications or online reading resources that cater to the interests and preferences of students while supporting their language learning journey.

By integrating these recommendations into future research endeavors, scholars can contribute to the advancement of knowledge and practices in promoting reading habits and improving English language proficiency among students, particularly within the local context.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF FUTURE RESEARCH:

While the present study shed light on the promotion of reading habits among students, it was unable to conclusively determine the impact of these habits on language competency. Although students reported improvements in their language competency as a result of reading, the study lacked concrete evidence, such as the results of their annual exams, to substantiate this claim. The inability to obtain such evidence was primarily due to time constraints, as the research was conducted over a four-month period, which may not have been sufficient for comprehensive data collection and analysis.

Furthermore, future research endeavors could explore additional factors influencing the relationship between reading habits and language competency. Longitudinal studies conducted over an extended duration could provide more robust evidence regarding the effects of sustained reading habits on language skills development. Additionally, qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, could offer deeper insights into students' perceptions and experiences related to reading and language competency. By addressing these limitations and expanding the scope of inquiry, future research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of reading in language development among students.

The graphs and tables indicate that a majority of students acknowledge experiencing improvements in their English language skills as a direct result of their reading habits. However, the validation of these claims was hindered by the absence of concrete evidence, such as exam scores, to substantiate these self-reported improvements.

Hence, there exists significant potential for further research to delve deeper into the positive effects of reading on English language proficiency. Future studies could employ more comprehensive methodologies, including longitudinal assessments and standardized language proficiency tests, to gather empirical data supporting the correlation between reading habits and language development. Additionally, qualitative approaches such as interviews and observation could provide nuanced insights into the specific mechanisms through which reading influences language skills acquisition. By addressing these gaps and expanding the scope of inquiry, future research endeavors can contribute to a more thorough understanding of the relationship between reading habits and English language proficiency among students.

REFLECTION:

Engaging in action research provided me with a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. While I had previously acquired theoretical understanding of research methodologies, conducting action research in a real-world setting presented both enriching experiences and challenges.

One of the key lessons I learned was the importance of timely execution in action research. Adhering to deadlines and maintaining a structured approach enabled me to effectively track progress and gather data without overlooking critical details. Additionally, I developed proficiency in interviewing participants and utilizing analytical tools such as SPSS and Excel to refine my research findings.

However, navigating the complexities of real-world research posed its own set of challenges, particularly with limited prior experience. I found myself frequently seeking guidance from a critical friend to overcome hurdles and enhance the quality of my research. Moreover, grappling with unfamiliar tools like SPSS and graph-making software required additional effort and resourcefulness. Yet, through perseverance and leveraging online resources, I gradually gained confidence in utilizing these tools to analyze and present data effectively.

Perhaps the most significant challenge I encountered was the constraint of time. Conducting comprehensive research within a limited timeframe proved daunting, especially when seeking to obtain concrete evidence of the impact of reading on students' language competency. Reflecting on this, I recognize the value of longer durations for research endeavors, allowing for more thorough data collection and analysis.

In hindsight, this experience has underscored the importance of adaptability, resilience, and resourcefulness in overcoming challenges encountered during action research. Moving forward, I am committed to applying these insights to future research endeavors, striving for continuous improvement and maximizing the impact of my research outcomes.

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