



Improving grade five students' recreational reading habits: An action research

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ABSTRACT

Reading is vital for learning. It makes a reader more empathetic, knowledgeable, and creative and stimulates imagination. It also helps in boosting communication, improving vocabulary and helps to discover the world. Given this context, the present study seeks to improve grade five students' recreational reading habits through measures such as uninterrupted sustained silent reading, creating reading corner and providing reading incentives. Grounded on the pragmatism paradigm, the study employs convergent parallel design. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected through survey of 25 students and six students, respectively. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative data from interview were used to support the findings of quantitative data. The result of the current study revealed that intervention measures employed for this study are effective in enhancing grade five students' attitude towards reading. The recreational reading habits also improved after implementing the intervention measures. In addition, it was also found that reading incentives motivates students the most followed by uninterrupted sustained silent reading. Therefore, teachers and parents need to encourage students to read by creating reading platform and providing incentives for the students to enhance their recreational reading habits.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is the most powerful tool human beings possess, and reading is one of the most effective means to master this tool. The habit of reading allows us to discover new ideas. It also helps in brain development and enhances one's imagination. Moreover, reading plays an important role in children's academic performance and has a significant influence on learning (Abid et al., 2023). Therefore, inculcating reading habits in young children is of paramount importance.

Researchers have highlighted the significance of developing reading habits and the benefits of reading to children at an early age (Majid, 2021; Celik, 2019). Children who struggle with reading at the end of primary school have a lower chance of succeeding in secondary school and in life as an adult. They are likely to earn lower grade than their peers. Therefore, the focus should be on encouraging students to develop reading habits at a young age.

To inculcate the habit of reading, library services in school is made available from 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.. A separate period of 50 minutes is allocated to students to avail library services in the schools. In addition, to encourage students to read more, the first week of September is celebrated as National Reading Week in Bhutan every year. Despite such effort, recreational reading habits amongst the students remained poor (Dorji and Rinzin, 2021). Therefore, there is a need to encourage students to read on their own for enjoyment.

Given the above context, it is timely to intervene and help students to take up recreational reading which will not only prepare them to become a lifelong learner but also to excel in their academic performance. Therefore, the aim of this action research is to enhance grade five students' habits in recreational reading in Chumey Higher Secondary School.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Chumey Higher Secondary School was established in 1983. It is located under Chumey Gewog. The school aims to impart quality wholesome education to help learners realize their full potential, by providing a caring and enabling environment and laying equal emphasis on learners' physical, mental, social and spiritual development.

The grade level chosen for this study is grade five. There are 25 students with 13 boys and 12 girls with ages ranging from 10 to 13 years and from different social and cultural backgrounds with mixed ability. It was observed that they are enthusiastic and obedient learners, however, they lack confidence to come forward and learn.

From the reading log maintained by the English language teacher, it was evident that the biggest challenges grade five students face is their poor recreational reading habits. Their poor recreational reading habits not only hampered their ability to comprehend materials during teaching and learning but also limited their ability to independently learn.

Considering their poor recreational reading habits, book review strategy was employed in order to encourage students to enhance their recreational reading habits for 1 month. However, book review strategy does not encourage students to read for recreation. This is because, within 1 month, 25 students read only 90 books ($M=3.6$). In addition, 3 students didn't read even one book during that period. Given this circumstance, it is timely and vital to look for different strategies to encourage grade five students to practice recreational reading. This study will have numerous opportunities such as improving students' habits of recreational reading, new and exciting experiences for participants, improving vocabulary, adding literature on Bhutanese context in the international arena and enhancing researchers' knowledge and experiences with regards to recreational reading habits.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

With the aim of helping grade five students to develop their recreational reading habits, three objectives are framed.

1. Examine the attitude of grade five students towards recreational reading.
2. Assess grade five students' recreational reading habits before and after the implementation of intervention strategies.
3. Investigate grade five students' source of motivation for recreational reading after the implementation of intervention strategies.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED

1. *Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading*

Uninterrupted sustained silent reading (USSR) is regarded as one of the important measures to improve recreational reading habits (Manurung et al., 2020; Bari et al., 2021; Loday, 2021). Therefore, in order to encourage students to read for recreation, the current study implemented the USSR. Researchers in consultation with the participants designated 25 minutes of lunch break to implement the USSR. Participants were allowed to select books of their own interest. The researchers took turns to monitor the activity and read along with the students. The USSR was implemented for a duration of one month.

