



Why Aren't Children in Bhutan Reading?

Dawa Gyeltshen^{1*}

¹*Kidheykhar HSS, Mongar, Bhutan.*

Authors' contributions

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/AJESS/2021/v22i330532

Editor(s):

(1) Velan Kunjuraman, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia.

Reviewers:

(1) Arifuddin, University of Mataram, Indonesia.

(2) Muhammad Arshad, National College Of Business Administration and Economics, Pakistan.

(3) Fatma Mohammed Alkaaf, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.

Complete Peer review History: <https://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/74192>

Received 14 July 2021

Accepted 21 September 2021

Published 07 October 2021

Short Research Article

ABSTRACT

This micro study aimed to explore, "Why aren't children in Bhutan reading?" For the purpose of this study, I have chosen students of two primary schools and one central school. I did case study with 20 students of class IV to VI from each school. I focused my study on reading in both the languages taught in Bhutanese schools: Dzongkha, the national language, and English, as a second language. I collected my data using semi structured interview with students. I also talked informally with some of the students. This small study has led me to my current interest of finding out the main reasons why children are not reading in Bhutan.

Keywords: Reading; teachers; schools; speaking skill; reading ability; education.

1. INTRODUCTION

English language is a second language in the schools of the Bhutanese people and it is also given the paramount importance by the Education Ministry. Though there were no studies done on this issue, it still remains a national concern for many educators and parents in Bhutan. As a teacher and a father, this

concern gave rise to a question in my mind, "Why aren't children in Bhutan reading?" To find out the reason to this perennial question, I carried out a study in three schools.

My experience as a teacher for the last twenty four years, many students in the school do not like to read because they do not understand what they read. Students do reading in the school just

*Corresponding author: Email: dgyeltshen.409@gmail.com;

for academic purpose. It is evident that most of the students do not read books during their leisure hours. Students hardly read books other than prescribed texts. All these are indicators that show there are certain factors which hinder the capability and confidence of the students in reading ability.

As implied above, there are a range of reasons as to why this might be the case. Is it because students are not skilled enough to read? Is it because reading materials are not easily accessible? There could be many reasons and the likely cause is in fact a combination of these. However, not much research has been carried out to find out what factors could have impeded the acquisition of reading ability by students. Ahuji [1] states that today's youth is not educated until he becomes an effective reader. Thus, reading is that first button in the garment of education. The ability to read well is one of the most valuable skills in this ever widening world. Today reading serves manifold purpose. It is needed in daily life activities. In this context, as a teacher, it was the biggest concern to explore, *why aren't children in Bhutan reading?* My study identified four main areas of concern.

1.1 Popular Study Materials for Children

Most children like to read books with pictures and medium print size. Among the reading materials the comic seems to be the most popular kind of book but in the rural Bhutan, comic books are not available. Children seem to look for the comic section of the national newspaper, the only source that they could get once a week. There are almost no books written in the national language besides the school textbooks, so not much reading can take place in their national language. Children can get some reading materials written in English and they like to read them but these materials are very scarce and scanty in number. Teachers are not able to choose books that appeal to the children, as there is not much reading material available.

1.2 Lack of Motivation

Most reading is done in schools and in the schools it is for academic purposes only. There is no proper motivation given for children to do reading. The only reading for pleasure is once or twice in a month where the teacher brings some books and issues to the children. Children must find their own time to read the books as there is

no proper timetable for reading books for information, ideas or simply for pleasure. They get to change the books only after another month. The school organizes a so-called Reading Week, in which only the good readers take part for competition. According to the study, many students wanted to participate but only selected ones could take part because of insufficient materials, space and time.

1.3 Parents' Background and Home Environment

Although some Bhutanese do read, the society at large follows an oral culture. People prefer to talk than read. Even in operating machines instead of reading the manuals, 'trial and error' is the common practice of the society. On the other hand, children in rural areas have to attend to a number of regular household chores. Illiterate parents and elders in homes cannot understand the value of reading if it is not connected to school, religion or daily tasks.

