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The Five Laws of Reading

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Abstract

Reading has played the best role in the transformation of societies from nomadic to agriculture; agriculture to industrial; industrial to information and knowledge-based societies. It has played a crucial role to transform humans from wild wanderers to world leaders. However, with the technological advances, many new hobbies have taken a greater time slice of human lives, which ultimately affects their reading habits as well. Therefore, the authors have suggested “*The Five Laws of Reading*” in the present study to keep the reading habits active among humans in times to come. “The Five Laws of Reading” devised are:

1. Reading is an intellectual diet of the mind
2. Develop a habit of reading early
3. Fix the time slot for reading daily
4. Save the future of your life
5. Reading is a continuous process

Keywords- Reading, Reading habits, Reading motivation, Reading achievement, Reading acquisition

Introduction

Reading is one of the best habits of humans. The meaning of *reading* has undergone many changes since the dawn of civilization. In the past, reading simply meant to extract visual information from any given symbols, signs, codes, or systems. Thereafter, reading became much

more complex and involved the understanding of a whole text composed of written signs. Thomas and Loring (1979) argue that reading has various meanings. They state:

“Reading is more than a decoding process which involves recognising or analysing graphic symbols. Reading is gaining meaning from graphic representations. Reading is a communication skill along with writing, speaking, listening, and thinking. However, reading requires that the communicator be able to decode printed messages into meaningful thoughts. While mere decoding is not reading, it is impossible to read without decoding. Reading should be perceived as the ability possessed by the reader to decode and gain meaning from the written message of the author”.

Smith and Robinson (1980) defined reading as "an active attempt on the part of the reader to understand a writer's message". Devarajan (1989) defined reading as the art of interpreting printed and written words. It is regarded as one of the most effective processes of conscious learning. Whereas educators in the past regarded reading as a straightforward task of decoding text by recognising words and reproducing the 'message', they now concede that reading is a complex process whereby readers construct meaning using a variety of strategies and prior knowledge. Irvin (1998) describes the reading process as *“the interaction of what is in the head with what is on the page* within a particular context that causes students to *comprehend what they read”*. According to Toit (2001), “Reading is as a process of thinking, recalling and relating concepts under the functioning of written words”. Thus, reading is the ability to recognise, understand, and examine words or sentences and understand the information within. It is not only a cognitive process of understanding a written linguistic message but to examine and grasp the meaning from it.

Reading has played the best role in the transformation of societies from nomadic to agriculture; agriculture to industrial; industrial to information and knowledge-based societies. It has played a crucial role to transform humans from wild wanderers to world leaders. However, with the technological advances, many new hobbies have taken a greater time slice of human lives, which ultimately affects the reading habits of people as well. Therefore, the authors have suggested *“The Five Laws of Reading”* in the present study with the hope that these laws can serve as guiding and inspiring forces to keep the habit of reading alive in all technology- driven societies among humans in times to come.

These five laws are:

1. Reading is an intellectual diet of the mind
2. Develop a habit of reading early
3. Fix the time slot for reading daily
4. Save the future of your life
5. Reading is a continuous process

First Law: Reading is an intellectual diet of the mind

Reading is primarily an intellectual activity. It is a spring of knowledge that continuously irrigates the minds of readers. Reading is a tool of the acquisitive mind and a vehicle for obtaining ideas that cannot be transmitted verbally. Reading is the third eye of a person; it has the power to see and observe what the other two cannot even think or dream (Lone, 2015). Reading widens up the scope of one's imagination. It adds new sight to the eyes and new wisdom to the mind. "A dumb person becomes a communicator and a lame climbs mountains of knowledge through reading" is an old saying. Reading loads the mind with new software (Satija, 2002). The individual who reads well has at his command a means for widening his mental horizons and for multiplying his opportunities of success. Reading is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth. Sir Richard Steele has logically quoted, "Reading is to mind what exercise is to the body". In our opinion "Reading is to mind what air is to life and water is to fish". Some educators argue that reading make people smarter (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). Reading is the perfect tool to help young minds to increase their appetite, ignite their imagination, expand their intelligence, and enhance their wisdom. Reading fosters personal, moral, and intellectual growth. Reading influences the attitudes, morals, beliefs, and judgment of readers (Gray and Tinker, 1967). Regular and systematic reading sharpens the intellect, refines the emotions, elevates tastes, and provides perspectives for one's living; and thereby prepares a person for effective participation in the social, religious, cultural, and political life. Reading habit is a medium of change towards better citizenship, enrichment of information and knowledge, knowing the events and happening without physical presence and self-confidence. Research has also shown that reading fosters cognitive development by promoting higher-order reasoning, critical thinking, comprehension, writing skills, vocabulary, and grammatical development (Krashen 2004). Mental health care is quite expensive and still not freely available to everyone.