2. *Reading corner*

Magsumbol and Punzalan (2019) reported that students' attitude towards reading can be improved when they are provided with lots of good reading materials. Therefore, to encourage students to read and to make reading materials available, researchers have set up a reading corner in the class. This enabled students to easily pick a book to read whenever they are not able to avail library service. Reading corner also provided opportunities for students to share their books to their classmates. In order to ensure the reading corner has enough books, researchers sought support from parents and friends for book donations appropriate for the grade level.

3. *Reading incentives*

Reading incentives is one important measure to encourage students to improve their reading habits (Bala, 2020). In addition, West (2014) asserts that research into motivation and incentives, both generally and for reading, targets mainly on children in the elementary school age range. Therefore, students were informed about the following reading incentives during the start of the study.

- *Certificates and prizes for highest book reader*

In order to recognize the effort of the highest book reader, three top readers were awarded with certificates and prizes at the end of the intervention. For this purpose, participants have maintained a reading log containing the title of the book and the name of the author. In addition, to ensure participants have read the book, researchers have asked three questions related to the content of the book. If participants are not able to answer, participants are asked to read the book again. After the participants were able to answer all three questions, the participants were allowed to update the reading log and researchers put an initial against the list.

- *Prizes for lucky book readers*

In order to encourage and to provide an opportunity for all the participants to win a prize, prizes for lucky book readers were also provided. All participants after the completion of reading a particular book write the title of the book and his/her name against the title on a piece of paper and put it in the reading box installed on the corner of the classroom. After the 4th week of intervention (end of intervention), in presence of all the students, researchers have picked three lucky winners and prizes were awarded to the lucky book readers.

- *Hand out bookmark*

Tornio (2016) states that “bookmarks reinforce a love for reading”. Therefore, every participant was provided with a bookmark after they have completed reading their first book.

METHODS

Place of research and participants

This action research was carried out in Chumey Higher Secondary School among grade five students for a duration of 4 months. 25 students which comprises of 13 male and 12 female from grade five participated in this action research. The selection of participants for this action research is purely based on the poor recreational reading habits among grade five students as discussed above under Situational Analysis. The study was conducted between the month of April and July, 2022. The intervention strategies to improve reading habits were employed during the month of May.

Ethical Consideration

In order to conduct this study, initially, we obtained written approval from the school principal, who granted permission for the study to be conducted among fifth grade students. Following this, the parents of all 25 students provided their consent for their children's participation, acknowledging the substantial benefits that their involvement in the study could yield. All 25 students willingly agreed to take part in the study. Parents and students were also informed about students' right to withdraw from the study at any given point should they choose to do so.

Data collection and analysis

Administering survey and interview

The survey administration process for the fifth-grade students was carefully designed to ensure clarity and understanding. A set of 13 survey items was presented to the students, with each question carefully explained using straightforward language. Additionally, the questions were also explained in Dzongkha (national language) to further enhance comprehension. To guarantee that every student could fully understand the items, students were encouraged to seek clarification if any aspect of the questions remained unclear.

Regarding the interviews, the questions were initially presented in English and subsequently translated into Dzongkha. Participants were given the freedom to respond in either English or Dzongkha, depending on their personal comfort and preference.

Survey

Survey as a technique for collecting quantitative data is adopted since it is faster, more accurate, and cost-effective and can be analysed fast using statistical tools. The data for this study were collected twice, once before the implementation of intervention strategies and once after the implementation of pre identified intervention strategies. All 25 students participated in both preliminary data collection as well as post intervention data collection. The data collected were analysed based on descriptive statistics such as sum, mean and frequency. Statistical Package for Social Science (22 version) was used to analyse the data.

