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## Parent involvement towards children's reading habit: A focus group survey from Nashik, India

Suvarna P. Desale

*K. K. Wagh Universal School, Nashik, India, suvarna.desale@gmail.com*

Rajendra M. Kumbhar Ph.D.

*Savitribai Phule Pune University, rajendra\_kumbhar@unipune.ac.in*

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**Parent involvement towards children's reading habit: A focus group  
survey from Nashik, India**

By

**Suvarna Desale**

Librarian, K. K. Wagh Universal School,  
DGP Nagar, Nashik, Maharashtra, India – 422006

[suvarna.desale@gmail.com](mailto:suvarna.desale@gmail.com)

ORCID ID – 0000-0002-5364-9626

**Prof. (Dr.) Rajendra Kumbhar**

Professor and Head, Department of Library and Information Science,  
Savitribai Phule Pune University, Maharashtra, India – 411007

[rajendra\\_kumbhar@unipune.ac.in](mailto:rajendra_kumbhar@unipune.ac.in)

ORCID ID – 0000-0002-3548-5744

## **Abstract**

**Purpose** - This study was carried out to ascertain parents' attitude about reading related activities of children, to discover parents' efforts for instilling the reading habit in their children, to understand the challenges faced by parents in inculcating reading habit in their children, and to suggest possible solutions to the parents' difficulties related to their children's reading habits.

**Design/ Methodology** - The research was conducted using the Survey method, with Focus Group Discussion used as the data collection tool. The research sample was 24 parents of pupils who were studying in the primary and secondary Marathi medium schools in Nashik district. An anonymous data was collected Qualitative descriptive analysis was carried out of the collected data.

**Findings** - It was observed that parents knew that pleasure reading was important for the overall behavioral development of their children. However, less than half of them performed any substantial activities to instill the reading habit in their children. Children's excessive usage of the internet, time constraints, children's disinterest in reading, and parents' incognizance about the effective reading material were the main challenges faced.

**Originality/ Value** - This study is one of the first one of its kind in the Indian scenario. Uniquely collecting parents' real experiences through focus group interviews, this paper provides concrete solutions to the difficulties of parents in inculcating reading habits among their children.

**Paper type** - Research paper

## **Keywords**

Reading habit, children, parents, qualitative descriptive research, focus group discussion

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## **1. Introduction**

Involvement of the parents in reading related activities of their children is an essential part of the basic need of every child to build a strong society. From childhood, the children try to imitate their parents and family members. Behavior of the child is the mirror of their home environment. From the early age of child, co-reading with parents makes an imperishable change in overall development of the child. It is necessary that the parent's attitude towards their child's reading habit should be careful and attentive. Generally, it can be seen that children become more successful when their parents get involved in each activity of the education. It reflects in the child's higher test scores, grades, their attentiveness in the school, homework completion, and other activities in the school like sports, music, literacy level, drawings etc. In short, parent's involvement flourishes the child's overall performance. Present study focuses on the attitude of the parents towards the reading habits of the children at home, parents opinions on children's screen time, and the efforts of parents in facilitating them to read at home.

This paper primarily focuses on the parents' influence on their children's reading habits. A reading habit is defined as "The activity of reading is regarded as a habit when it is repeatedly carried out. In measurable terms reading habits are often considered in terms of the amount of materials being read, the frequency of reading as well as the average time spent on reading" (Wagner, 2002). This definition shows the importance of frequent reading. To inculcate the reading habit, children should be involved in reading from childhood as a regular activity in their daily routine.

## **2. Review of Literature**

To find out the previously published material on the research topic, a literature search was carried out using primary and secondary sources. Among the recall, a number of studies were found on parents' role in inculcation of reading habits among very young children. However, the opinions and influence of parents on older children's reading habits, especially in Indian scenarios were not seen in previous research. This study would be the first of its kind which focused on the actual opinion of the parent community and providing feasible solutions to their difficulties in nurturing the reading habit among students.

Reporting the case study they conducted about the students' reading habit, Davidovitch, et al. (2016) wrote about whether the preference was more towards traditional (print books) or modern (computerized screen/ online). Results indicated that students preferred using online

and computerized reading because it was updated and time-saving. It was remarked that the academicians should implement the print reading and encourage their students to read print material rather than the computer/ online.

Loan (2011) conducted the comparative review of literature on ‘impact of technology’ and ‘impact of print media’ on reading habit of students. The suggestions showed that the print media provides long thinking power to the mind. The text reading on print is an unending process however; electronic gadgets such as, computer, cell phones, radio etc. are the “Time Eating Machines”, students run behind these electronic media. These media almost closed the print books.