1.4 Lack of Modeling

Children do not have role models to look up to and see how reading is done for recreational activity. Teachers have prescribed manuals and syllabuses to follow and they are required to meet the deadlines. So reading aloud an enjoyable book of personal choice cannot take place. At home, reading for pleasure hardly ever takes place. Occasionally children see monks reading sophisticated prayer books to grasp the meaning of which is beyond the knowledge of most lay people not schooled in the sacred scriptures.

This small study has led me to my current interest of finding out more about these four main reasons why children are not reading in Bhutan. I have researched the four factors to give me a greater understanding of this problem so that I can create a strategy to help Bhutanese children enjoy reading and become lifelong readers.

1.5 Lack of Appropriate Reading Materials

The unavailability of reading materials and facilities in the school are some of the major concerns of students and teachers. The different types of reading materials that student commonly use are short stories, essay, poems, kuensel, newspapers and subject related books. However, some of these reading materials are not available

in the schools. Thus, the access to availability of reading materials can be an important factor that hinder enhancement of students' reading ability. According to Zangmo [2] who revealed that many studies have shown and supported the notion that a book rich classroom environment will increase the motivation levels of the children to read. It was found out that in most developing countries, the libraries have a majority of textbooks than fiction. The evidence showed that 'ready access to a wide range of books is a key factor in raising literacy levels' Elley (1996). High reading scores were not found in countries that do not contain good school libraries. Therefore, the availability of books is a key factor in reading development.

According to one of Gambrell's major findings, 'The availability of books is the key factor in reading development' (1996: online) only if children are instructed how to use the books. Although it is obvious that having a book-rich environment has a positive effect on children's reading, studies have shown that what matters most is what is done with the books. Gambrell [3] says that as having a piano in the room will not necessarily make a child pianist and similarly having books available is not sufficient for the development of highly motivated readers. On the other hand, as pianist needs a piano to perform, there should be high quality books and other reading materials for children to become good readers.

The study too reveals that the lack of supplementary reading materials in the school deterred students from building their reading abilities. Generally, this factor has become a common issue in all schools and it has affected the students to read well with accuracy and fluency [4]. It seems that supplementary reading materials that meet students' interest are rarely found in remote schools although the school has adequate library books. Therefore, lack of access to wide range of materials hampers acquisition of vocabulary and comprehension skills in addition to development of reading habit. In school, it is not possible to get adequate numbers of interesting reading materials because of limited financial support. Even if the schools have the subject matter and illustrations available, many of the imported books are often unfamiliar to the cultural backgrounds of readers. This lack of resources could also be a reason why students do not show interest in reading and thus their reading habit are very poor.

Gambrell [5] found out that about 80 percent of children that he interviewed indicated that narrative and information books that they enjoyed most were self selected from the classroom library. The research supports the notion that the books and stories that children find most interesting are those they have selected for their own reasons and purposes. In a study done by Schiefele (1991), students who were allowed and encouraged to choose their own reading materials spent more effort in learning and understanding the material. 'It appears that opportunities for choice promote students' independence and versatility as readers' (Turner, 1995)

1.6 Motivation

The other important factor responsible for developing a reading interest in students depends on motivation. Day and Bamford [6] states that motivation is a force that makes people do or not to do something. Wigfield and Guthrie [7] mention that, motivation and engagement make reading enjoyable. The greater the motivation, the greater the learning will be. Therefore, students need to be motivated to be learning. One of the reasons of student's poor reading habit may due to the lack of teacher's appropriate motivation towards teaching reading skills [8]. It plays an important role and brings behavioral changes and influences in the learners. Motivation is something that energizes, directs, and sustains behavior; it gets students moving, points them in a particular direction, and keeps them going (Ormrod, 2014). Motivated to learn also refers to, "The degree to which students are dedicated to and engaged in learning. A willingness to think through problems and work through challenges to achieve mastery of a concept or skill goes beyond simply having fun during learning." In this sense, not all the learners are of same cognitive level of learning. Teachers should identify the learners intelligence level and reinforce the learning accordingly. Kennedy as cited in Ions & Quigley (1995) said that, not every child has an equal talent or an equal ability or equal motivation, but children have the equal right to develop their talent, their ability and their motivation.