Interview

The interview is an important technique to gather the data through verbal communication between the researcher and the participants (Mathers et al., 2000). Study participants were interviewed twice. They were interviewed to understand more on recreational reading before as well as after the intervention. Three highest book readers and three lowest book readers are selected for the interview. Interview data are used to support the findings of the quantitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Grade five students’ attitude towards recreational reading

Grade five students’ attitude towards recreational reading before and after the implementation of intervention strategies is assessed through survey as well as interview. All 25 participants responded to the guided survey. It can be clearly seen from Figure 1 that there is improvement in grade five students’ attitude towards recreational reading after the implementation of intervention strategies. Before the intervention, no participants responded that they enjoy reading “Very much”, however, four participants responded that they enjoy reading very much after the intervention. Similarly, there is a sharp fall in the number of participants who responded “Not at all” before (n=7) and after (n=1) the intervention.

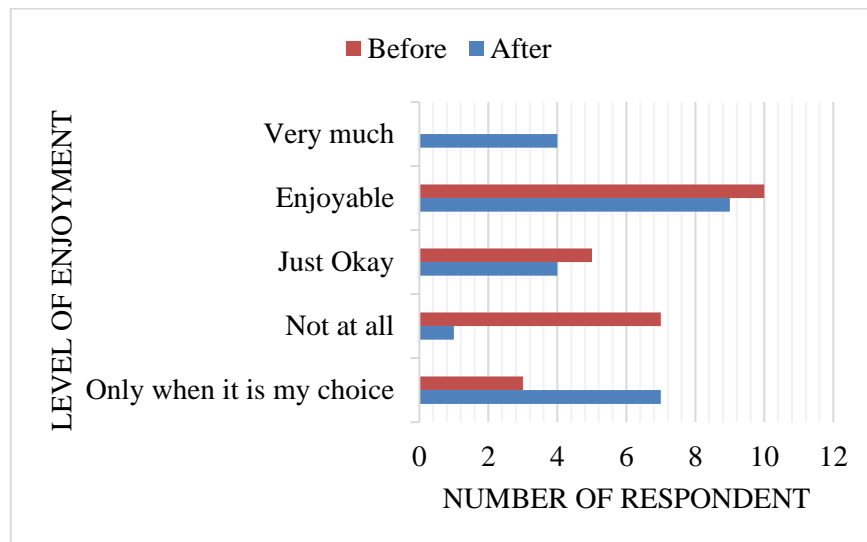


Figure 1: Participants’ level of enjoyment

With regards to their preference to read for academic purpose or for enjoyment, there is significant increase in the number of participants who prefer to read for enjoyment (n=17) after the intervention as compared to 8 participants before the intervention as shown in Figure 2.

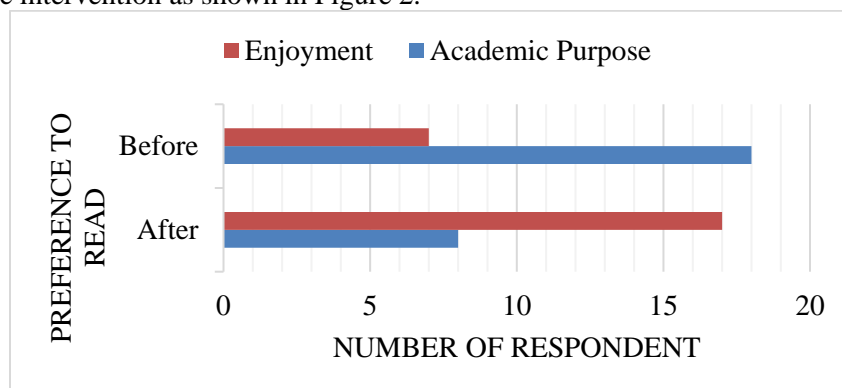


Figure 2: Participants' preference to read

The qualitative findings from the interview data also revealed that participants' attitude towards recreational reading habits have improved after the intervention. Participants have negative attitude before the implementation of intervention strategies. P3 responded "I do not enjoy reading. I enjoy playing with my friends more". Similarly, P4 said "I like reading books. I mostly read text books". In addition, P6 said, "I do not enjoy reading because I always watch television. I like watching television more than reading books." However, after the implementation of intervention strategies, participants are of the view that they should read more in order to learn. "Before participating in this study, I do not read a lot. I always play with friends. Now I feel that reading is important and I am reading more every day. Reading has become a habit after participating in this study" (P4). Similarly, P1 said "I try to read at least once every day after participating in this study. Reading helps me to gain more knowledge".

