CHAPTER
FIVE
Chapter 5

Discussions and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion of findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences in reading habits and interests between the urban and rural teenagers. The study was aimed at identifying the strength of relationship between reading and the home.
environment, reading and socio economic status, family educational background and accessibility of reading materials.

The focus of this study was on two samples group of teenagers between the ages of sixteen to eighteen. This study was carried out on a comparative basis on sixty urban teenagers and sixty rural teenagers.

The results of the study showed a definite relationship between respondents' reading and their socio economic background, i.e. age, occupation, income, education. The evidence obtained suggests that the urban respondents read English materials widely compared to the rural respondents.

Relevant data from the study was also obtained to determine types of reading materials that interest teenagers, frequency of reading and their motivation to read.

The reading materials cited for the purpose of this study renews papers, books and magazines. On the whole the quantity of newspaper reading is the highest compared to books and magazines. Books were the least preferred by rural teenagers.
The ultimate objective of this study is to assist teenagers to foster reading habits and interest.

The analysis of the data has indicated many interesting findings. In this chapter the discussion of the findings is organized under three sub headings: newspapers, books and magazines.

Interviews were also carried out to solicit respondent’s attitudes and opinions towards reading. Interviewees’ responses indicated an awareness of the importance of reading in their lives.

5.1.1 Newspapers

The study found that in general, newspapers were the most preferred reading materials among both sample groups. However, the comparative figures showed that reading newspapers was exceptionally high among the urban respondents.

This higher percentage for reading newspapers among the urban teenagers is attributed to the fact that urban teenagers have the accessibility to obtain newspapers compared to the rural teenagers. Limited accessibility, low language
proficiency and low family income are the deterrent factors to reading among the rural teenagers.

Reading newspapers takes place more frequently among urban teenagers as compared to rural. However, among the rural teenagers, reading newspapers is more frequent compared to books and magazines. The main reason for not reading English materials among the rural teenagers is that they cannot understand the language. The root of this problem is in fact the home environment. In the majority of the rural families English is a foreign language. Family members do not converse in English and neither can their parents read or write in English. This is in contrast with the urban families who are fluent in the language.

The majority of rural teenagers preferred comics compared to more serious reading materials such as the local news and foreign news, which are favoured by urban teenagers.
5.1.2 Magazines

Magazines are the second popular reading materials among both the sample groups.

A very small percentage of rural teenagers read magazines. One of the main reasons for not reading English magazines among rural teenagers is again the inability to understand the language. This was followed closely by the reason that they are not interested. It was found that reading interest was not inculcated at an early age. In addition, language is a barrier and this kills their interest.

Among the magazine readers, it was found that the rural teenagers preferred magazines that are informative and educational in nature, such as the Reader’s Digest. Among the rural respondents, the majority of magazine readers preferred the Students Digest. The Students Digest is a monthly magazine which is also informative and educational but for light reading. It uses simple English for easy understanding.

Rural respondents hardly borrowed any magazines from their school libraries compared to a higher percentage of urban teenagers who borrowed magazines.
from the school libraries. Upon further investigation it was found that the rural library did not have any magazines that students could borrow.

Both sample groups who read magazines spend less than two hours reading in a week.

Entertainment and educational magazines were the two most preferred types of magazine among the rural and urban sample groups. Teenagers read magazines for leisure as well as for knowledge.

5.1.3 Books

Books were the third popular reading material among the teenagers. Respondents were asked to indicate the number of books read in the past six months. The majority of urban students read between three to five books compared to the majority of rural teenagers who read between one to two books.

Romance and mystery books were the two most preferred types of books among the urban teenagers. In contrast the rural teenagers preferred reading books on humour and horror.
The majority of urban teenagers belong to the higher income group. Thus, they could afford to buy books. This is not so among rural teenagers who belong to the lower income group. Borrowing books is their main source of obtaining books.

Urban teenagers spend more time reading books per week compared to rural teenagers. Urban teenagers spent between four to six hours reading. In comparison, rural teenagers spent less than two hours. This could be attributed to their interest and the time available. Many rural teenagers were found to be working part time. This leaves them with hardly any free time.

Content and author are the two important features urban teenagers look for when purchasing books. Urban teenagers have more access, are more exposed and have more supportive families who have the financial means to obtain books. Rural teenagers, on the other hand, have no access to the latest books, are unfamiliar with book titles and authors and most importantly they do not have the financial means to buy books. Hence, to the rural teenagers, price is the most important feature to look for when purchasing books.
5.2 Conclusion

The study found that there was definitely a relationship between socio-economic status and reading as well as the home environment and reading.

The home environment plays a pivotal role in encouraging and inculcating the reading habit. A genuine love for reading can be developed at home.