1.7 Culture and Home Factor

Reading is seen as 'work' by both parents and children and thus reading for pleasure hardly takes place in some families and cultures in the

context of remote places in Bhutan. Besides, illiterate parents and elders in homes cannot understand the value of reading. The society at large follows an oral culture in remote places of Bhutan. People prefer to talk than read. The IEA Reading Literacy Study found that students whose home language differed from the school language performed less well on the reading tests than those who were tested on their home language (cited in [5]).

1.8 Parents' Background and the Home Environment

The home environment is a very important factor affecting lifelong readers. Parents are the child's first educator. A child's family and home environment has a strong impact on his/her language and literacy development and educational achievement. This impact is stronger during the child's early years but continues throughout their school year. The support, guidance and literacy skills of parents will definitely have an impact on their children's reading ability. M. C. Smith & Elish-Piper, (2002) mention that whenever parents have literacy problems, the potential exists for their children to struggle with literacy acquisition. Parents reading to babies and young children have a strong impact on children's language and literacy development. Parent's reading to their children in the pre-school years is regarded as an important predictor of literacy achievement (Weinberger, 1996). Therefore, there are two components to the role parents play with reading attitude. First, the home literacy culture is significant to the development of children. Within the home literacy environment, there should be presence of literacy artifacts including many different kinds of printed materials.

1.9 Role Models

Modeling refers to the patterning of thoughts, beliefs, strategies and actions after those displayed by one or more models- usually teachers or parents who explain and demonstrate skills (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997) [9]. When we as teachers or even as parents share our reading with children, we are showing them how reading enhances our lives. In this way, we demonstrate to our children that reading helps us learn more about the world in which we live, gives us pleasure, increases our vocabulary, and makes us good speakers and writers. Another important reason mentioned is that when we share our personal reading, children learn to

see us as real readers. Explicit reading models for our students will help them find out that reading is enjoyable and learning is pleasure, Children will be encouraged to become lifelong readers [10].

Mana and Misheff (as cited in Oğuz, Yıldız, & Hayırsever, 2009) suggest that the joy and enthusiasm of reading cannot be taught but modeled. Accordingly, students could not only become good readers through modeling. The role of the teacher in the school is paramount. Research suggests that the frequency with which students read in and out of school depend upon the priority classroom teachers give to independent reading (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988) [11]. For a student to be a better reader, a given role model by parents, teachers, and peers may facilitate their learning. Gambrell, Morrow, & Pressley, [10] state that students need to see that we value reading and that reading is important in our life. Therefore, teacher modeling and parents modeling of reading has positive effect on student learning to read effectively.

2. CONCLUSION

After having read many materials on how to get children to read, I have realised that children must learn to love reading to develop reading habits. From an early age, children need to encounter a wide variety of books that entertain, arouse their interest and excite their curiosity. In countries like Bhutan, there are not many books available for pleasure and the only reading materials are the textbooks. Children miss opportunities to read for enjoyment that results in reading impediments. When children's reading skills are under developed and the only reading materials are the textbooks, reading becomes difficult and not enjoyable. The prescribed text books which are difficult for children and the competition based reading programmes might lead to the development of aversion to reading in children [12]. For children who live in a bookless society, in an oral culture where reading is thought as work rather than pleasure, teachers need to think of creating interest among young learners from a very early age with a wide range of books rather than using only pressure to make children read. Success in bringing up a generation of children who will read for pleasure can be fulfilled only when access to books is easy, when children have the choice and time for reading and finally when they are shown the real value and purpose of reading.