It was clear from the preliminary data that grade five students do not have a positive attitude towards recreational reading. However, the result from both quantitative and qualitative data indicates that students' attitude towards recreational reading habits have improved after participating in this study. The response from interview and the enhanced level of enjoyment among the participants to read indicates that students have understood the importance of reading. The results also provide a clear indication that teachers can help improve students' recreational reading habits through various interventions such as USSR, reading corner and reading incentives. In addition, the findings also show that students are more into reading as compared to before. The result of this study is similar to that of the study conducted by Bayraktar and Firat (2020) and Andres (2020). In their study, they found that students' attitude towards reading has improved after the intervention. The similarities in the findings may be attributed to the intervention measures that are implemented in order to encourage students to read. Similarly, the findings of Dorji and Rinzin (2021) and Loday (2021) also revealed that the USSR is successful in engaging students wholeheartedly in reading. Similar to the current study, they also found that students were very much involved in reading as a result of the intervention strategies. These results build on the existing evidence that students' attitude towards reading can be improved through various interventions. Intervention strategies such as USSR and Reading Incentives seem to be helpful in encouraging students to take up reading in their leisure time. In addition, the data contribute a clear understanding of the role of teachers in improving students' attitude towards recreational reading. However, this result cannot be generalized since the data were collected from grade five students only and it was beyond the scope of this study to collect the data from other grades. Therefore, further research is needed to establish whether the attitude of students in different grades can also be influenced by current intervention measures to validate the findings of the current study.

2. Grade five students' recreational reading habits before and after the implementation of intervention strategies

Grade five students' recreational reading habits before and after the implementation of intervention strategies is assessed through frequency of books read, time spent in reading, books read before one month and after one month of the implementation of the intervention strategies.

In order to find out how often grade five students read for recreation before and after the implementation of intervention strategies, the data was collected through a survey questionnaire. All 25 students responded to the survey. From the data presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4, it is clear that intervention strategies are quite effective in enhancing grade five students' recreational reading habits.

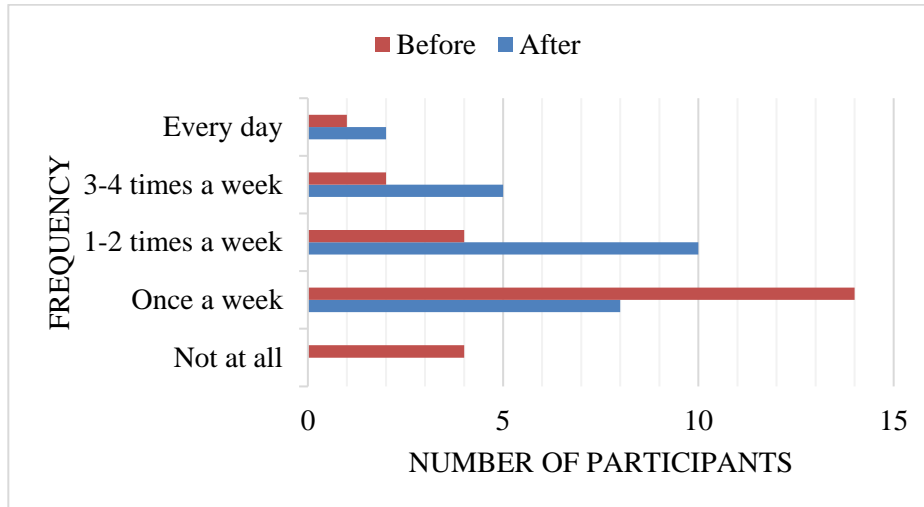


Figure 3: Frequency of books read

Before the implementation of intervention strategies, four participants responded that they do not read at all and 14 responded that they read only once a week. However, after the intervention, majority of the participants (n=10) responded that they read 1-2 times a week. There is also an increase in response 3-4 times a week (from 2 to 5) and every day (from 1 to 2). In addition, none of the participants responded to “Not at all” after the intervention. All the above data indicates that USSR, Reading Corner and Reading Incentives are effective in helping students enhance their recreational reading habits.

