

## **Enhancing Reading Culture through Libraries in Manipur**

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### **Abstract**

Reading is an essential part of individual learning, growth and development. It is a lifelong process which never ends and it is also one of the language skills needed to function effectively in today's society. Without reading, it is not possible to seek any information and knowledge. Library is the place where books are kept according to different subject matters which should provide innovative, creative services with the goal of capturing students' interest, and motivating them to develop a reading habit. Reading plays a significant role in a person's everyday life and, when nurtured, becomes a habit that contributes to the formation of a reading culture. This paper defines the concept of reading culture and its relationship with library. The main objective of this study is promoting and enhancing reading culture and to make reading a habit. The study aimed to answer some of the questions like 'What is the state of school libraries in Manipur?' and 'What is the role of library in promoting reading culture in Manipur?' The study also suggests various ways to improve library conditions and enhance reading culture among students and then to help policy makers and stakeholders including librarians and school administrators to design appropriate reading programs for students in higher secondary schools in Manipur in present and in future time.

**Keywords:** Library, Reading, School, Culture, Reading Culture, Manipur

### **Introduction**

Society is an ever-evolving tapestry of diverse languages, cultures, principles, and practices, all of which contribute to the enrichment of human life. In such a dynamic context, education plays a pivotal role in driving intellectual, economic, and social development. Central to this process is the cultivation of a strong reading culture – an essential foundation for individual growth, community engagement, and societal advancement. A robust reading culture fosters critical thinking, creativity, and empathy, shaping individuals into lifelong learners and informed citizens. Libraries, as vital institutions, serve as catalysts in nurturing and sustaining this culture by providing access to diverse knowledge resources and learning opportunities.

In the modern, knowledge-driven era, reading holds immense significance for both individual and collective progress. It sharpens cognitive skills, facilitates lifelong learning, and fosters social cohesion. However, the increasing prevalence of digital distractions, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to high-quality reading

materials are significant barriers to sustaining a thriving reading culture. These challenges are particularly pronounced in regions like Manipur, where systemic gaps in library resources and policy interventions hinder the development of effective reading habits.

Manipur, with its distinctive socio-cultural identity, faces unique challenges in promoting reading, especially among students. Factors such as poorly equipped school libraries and an absence of comprehensive policies addressing literacy needs exacerbate the issue. Although initiatives by educational institutions and organizations such as 'READ' (Rural Education and Development) have made efforts to bridge these gaps, reading remains a secondary priority for many students, overshadowed by other academic and socio-economic pressures.

This study aims to examine the current state of libraries in Manipur, evaluate their role in fostering a reading culture, and propose actionable strategies to enhance reading habits among students. The findings are intended to assist policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in designing effective and sustainable programs to revitalize reading culture in the state.

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), reading is one of the four foundational language skills, alongside listening, speaking, and writing. Promoting a culture of reading aligns seamlessly with the pedagogical objectives of ELT, as it:

- Enhances vocabulary acquisition, a crucial component for effective communication in both spoken and written English.
- Develops comprehension skills, enabling learners to interpret, analyze, and respond to texts more effectively.
- Familiarizes students with diverse genres, styles, and linguistic registers, thereby deepening their understanding of the English language.

By nurturing a habit of reading, particularly in English, students in Manipur can significantly enhance their language proficiency. This not only strengthens their academic performance but also equips them with the skills necessary for professional growth and global competitiveness.

### **The Role of Libraries**

Libraries are often referred to as temples of knowledge, serving as repositories of information on a wide range of subjects. They house vast collections of books across various themes and genres, making them fundamental to the promotion and sustenance of a strong reading culture, particularly among learners. Libraries provide free and equitable access to reading materials and information, thereby fostering an environment conducive to learning.

Libraries play a pivotal role in creating and promoting a strong reading culture among students by helping individuals develop a love for books. Students can borrow

books, take them home, and return them upon completion, fostering a habit of regular reading. The best time to cultivate reading habits is during childhood, and it should begin both at home and in school to ensure reading becomes an integral part of daily life, ultimately contributing to a strong reading culture.