CONSENT

Asking interviewees to fill in the consent form in advance to ensure full participation for collection of data. During the data collection, confidentiality and anonymity on the views responded by participants will be maintained throughout the research. All the participants would be guaranteed not to disclose their identity and pseudonyms will be provided in the final write up. Similar during the post data collection period, the researcher will maintain participants' identity and ensure that the participant's views and ideas are protected from any damages or harm. Any information regarding the researcher such as field notes, interview transcripts and observation sheets will be kept securely and it would be available to only the researcher.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical issues are the professional code of conduct that the researchers must abide by before, during and after the research. A Guide to Research Ethics (2003) of the University of Minnesota provides us with very important reasons as to why understanding research ethics is important. According to the Guide; Research is a public trust that must be ethically conducted, trustworthy, and socially responsible if the results are to be valuable [13]. All parts of a research project – from the project design to submission of the results for peer review – have to be upstanding in order to be considered ethical. When even one part of a research project is questionable or conducted unethically, the integrity of the entire project is called into question. (pg. 6-7). Therefore, the researcher will take care of any potential ethical issues. While carrying out the study, the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of interviewees. In the pre-data collection, the researcher will make aware of how one should get access to data collection. For instance, getting approvals from the concerned authorities such as Paro College of Education, Ministry of Education, District Education Officers, and school principals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I like to thank my proofreaders Mrs. Tshering Wangmo, Ph.D, Assistant Professor, Paro College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan and Mrs. Ugyen Tshomo, Lecture, Paro College of Education for

making this study more presentable. They played the roles of proofreaders, but also acted as excellent critics. I sincerely like to thank them for sacrificing their time to coming up with critical suggestions.

Besides, I must also thank Dzongkhag Education Officer, Mongar Dzongkhag and three school Principals of Bumpazor PS, Ngatshang PS and Kidheykhar Central School, Mongar, who has granted approval letter to collect data for my study from their school. Eventually, my profound appreciation goes to all teachers and students who rendering assisting hands in responding questionnaires with honesty and sparing your invaluable time. Finally, words cannot express my heartfelt gratitude, appreciation and thanks for all the support and encouragement of my family and my friends.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Ahuji GC. How to read effectively and efficiently. A concise guide to promote reading ability. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers (P) Ltd; 2007.
2. Zangmo D. Why aren't children in Bhutan reading? Rabsel: The Centre for Educational Research and Development Journal. 2002;XI:35-43.
3. Available:<http://www.schoolchangeinreading.org/files/Gambrell> (Retrieved on 11.09.2019).
4. Curriculum and professional Support Division. Reading techniques: Supplementary reading programme. Paro: CAPSD; 2004.
5. Gambrell LB, Morrow LME, Pressley ME. Best practices in literacy instruction; 2007. Available:<http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2007-01980-000>
6. Day R, Bamford, J. Extensive reading in the second language classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1998.
7. Guthrie JT, Wigfield A. Engagement and motivation in reading. In Kamil ML, Mosenthal PB, Pearson PD, Barr R. (Eds.). Reading research handbook. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. 2000;III:403–424.

8. Colker J Laura. When Children Read Because They want To, Not Because They Have To; 2005.
Available:<http://www.rif.org/educators/articles/WhenChildrenRead.msp>
(Retrieved 15.09.2019).
9. Zimmermann S, Hutchins C. The seven keys to comprehension: How to help your kids read it and get it; 2003.
10. Gambrell B Linda. Creating classroom cultures that foster reading motivation; 1996.
11. Anderson RC, Wilson PT, Fielding LG. Growth in reading and how children spend their time outside of school. Reading Research Quarterly. 1988;285–303.
12. Schoenfeld AH, Smith JP, Arcavi A. Learning: The micro genetic analysis of one student’s evolving understanding of a complex subject matter domain. Advances in Instructional Psychology. US. 1993;4:55–175.
13. Winch G. Literacy writing and children’s literature, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, Australia; 2004.

© 2021 Gyeltshen; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
<https://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/74192>