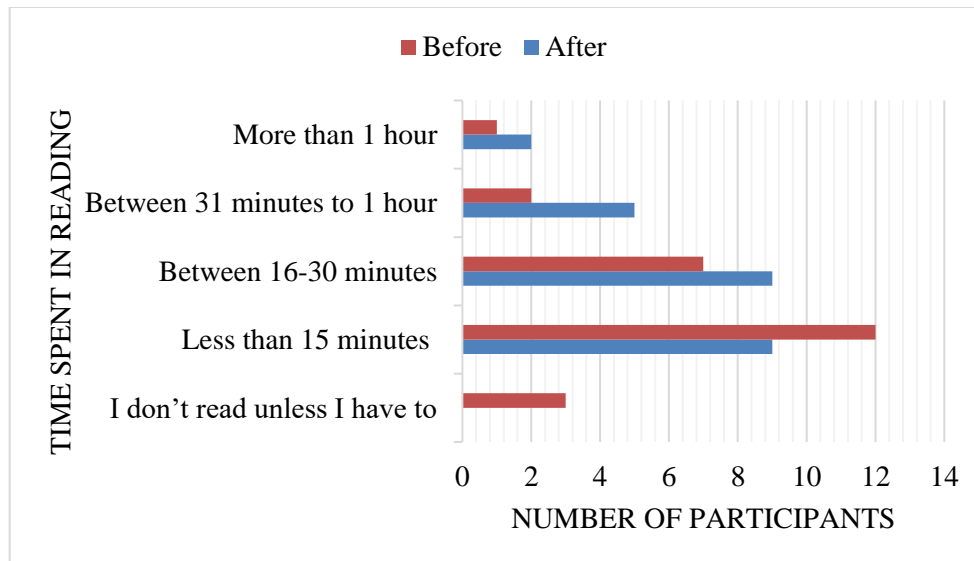


Figure 4: Time spent in reading

The data shows that there is an increase in the time spent by participants in reading after the implementation of intervention strategies indicating that these strategies are effective in enhancing participants’ recreational reading habits. Participants were provided with five different responses in the survey and asked about the time they spend reading while it is their choice (Figure 4). Before the intervention, there are three participants who responded “I don’t read unless I have to”, however, after the intervention none of the participants choose this response. While the number of responses for “Less than 15 minutes” decreased (from n=12 to n=9), there is increase in the number of responses for “Between 16-30 minutes” (from n=7 to n=9), “Between 31 minutes-1 hour” (from n=3 to n=5) and “More than 1 hour” (from =1 to n=2).