Jennings, et al. (2014) compared the effectiveness of graphic novels, heavily illustrated novels, and traditional novels as reading teaching tools on the fifth grade students. Researchers gave the six novels: two traditional novels, two highly illustrated novels and two graphic novels to the 24 mixed ability students. Then they measured the students’ comprehension and enjoyment by using rubric-graded assignment and rating scales. The variables to compare were the effectiveness of students' thinking skills, completed assignments. The graphic novel received the highest scores in all categories. The researchers concluded that graphic novels are considered an engaging and effective method of teaching reading to fifth graders.

Merga (2014) discussed the findings of the survey West Australian Study in Adolescent Book Reading (WASABR). It showed that recreational reading can be increased by communication with peer groups, parents, family discussion and educators. It developed the confidence among the children. They know the brainstorming strategies and reading go beyond the textual based reading.

Applying the Gee’s Theory of Discourses to find out impact factors of the reading habits of the students, Knoester (2009) conducted the interview of parents, friends and teachers in the United States of 10 small public schools, with the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade students selected for the study. He referred to parents as the “Home Teachers”; and that these home teachers must have a home library. They must emphasize their children by conducting activities, just as a teacher insists students do recreational reading.

Reporting his study conducted on five Indonesian parents whose children ranged in age from 6 to 12 years, Alam (2021) identified optimal mechanisms through which parents could play an important role in supporting their children's recreational book-reading into adolescence. Findings showed that the parents comprehended their children's reading abilities, but should provide more encouragement for continued reading. It was concluded that parental participation could help children acquire a reading habit. Ahmad (2020) carried out a study to

understand the effect of leisure reading on the overall educational performance of children. Findings of the study showed that parents' reading with their child had a positive impact on the educational attainment of their children.

To determine the association between family characteristics and reading habits and interest in Malaysian National Primary Schools, Yusof (2010) administered a research that examined the impact of factors like family income, parents' education level, parents' employment, parents' encouragement to read, and reading environment at home. The findings displayed that all these family factors had a considerable and beneficial effect on children's reading habits and interests.

Klauda (2009) examined empirical studies concerning the ways and extent to which parental support for reading relates to the reading motivations and habits of students in the fourth through twelfth grades. Paper included discussion of extant quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies, models from the reading domain, and extensive recommendations for future research.

Researching the reasons behind the increase in reading promotion in the Netherlands over the past five decades, Kraaykamp (2003) found that the use of library facilities at an early age showed a sharp increase; while secondary schools paid more attention to the cultural education of pupils. The results indicated that attention to reading in their youth had a positive influence on children's reading level in adult life.

### **3. Identification of the Problem**

It was observed that the parents did not have a clear idea about what type of books they have to make available for their children, how to be the reading role models for them, how to identify the children's difficulties of reading, and how to solve them. Many times, parents purchased books for their children without making an effort to discern their reading choices; or they bought books of their own choice. In such cases, the children may find those books given by their parents as difficult and therefore, uninteresting.

The parents expect their children to read whichever books they purchase. However, more effort needs to be put to understand the reading needs and preferences of the children about which type of book they want to read and what actual difficulties they face. Many such problems were faced by the parents and the main difficulty was that the children spent long hours on the screen, handling mobile phones and watching television. Therefore, this research

was undertaken to find solutions that would help parents in developing their children's reading competency perpetually.

#### **4. Significance of the Study**

A number of libraries and national institutions of many countries bring out publications specializing in children's reading related material. They also organize activities with expert teachers, librarians and parents on an individual basis. It shows their awareness about reading related activities. It also motivates other slow or difficult readers to become good readers. It also encourages the inactive parents to become active parents about their pupils reading related activities.

In India, parents are very passive about their child's reading related activities. However, illiteracy is the main reason behind this problem. According to the ASER report 2018, Eighth class students in rural India were unable to read even a Second class text. In rural areas of India, the children cannot read and write due to poverty level and unawareness of education among the parents. However, the vision of ASER survey is to improve the quality of social sector programs i.e. town, village, city, district and state. It aims to create a culture where rigorous measurement of outcomes are integrated into action, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice, assumptions and reality with help of the schools, colleges, NGO's and universities. This study focuses on the parents' involvement in the reading related activities of their children, parents' attitude, efforts, and their difficulties. Hence, this study may be of help to all the parents to better understand the difficulties, needs and choices of their children about reading books.