There are various types of libraries, each serving a distinct purpose and catering to specific user communities. These include national libraries, academic libraries, public libraries, special libraries, and school libraries. As public service institutions, libraries are tasked with the responsibility of offering high-quality services to the community, thereby enhancing the reading culture and contributing to the intellectual development of society.

### **Understanding Reading**

According to Willinsky (2017), reading is a fundamental life skill that is essential for human development and serves as a cornerstone for lifelong success. Reading enhances human productivity, enriches vocabulary, and improves language skills. It is the foundation upon which educational and intellectual skills are built and involves the recognition and verbalization of written symbols that represent sounds in human speech.

Reading is crucial for acquiring information and knowledge in everyday life. It stimulates imagination, curiosity, and quick learning while broadening perspectives. Additionally, reading enhances an individual's ability to handle complex ideas, acquire essential skills, and develop values and attitudes necessary for personal and societal growth. It plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning processes of a language and promotes cognitive and critical thinking abilities.

### **Cultivating a Reading Culture**

A reading culture refers to an environment where reading is valued, respected, encouraged, and appreciated within a society. It signifies the integration of reading into daily life, making it a habitual and valued practice. The mere ability to read and write does not constitute a reading culture; rather, reading must become an integral part of an individual's routine and societal framework. In Manipur, initiatives such as community reading programs, mobile libraries reaching remote areas, and literary events like book fairs and storytelling festivals have been introduced to promote reading habits. Efforts by local educational institutions have played a crucial role in making reading materials more accessible to students and communities, thereby fostering a love for reading among the youth. It entails integrating reading into daily life as a habitual practice.

A strong reading culture is characterized by individuals who engage in reading both intensively and extensively, making it a regular habit. Reading should extend beyond academic settings to include leisure reading at home, thereby serving as a source of both knowledge and pleasure. As noted by Lungwangwa (2007), a reading culture entails a society where people actively engage with newspapers, stories, and poetry for entertainment and personal growth.

The absence of a reading culture exacerbates social inequalities and poses a significant threat to national development (Street, 2011). No country can achieve sustainable development if its citizens lack access to information. A well-established reading culture broadens learners' vocabulary, fosters critical thinking, and equips individuals with lifelong skills necessary for effective participation and survival in a rapidly evolving environment.

### **Literature Review**

Libraries play a pivotal role in cultivating lifelong reading habits, nurturing knowledge, and improving the quality of education, as studied by Naorem Romikanta Singh and Th. Madhuri Devi (2014). Adeyemi Adewale Akinola (2021) examined the promotion of reading culture for better societal development and found that reading culture builds morals and societal values in students. Similarly, Dr. Surendra Sethy (2018) analyzed various factors contributing to poor reading culture and emphasized the significant roles libraries can play in enhancing and promoting reading habits among users.

Dr. Juliet C. and Millie N. (2019) highlighted the importance of incorporating reading culture into library collections, readership campaigns, reading clubs, and events such as World Book Day. Laura Benson (2021) underscored the necessity of fostering reading habits from early childhood to ensure lifelong engagement with books. However, Diyoshak Rhoda Danladi and Soko Rejoice Yohanna (2018) revealed that libraries are not well-integrated into school curriculums, and reading culture is on the decline, partly due to the widespread use of smartphones.

In their study, Yunusa Anate Adejimo et al. (2021) found that students spend less than an hour reading in libraries and identified key factors contributing to a poor reading culture. Additionally, Preeti Mahajan (2010) opined that state governments play a crucial role in developing primary and secondary education by implementing policies that support reading culture.

However, S. Muansangluai Ngaihte (2021) observed that public libraries in most districts of Manipur remain stagnant due to a lack of awareness among the public. Addressing these challenges through effective policies, awareness campaigns, and infrastructure development is crucial to revitalizing the reading culture in Manipur.