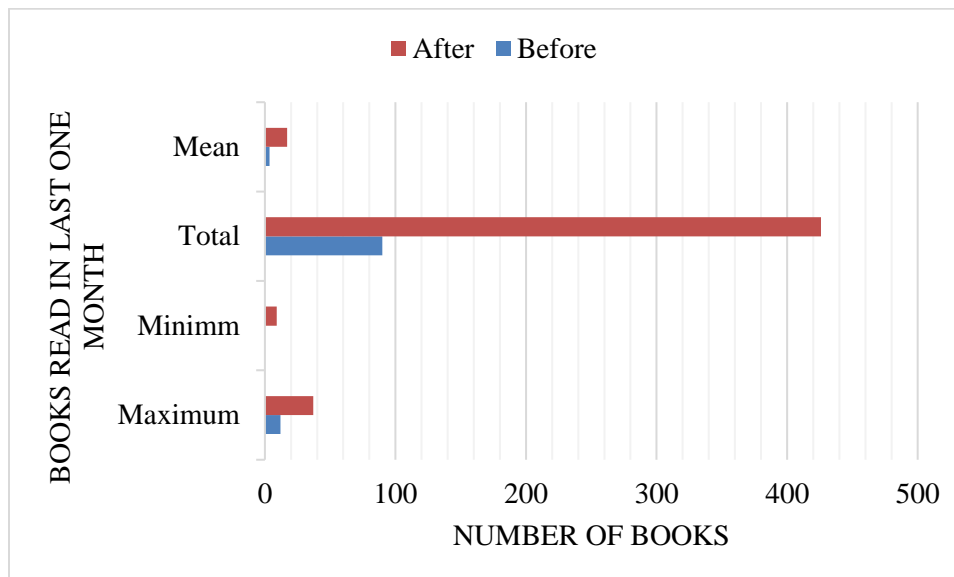


Figure 5: Number of books read

The number of books read by individual participants and teams are shown in Figure 5. The data in Figure 5 is derived from participants' response for survey item 13 "How many books did you read in the last one month?" and tallying it with the reading log maintained by students which is verified by teachers. It was found that there is a significant increase in the number of books read by an individual as well as participants as a whole. Before the intervention, the maximum number of books read by an individual was 12 as compared to 37 books after the intervention. In addition, three participants did not read even one book before the intervention, whereas, the minimum number of books read after the intervention was nine. In total 25 participants read 90 ($M=3.60$) books before the intervention and 426 ($M=17.04$) books after the intervention. This vast increase in the number of books read indicates that the intervention strategies are effective in enhancing recreational reading habits.

The findings of the qualitative data were also parallel to the findings of the quantitative data. Participants mentioned that they do not read often and they read only for academic purposes before the intervention. For example, one of the participants said "I do not read often. I read only a few books in the last month. I only read to maintain my reading portfolio for English subject" (P1). However, after the intervention, there is a shift in the way students think about reading. Students reported that they always make sure to read often. One participant mentioned "I always take time to read every day. Before I used to read but for my portfolio only. Now I read for fun. In the last month I have read more than 30 books" (P6). In addition, P2 said "Now I like to read books. I feel that I am missing something if I do not read books. I read more than 20 books in the last month".

The study revealed that students have read more books ($n=426$) after the intervention as compared to before ($n=94$). The results suggest that the current intervention measures encourage students to read more. Increase in the frequency of books read (as shown in Figure 3, 4 and 5) also indicates that students are able to dedicate their leisure time more on reading than before. It is encouraging to see that, if provided proper guidance and motivation, desirable habits can be instilled in the students. The findings of the current study are in line with the findings of Loday (2021) and Dorji and Rinzin (2021). They reported that students were able to read more books after participating in their studies. The similarity in findings could be because of the intervention measures implemented in order to help students read more. However, it is hard to conclude that students are into reading more books. Their habits might be temporary. This is because students might be reading just for reading incentives that are part of the study. Moreover, the preceding studies have never conducted the study on participants reading habits after the completion of their study. Therefore, there is a need for future study to confirm that those groups of students who participated in the study are really into reading or not.

3. Motivation for recreational reading

In order to encourage grade five students to adopt the habits of recreational reading, interventions such as USSR, Reading Corner and Reading Incentives were implemented. Of all the intervention measures, participants responded that Reading Incentives (n=19) encourages them the most, followed by USSR (n=6) to take up recreational reading (Figure 7). However, participants believe that Reading Corner doesn't influence or encourage them to develop the habits of recreational reading.