Parents advocate the reading of books, newspapers and magazines. For the urban teenagers, their parents were influential in encouraging reading. There is easy accessibility for reading materials at home as these materials are purchased regularly. Urban parents too are fluent in the English language and English is spoken in most urban households. However, this is not the same in the rural home environment. Their parents' inability to converse in the English language is passed on to their children. Some rural parents encourage their children to learn the language but there is lack of motivation and initiative on the part of the children.
Other than parents, teachers play an important role in encouraging reading. Both urban and rural teenagers claim that teachers played an instrumental role in developing their reading interest.

The languages spoken at home influences greatly teenagers ability to cope with the language. In most urban household, family members converse in English. Urban teenagers are comfortable with the language, on the other hand rural family members seldom speak in English. Their mother tongue, which is either Malay, Chinese or Tamil, is the main medium of communication at home. Thus, the majority of them identified not understanding the language as one of the reasons for not reading.

Language learning is acquired at an early stage. According to Chomsky, an early exposure to the language allows a better acquisition of the language. This provides a strong foundation when children start speaking the language at later stages of their lives. This early exposure stems from the home environment. The study shows evidence that there is strong home support among the urban households, which can inculcate the love of reading. In the urban households, parents who read are models for their children.
Data also indicated a relationship between income and reading. The lesser the income, the lower the reading rate. In addition, lower income means fewer reading materials available at home. The purchasing power of books here clearly remains among the urban families. Hence, a higher level of encouragement with regards to reading. Encouragement towards reading among the lower income group in this case was largely negative.

It must be noted here that the income mentioned is inferred through the occupation. In addition, there is a positive link between education, occupation and income. The higher the education the better the occupation and the higher the income. This was clearly evident among the urban families and a very small percentage among the rural families.

The interview section exposed an awareness among students with regards to reading and inculcating reading habits and interest. All the interviewees were aware of the differences. However, the only difference was a strong awareness towards the importance of reading and actually doing something about it. The urban students showed an awareness towards reading and purchased reading materials. The rural students also showed awareness but do not have purchasing power. This restricted their access to reading materials.
5.3 Recommendations

The development of reading skills is integral to the educational process. Where reading is concern, there is surely much cause for concern especially among the rural teenagers. While there is little that can be done about the home environment there is definitely much more that the school can do to improve the quality and quantity of reading. Developing a genuine love of reading at school level can surely ensure the growth of a reading community in the future.

5.3.1 The School Library

As the school library is the only access to reading materials, especially for rural students, it should provide adequate and varied stock of reading materials. The school should ensure that the school library is conducive and fully utilised. To attract students, a wide choice of reading materials should be well stocked. Selection of books too, should be in line with students’ interest and level. Students should be able to read what they like and not because it is forced on them. The school should subscribe to a wider choice of magazines based on the type preferred by the students.
5.3.2 The Teachers' Role

The teachers should identify pupils' attractions and offer carefully selected materials. Activities should be varied and creative. For example, teachers should enrich teaching with book related activities. Dramatization of stories would encourage reading.

It is important that teachers view reading as a potential to reinforce, extend and enrich language skills. Teachers can inculcate into students that reading is important. This can be done by proper guidance, encouragement and reading opportunities.

An excellent teacher would identify poor readers and develop a programme to assist such readers. Teachers could include library periods in the timetable. These periods would allow students to use the library to its fullest, thus, giving rise to reading enjoyment.

As habits are formed through regular activity, it is the teachers' role to develop a regular reading programme. This would automatically inculcate the reading habits and interest among his or her pupils.
5.4 : How to Promote Reading Habits

Generally, the highest percentage of non-readers came from a lower economic level. Therefore, it is the duty of the parents to provide the climate for reading. Parents who read fairy tales or short stories to their children have already formed the foundation to reading habits and interest.

Newspapers is the most common form of reading when children are at home. Newspapers, being the cheapest form of reading material, should be subscribed by every household. Often we underestimate the impact of newspapers on children. Such form of reading materials, if kept lying around the house, is likely to be picked up and browsed through, even if it is just to look at the comics.

Lack of motivation and encouragement from both parents and teachers is a deterrent to promoting reading habits. But most parents in the rural areas are illiterate where English language is concerned. Therefore, it is the teacher’s job with the help of the school authorities to implement reading programmes for the benefit of the students'.
Books seem to be the least popular form of reading material among the rural teenagers. The main reason is that books are expensive and rural parents do not have the purchasing power. One way of promoting reading is to extend the assistance in the form of book donations to these schools. This would minimize the cost of buying books and enhance reading among the rural teenagers.

Inaccessibility to obtain a variety of books in the rural areas is also one of the causes of lack of reading among rural teenagers. Therefore, marketing and distribution of books should be developed to reach a wider readership, especially in the rural areas.

The education system needs to be designed in order to contribute to intellectual creativity. The moment most individuals read to acquire certain skills, their reading is limited to text books reading only. The education system needs to instill and promote the love of reading, which is not only directly relevant to vocabulary enrichment but also for enjoyment.