### **Background of the Study**

The declining reading culture among students in Manipur poses a significant challenge to educational success and societal development. Neglected libraries and limited reading habits impact overall academic performance and intellectual engagement. Addressing these issues through improved library services and policy interventions is critical.

## Methodology

The researcher focused on school libraries, as they are dedicated to supporting the educational programs of primary and secondary schools. The study was conducted in selected higher secondary schools across Manipur. A total of five higher secondary schools were randomly selected for the study. Data were collected using self-made questionnaires, interviews, and direct observations to obtain insights into the prevailing conditions of school libraries and the reading habits of students.

## Research Findings

The study revealed that higher secondary schools in Manipur suffer from poor library conditions, with some institutions lacking library facilities altogether. The reading culture among students is alarmingly low, as confirmed through interviews with students and teachers, which highlighted the dire state of library usage. Even in schools that do have libraries, the facilities are substandard and underutilized.

Many library spaces are small and poorly maintained, often containing just a few cupboards filled with outdated and dust-covered books. The furniture is inadequate, consisting of low-quality chairs and tables that are rarely used by students. Poor lighting conditions further discourage students from using library spaces effectively. Additionally, the pervasive reliance on mobile phones and the internet has significantly contributed to the decline in library engagement. Despite these challenges, it is essential to recognize the vital role libraries play in fostering a strong reading culture and take steps to revitalize their use.

## *Key Findings of the Study*

The research identifies several critical insights into the current state of reading culture among students and teachers in Manipur:

- **Low Reading Culture in School Libraries:** The overall engagement with reading materials in school libraries is extremely low, with many students not utilizing these resources for knowledge enhancement beyond their curriculum.
- **Challenges in Promoting a Reading Culture:** Establishing and sustaining a reading habit among students within school libraries remains a significant challenge, largely due to poor infrastructure, lack of encouragement, and minimal institutional support.

- **Undervaluation of Libraries:** Libraries continue to be undervalued by students, teachers, and school administrators, resulting in a lack of investment and policy attention.

### *Insights from the Study*

- **Limited Engagement beyond Academic Texts:** Students primarily focus on curriculum-based reading, with little interest in extracurricular materials such as fiction, newspapers, or self-help books. The exam-oriented education system plays a crucial role in restricting students' reading habits, as they perceive reading beyond textbooks as unnecessary for academic success.
- **Influence of Digital Media:** A significant shift toward digital content was observed among students, with many preferring online articles, videos, and social media over printed books. While digital platforms provide access to vast knowledge resources, they also contribute to distractions, reduced attention spans, and a decline in deep reading practices.
- **Role of Libraries and Infrastructure:** The absence of well-equipped and inviting library spaces in many schools serves as a major deterrent to reading habits. Schools that invest in better library facilities, updated collections, and active librarian engagement demonstrate a higher inclination toward regular reading among students.
- **Parental and Teacher Influence:** Students who receive active encouragement from parents and teachers tend to develop stronger reading habits. However, a lack of parental involvement, particularly in rural areas, negatively impacts students' engagement with books. Teachers who integrate reading activities into their lessons help foster a more positive attitude toward reading among students.

These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve library conditions, integrate reading into daily learning, and foster a culture of reading beyond academic requirements.

### **Challenges Contributing to a Poor Reading Culture in School Libraries**

Several interconnected factors contribute to the poor reading culture in school libraries, particularly in regions like Manipur. These challenges include:

- **Limited Access to Technology:** Many school libraries lack computers and internet connectivity, restricting students' access to online information resources that could enhance their reading experience.
- **Administrative Neglect:** A lack of prioritization and poor attitudes toward the significance of libraries hinder their development and effective utilization.
- **Time Constraints:** Students often have limited opportunities for reading outside the classroom, reducing their engagement with books and reading activities.
- **Outdated and Insufficient Resources:** Many school libraries are stocked with outdated or insufficient reading materials, which fail to engage or meet the diverse interests of students.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure and Funding:** Poor infrastructure and limited funding prevent schools from providing well-equipped libraries that can attract and retain student interest.
- **High Costs of Books:** Financial constraints make it difficult for schools to update their collections, further exacerbating the issue of outdated book inventories.
- **Shortage of Professional Librarians:** A well-trained librarian can play a transformative role in fostering students' reading habits. However, a shortage of professional librarians in Manipur's schools results in ineffective library management and underutilization of available resources.
- **Impact of Digital Entertainment:** The rise of smart phones and social media has shifted students' focus away from books to digital entertainment. This cultural shift poses a significant challenge for educators and policymakers striving to build and sustain a reading culture among students.
- **Economic Constraints:** Economic hardships, particularly in rural areas, prevent families from investing in books and other reading materials. In many households, financial struggles limit the availability of resources necessary for fostering a reading habit.
- **Parental and Community Involvement:** Parents play a crucial role in shaping children's reading habits. However, in many families across Manipur, there is limited awareness of the importance of reading beyond academics. A lack of encouragement and support from parents often leaves students unmotivated to engage in recreational reading.
- **Lack of Regional Language Content:** The absence of accessible reading materials in regional languages discourages many students from developing consistent reading habits. This gap alienates students who are more comfortable engaging with content in their native language.
- **Examination-Driven Education System:** The prevailing examination-focused educational system places undue emphasis on syllabus-based learning, discouraging students from exploring diverse literary genres and subjects. This system stifles curiosity and limits exposure to reading beyond academic requirements.

- **Gender Disparities:** In some parts of Manipur, socio-cultural expectations and gender-based inequalities restrict girls' access to reading materials, further widening the literacy gap.
- **Policy and Systemic Gaps:** Despite various educational policies, the lack of systematic reading promotion initiatives in Manipur's schools limits students' motivation to engage in reading activities. Without structured programs or incentives to encourage reading, students remain focused solely on academic achievements, leaving little room for personal or intellectual exploration through books.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of libraries, many schools in Manipur lack the necessary resources to create a vibrant reading environment. This issue is especially acute in rural areas, where libraries are often non-existent or poorly maintained. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, parents, and communities to create a supportive environment that fosters a love for reading and ensures equitable access to library resources for all students.

### **Suggestions and Ways to Improve Reading Culture and Libraries in Manipur**

- It should be a government policy to ensure that all schools establish a well-equipped library.
- The school principal plays a pivotal role in developing and sustaining a strong reading culture within the school. An effective reading culture can be cultivated with the support of the principal, who holds the authority and key responsibility in establishing and maintaining it. Other staff members and stakeholders also have crucial roles to play in this process.
- There is a need for school teachers and administrators to change their mindset and start valuing libraries in schools while promoting a reading culture. They should organize reading programs, competitions, awards for regular library users, school debates, press clubs, and book review sessions after reading.
- Lending materials to students for reading during their free time should be a deliberate policy, alongside strategies to encourage students to spend time reading in the library.
- Organizing book fairs, sensitization campaigns, and reading competitions can significantly promote a reading culture.
- The use of ICT tools and a wide range of electronic information resources, including e-books, audio books, and multimedia content, should be integrated into libraries to attract and engage students.
- It is essential to promote reading culture across Manipur. Teachers, parents, and guardians should be sensitized on the importance of libraries and encouraged to instill reading habits in children at home. Gifting books on special occasions, such as birthdays, can be an effective way to nurture reading habits from a young age.
- Campaigns such as 'Share a Story' or initiatives like 'DEAR' (Drop Everything and Read) should be introduced in schools. These daily designated reading programs, lasting just 10-15 minutes, can encourage reading among teachers,

parents, siblings, and friends. Such initiatives can take place anywhere—at home, school, libraries, or workplaces—making reading a consistent and habitual activity.

## Conclusion

In the context of Manipur, fostering a reading culture through libraries is essential for the intellectual and social development of its citizens. Libraries serve as catalysts in promoting reading habits by providing access to diverse resources and creating an enabling environment for learning. Strengthening library services, enhancing accessibility, and promoting community engagement are vital steps toward building a thriving reading culture that contributes to the overall development of Manipur.

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