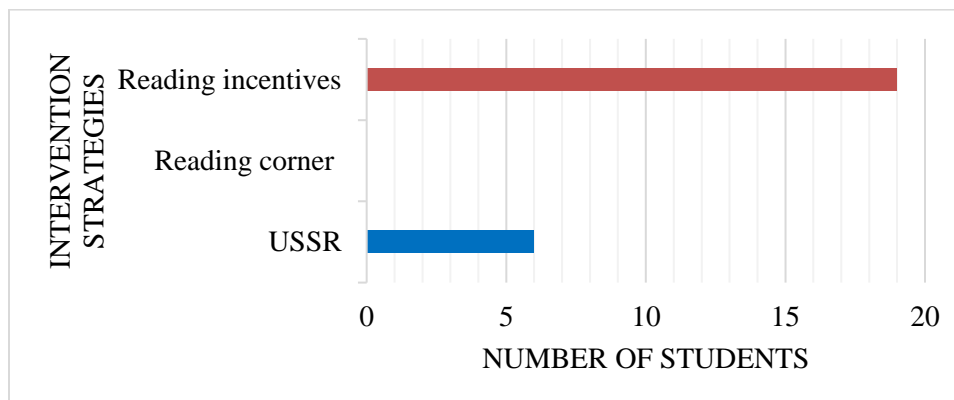


Figure 6: Motivation for recreational reading

The result of the interview also shows that students feel encouraged to read because of the reading incentives. This is evident from the response of the participants. P5 shared that “I feel encouraged to read because of the reading incentives. I also feel that certificates are very important in our life. Bookmark is also attractive and it helped us in marking the page while reading.” In addition, P3 said “I tried my best to read in order to receive prizes.” All in all, participants agreed that reading incentives encouraged them to read a lot.

The current findings revealed that reading incentives and the USSR motivates students to read more. However, it was observed that students are not at all encouraged or motivated to read due to the reading corner set up in the class. The findings clearly show that students are more likely to read for incentives than having a reading corner. The findings also revealed that students do not feel encouraged to read because of the reading corner set up in their class as part of this study (see Figure 6). Study conducted by Nonte et al. (2018) also reported that the availability of classroom libraries shows no or only little interrelation with students' reading habits which is in line with the current findings. This finding may be attributed to the library services provided in the school where students have free access to books whenever they need. This could also be due to the availability of interesting and better books in the library than the reading corner that we have created as part of this study. Studies conducted by Dorji and Rinzin (2021) and Loday (2021) also reported that students are encouraged to read when they are provided with reading incentives and a reading platform (USSR) which is in line with the current study. The similarity in findings confirms that intervention measures are necessary to help students to take up recreational reading. The data also contributes to a clear understanding of how teachers can encourage students to take up recreational reading. While this finding clearly shows that students can be motivated to read for recreational purposes through providing reading incentives and creating a reading platform, it is important to note that there are also other factors that encourage students to read more. Therefore, the future researchers could focus on measures other than those employed in this study to provide options and alternatives.

CONCLUSION

By analysing both quantitative and qualitative data, this study has shown how USSR, Reading Corner and Reading Incentives influence the recreational reading habits of grade five students. It was found that grade five students' attitude towards recreational reading have improved after the implementation of some intervention measures. Improvement in students' attitude towards reading after the intervention suggests that measures such as the USSR, reading corner and reading incentives influence students' attitude towards reading.

In addition, it was also found that students are able to read more books after participating in this study. This study provided students with the platform to read and develop their recreational reading habits. It was also found that the intervention strategies implemented in this study influence students to read except for reading corner.

The data also revealed that students are motivated to read more if they are provided with reading incentives as shown in Figure 6. Reading incentives such as certificates, bookmarks and prizes as discussed above are found to be effective in encouraging students to read more. However, the question remains whether the incentives provided can help in sustaining the interest of the students to read in future. All in all, the study revealed that grade five students' recreational reading habits have improved a lot. It is also appropriate to say that the intervention measures used in this study are useful in helping students enhance their recreational reading habits.

RECOMMENDATION

The study presents various findings pertaining to improving grade five students' recreational reading habits. It is evident from this study that there are opportunities for different stakeholders to work towards improving students' recreational reading habits.

The study reported that students' attitude towards reading can be improved. Therefore, teachers and parents should work together to encourage students to read not only for academic purposes but also for recreational purposes.

Since intervention measures employed in this study are found to be effective in improving students' recreational reading habits, teachers should try to use the USSR and provide reading incentives to improve students' recreational reading habits.

School administration should encourage students to read and provide reading incentives to encourage students to read more and build recreational reading habits.

It is important to confirm whether the reading habits that the participants develop during this study remains permanent. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a separate impact study to check whether the participants' recreational reading habits had remained permanent or not after the completion of the study.

In order to provide alternatives and options, similar action research can be carried out using different intervention measures.

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