#### **5. Objectives**

The present study attempts to investigate the importance of parents' involvement towards children's reading habit with the following objectives –

1. To ascertain the attitude of parents towards reading-related activities of their children
2. To discover parents' efforts for instilling the reading habit in their children
3. To understand the challenges faced by parents in inculcating reading habit in their children
4. To suggest possible solutions to the parents' difficulties related to their children's reading habits

## **6. Methodology, Scope, and Limitations**

This research was conducted using Survey research method. The research population was the parents of pupils studying in the secondary (fifth-grade to tenth-grade) Marathi medium schools in Nashik district of Maharashtra state in India. The sample of study was randomly selected under the set parameters. The research focused exclusively on parents' efforts for improving children's reading habit, their attitude towards reading activities of the children, and their difficulties while involved in reading activities with their children. The resulting improvements in reading or any other related skill among pupils were not the scope of this study.

## **7. Data Collection**

Focus group discussion (FGD) was used as the data collection tool to collect qualitative data. FGD is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service or concept. Questions are asked in an interactive group of approximately 10-12 persons where group members freely and spontaneously discuss the topic of research with each other. During this process, the researcher either takes notes or records the vital points he or she is getting from the group. Its purpose is much more than a question answer interaction and aims to obtain in-depth information on the topic of discussion (Ramadass & Aruni, 2009).

It is the best tool for collection of qualitative data from the participants since it accumulates the opinions of the respondents. It was essential to know the real experiences and opinions of parents about their children's reading habit, therefore FGD was decided to be the best tool to collect data from the respondents. The questions were prepared based on the thorough study of related literature.

The FGDs were conducted according to parents' convenient places. Two groups of 12 each i.e. 24 respondents were selected for study. Each parent was asked to respond to each of the questions put forth and their responses were recorded with their oral consent. To maintain anonymity, each of them was given a serial number for identification, instead of their name. The FGD activity was performed for approximately an hour for each group. Among the 24 respondents, there were 16 females and eight males.

Before commencement of each discussion, a brief summary of the questions was given to the respondents. The respondents were more open to share when they understood that the



questions were useful for their children's reading habits. At the end of the FGD, possible solutions to the obstacles were offered to the respondents.

## **8. Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The collected FGD audio data was transcribed individually; specific themes were identified; and data was segregated, and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively under those themes. The percentage stated is limited and rounded off to one digit after the decimal point.

### **8.1 Parents' attitude about importance of children's pleasure reading**

When asked whether they wanted their children to read for pleasure in addition to academic textual reading and whether they encouraged their children for pleasure reading, all 24 (100%) respondent parents strongly agreed that pleasure reading is very necessary for their children and they did not prohibit the children from pleasure reading. When queried about reasons for importance of pleasure reading, 19 (79.2%) parents noted that the pleasure reading was necessary for children to acquire knowledge; 6 (25%) parents told that it was very important for children's overall development and knowledge growth; 5 (20.8%) parents said that pleasure reading provided them an idea about children's interest in a specific subject area, and it would help with their career in future; 4 (16.7%) parents remarked on its significance in developing language skills and creative thinking; whereas 2 (8.3%) said that pleasure reading was essential for mental growth of the children.

However, one female parent strongly stated her opinion, "I know that it is advantageous to read other than academic content but children are very reluctant about reading itself. We persuade them to read novels, stories, and newspapers but they ignore our suggestions." All other parents also showed their agreement with this opinion. Another noted, "Children are not even able to choose books of their choice."

One more female parent expressed, "We emphasize to our children that they should read but they avoid even academic reading. If they even read the textbooks carefully, it will be good for their future growth as well, but they are only reading guides or notes written in the classes and aim just at passing the examinations. How can we make them read story books? Identifying the right reading material for my children is difficult, how do I address this?" All the other parents supported her question.

Responses showed that the parents knew very well the importance of pleasure reading. They also understood that pleasure reading improved the future of students but were facing much difficulty to overcome children's disinterest in reading.

## 8.2 Parents' awareness about children's pleasure reading preference

A question was asked to find out whether parents were cognizant about what their children liked to read for pleasure. In response, all 24 parents knew about their children's reading preferences. Among them, 10 (41.7%) parents said that their children preferred to read historical books or biographical books; 8 (33.3%) noted that their children mainly read fantasy, including superhero stories or magic tales; and for 5 (20.8%) parents, their children liked science-fiction books. In biographies, girls preferred to read about women leaders of the past. Next, 2 (8.3%) parents said that their children preferred reading sport related books, and 2 (8.3%) noted that their children only read daily newspapers. However, they also agreed that as parents they were not recommending any specific type of reading to the children.

Expounding further, one parent mentioned, "Children prefer to read small story books because they can finish reading those within a few minutes. They are not much accustomed to reading big novels." Another parent remarked, "Reading is considered as a boring activity by my children, so they do not read very much. Now, due to the pandemic, schools are conducting e-learning sessions, so we can not stop the children from using mobile phones." However, one parent stated, "Yes, the scenario in the schools is focused on online learning; but I give age-wise small books to my children, and ensure that they would read those and develop a habit of reading". Other possible reasons that children prefer reading small books can be because small story books or graphic novels are attractive and have an easy language.

## 8.3 Parents' efforts to inculcate reading habit in children

When asked about what kind of specific efforts were taken by the parents to enhance pleasure reading among their children, the parents outlined various ways. The responses received are presented in the table below -

Sr. No.	Activities by parents to inculcate reading among children	No. of parents	Percentage %
1	Visiting public library	9	37.5
2	Purchasing pleasure reading books	8	33.3
3	Visiting book exhibition	7	29.2
4	Attending expert lectures on books and reading	7	29.2
5	Read with children (Co-reading)	5	20.8

As seen in the above table, maximum i.e. 9 (37.5%) parents took their children to public libraries to create interest in reading. The discussion showed, however, that many times the books suitable to children's age group or vocabulary were not available in the public libraries. Hence, children would have to choose from available collections. Such selections might be harder for the children to understand due to the content and language, thereby creating dislike for reading altogether.

Nextly, one-third of the parents actively purchased pleasure reading books for their children. Further inquiries however showed that most of these parents bought the books that they felt suitable for the kids, instead of letting the children choose books per their own liking. Though parents' guidance and vigilance are necessary when purchasing books to ensure that no inappropriate reading material reaches the children's hands, taking into consideration the children's own reading preferences, allowing them the freedom to choose what to read is equally important to cultivate the reading habit.

Out of 24, 7 (29.2%) parents said that they took their children to visit book exhibitions with the purpose to show them the large amount of literature available to read and give them a hands-on browsing experience that they might not get in a school or public library. One parent noted his experience stating, "My children see the exhibition with interest but when asked to purchase any particular story book, they decline saying that they already saw the videos related to those books on YouTube." The adverse impact of multimedia on reading is highlighted here.

The same number of parents (29.2%) brought their children along to talks on books and reading as a means to create an interest in reading. The possible reasons for this activity could be that parents believed their children might like to listen to the views and the real life stories from experts; and might get encouraged into following in the footsteps of such successful experts.

It is natural for children to imitate their parents and other grown-up people around them. Reading habits of parents themselves therefore, carry a great deal of influence on children's reading. Collaborative reading or co-reading is an important activity that can shape a child's reading habit. All of the parents knew the importance of this activity, but the least i.e. 5 (20.8%) spent the time reading to or with their children. Furthermore, the group of parents under study were those of secondary and higher secondary (Grade 5 to Grade 10) students. Hence, more than half i.e. 14 (58.3%) of the parents remarked that they performed co-reading when their children were younger and new learners. However, co-reading to children now was not done by the parents due to their and children's time constraints, busier schedules due to higher studies, and inclination of children to spend the free time with friends rather than parents.

The remaining 8 (33.3%) parents did none of the activities and strongly commented that it was the responsibility of their children's schools to create awareness about pleasure reading among students, ensure the availability of suitable and enjoyable reading material, and make certain that students are provided with specific time in the school time-table for reading other than academic.

#### **8.4 Challenges faced by parents with respect to reading habit in children**

To discover what difficulties the parents face when trying to enhance pleasure reading among their children, a question was asked. In response, all 24 (100%) parents agreed that there were four main challenges they faced viz., children's excessive internet usage, time constraints of both children and parents, children's dislike of reading in general, and parents' incognizance about which books should be read by their children.

All the responding parents unanimously remarked that children's overindulgence in social media, online gaming, and overall excessive internet and mobile usage was the main reason for the decline in their reading. With online schooling due to the pandemic, using the mobile or computer has been a necessity for learning as well. It could not be prohibited altogether. Turning the children's attention away from screens of mobile phones/ laptops/ televisions and towards books was found as a near impossible task by the parents. Underlining this, one parent observed, "My children nowadays don't even bother asking me their study-related queries. They just try to find the solution from Google."

Time constraint was the next major hurdle for the parents. With respect to children, the parents asserted that due to a demanding academic schedule full of homeworks and assignments, children did not have enough time or energy for pleasure reading. On the other hand, parents too had a shortage of time due to various responsibilities and hence, could not spend enough time to ensure that their children read.

Another important adversity reflected by the parents was that their children mainly associated reading with study and therefore, did not show interest in reading for pleasure. As previously discussed, many of the parents quoted that they tried bringing their children pleasure reading material but children did not read those books.

Lastly, parents accepted that they did not know which books should be recommended to the children for inculcating reading habits. This was a very significant difficulty and necessitated the proper reading guidance from an expert readers' advisor. As one parent put, "I am at a loss when it comes to buying books that my child would enjoy. What type of reading material should be provided to them, so that they find it interesting to read?"

In addition, 19 (79.2%) parents vocalized that their children's schools did not have sufficient library facilities. The remaining 5 (20.8%) said that their children had a school library and they could borrow books from it, but the children complained that the books in the school library were not interesting. None of the responding parents however ever visited their children's schools and protested these issues of unavailability of good library collection or a lack of the school library altogether. Also, none of them spoke with the school teachers specifically about children's reading interest, their difficulties, or their reading habit growth.

## **9. Findings**

The analysis showed that all the responding parents knew that pleasure reading was important for the overall behavioral development of their children. Parents also thought they knew their children's reading preferences, but they also agreed that they did not actively discuss pleasure reading with their children. Less than half of them performed any substantial activities to instill the reading habit in their children. Though some of them purchased pleasure reading books, took the children to public libraries, book exhibitions, sessions on books and reading, or performed co-reading, maximum parents believed the cultivation of reading habit to be the schools' responsibility. Excessive usage of the internet, time constraints, and disinterest in reading were the challenges quoted by parents with respect to children. Another difficulty was parents' incognizance about the effective reading material for their children, and unavailability of sufficient school library facilities.

## **10. Suggestions**

There are certain concrete ways for parents to overcome the difficulties and inculcate the reading habit among children. They are listed as follows -

1. Parents should emphasize to their children the enjoyment value of pleasure reading, its importance for rich vocabulary, personality development and mental relaxation.
2. Parents should construct a minimum of 30 minutes daily for pleasure reading in children's schedules and ensure that children read the books for pleasure at that time.
3. Parents should dedicate a specific amount of time regularly to co-read or at least discuss pleasure reading with their children.
4. Parents should encourage children to tell them about what they read and why they liked it or disliked it, thereby learning the children's reading preferences as well as their reading problems, if any.

5. Parents should get separate membership for children at the nearby public libraries.
6. Parents should assert the necessity of pleasure reading in their children's schools and insist on the adequate library facilities as well as allocation of pleasure reading time in the school time-table.
7. Parents should consult various resources that recommend appropriate reading for children as per their age-groups. Some of such resources are - *Popular Picks for Young Readers* (American Library Association, ISBN 978-0838936054); *Junior Genreflecting: A Guide to Good Reads and Series Fiction for Children* (Libraries Unlimited, ISBN 978-1563085567); *वाचू आनंदे - भाग १ व २* (ज्योत्स्ना प्रकाशन, ISBN 978-8179250389); *मुलांना वाचून दाखवा आणि त्यांचे आयुष्य घडवा* (डायमंड प्रकाशन, ISBN 978-8184836943). All of these books are extremely useful resources that can help the parents in finding good books for their children in English as well as in Marathi.
8. To enhance reading habits, there are helpful guidelines available at many other websites such as [readingrockets.org](http://readingrockets.org), [scholastics.com](http://scholastics.com), and [abcmouse.com](http://abcmouse.com). These websites provide age-wise listing of reading sources for children from kindergarteners to adolescents. They also give free access to flashcards for kids, picture books, short stories, and novels with the guidelines on home reading activities.
9. Parents should introduce the children to many good websites and apps specializing in pleasure reading such as, [monkeypen.com](http://monkeypen.com), [storyweaver.org.in](http://storyweaver.org.in), [storyjumper.com](http://storyjumper.com); and free access e-magazines for children like Champak (English, Hindi, and Marathi) <https://www.champak.in/> and Kishor (Marathi) <https://kishor.balbharati.in/Archives/>
10. Parents themselves should read more and be effective role models for their children.

## 11. Conclusion

Developing the reading habit from an early age is extremely important as it not only increases the reading ability, but also enhances writing skill, comprehension, mental growth, and the vocabulary of a child. This research highlighted the fact that parents hold a major influence over shaping the reading habit of their children. Though there are many difficulties, especially in this digital age, that obstruct the cultivation of children's interest in reading, active participation and regular interaction by parents about reading can make a positive difference for the children.

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