Reading doesn't only help healthy minds to prosper but it suits well to struggling minds or depression brains. 'Mood-Boosting Books' or 'Reading Well Books' on prescription is highly effective treatment of mind, popularly known as 'bibliotherapy' (Kuijpers, 2018). Therefore, all humans must keep a habit of reading intact till the last breath of their lives.

Second Law: Develop a habit of reading early

Reading is an indispensable habit for humans. *"A human without a reading habit is like a tree without fruits and a flower without fragrance"*. Reading is an essential skill that improves with practice, age, time, knowledge, and maturity. Reading is an acquired skill, not an innate one; the more books we read, the better we become at it (Dewen, 2019). Readers first begin to develop pre-reading skills and then learn the print-to-speech code and practice it to a point of fluency when it can be used as a tool for learning. Gradually readers learn to make inferences from what they read, become more critical of ideas in the text, and can take a broader perspective in reasoning and thinking about what is communicated. Lin quotes this change as-

"Reading in one's youth is like looking at the moon through crevice; reading in the middle age is like looking at a moon in one's courtyard; and reading in old age is like looking at the moon on an open terrace".

The majority of the researchers advocate that reading habits must be developed at a young age. Once the reading habit is formed, it is likely to last for a long time. According to Greene (2001), "Reading habit is best formed at a young impressionable age, but once formed it can last one's lifetime". Therefore, parents, teachers, librarians, and other concerned institutions must encourage children to read for their active participation in society. Buchward has rightly said, *"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents"*. It is the primary duty of parents to infuse reading habits in their children and give them the best start on the road to success. Reading books and rhymes aloud with children, creating a mini reading corner at home, visiting libraries and bookshops at regular intervals, and providing them, books, and other reading sources as gifts and prizes on different occasions can be very helpful in creating reading habits at an early age. After parents, students spend most of their time with teachers. Teachers need to motivate and encourage students to read widely, not merely for passing examinations. The role of librarians cannot be ignored in building a healthy tradition for reading culture. They have to play a crucial

role to create a reading environment in which all components of reading culture come together. Hence, it is their primary duty to attract students, expose them to the joys and benefits of reading, and develop a pleasant atmosphere and positive attitudes towards reading. They should serve as a connecting link between students and reading material like books (Loan, 2010). Academic institutions can also play a great role in the development of reading society. Dewan (2019) argues that colleges should produce not just lifelong learners but also lifelong readers. However, the persons who have reached any stage of their age can also develop a reading habit to reap its benefits. Reading newspapers, magazines, books or other sources of interest in any format (print or digital) can also build a healthy reading habit at any stage of life.

Third Law: Fix the time slot for reading daily

In the present multimedia society, the new gadgets of technology like television, smartphone, computer, tablet, and the Internet have fully entered our lives. Till the end of 2000 many individuals could not afford to buy cell phones; computers and the internet are new technologies but these are now widely available and easily connectable (Shimray, Keerti, and Ramaiah, 2015). These gadgets offer a wide variety of services like sports, music, dance, surfing, chatting, gaming, etc. These have become the “Time Wasting Machines” and have taken a greater share of time. Children, youth, and adults alike are more inclined towards new technology for information, entertainment, and pleasure (Loan, 2009). Clark and Douglas (2011) argue that the world faces a declining level of reading for enjoyment both within adult and adolescent populations in the early 21st century. Based on the results of international student assessments a great concern has emerged about the decreasing reading appetite (Peña-López, 2016). In many countries, a great number of adolescents lack the ability of reading, dislike reading, or do not read at all, which is even more worrying if we think of reading as a powerful tool for success not only in school but throughout adult life of an individual (JOÓ and DANI, 2018). Ross (2000) observes, “Non-book readers find any kind of reading hard work and view book reading in particular as something to be prepared for psychologically and performed only when long blocks of time are available. Confident readers, in contrast, say that they find book reading easy, something they can do ‘just about anytime’.” Only skilled readers find reading easy to do. Therefore, the present generation faces many challenges to keep their lamp of knowledge burning (Loan, 2010). Humans

should develop a timetable to spend their time on different activities like playing games and sports, electronic media, and print media in a more balanced way. Humans should always spend their share on academic and non-academic reading without any fall (Loan, 2010) to become avid readers. This can be achieved by fixing a time slot for reading. At that time, we must follow the rule –DEAR “**D**rop **E**verything **A**nd **R**ead”.

Fourth Law: Save the future of your life

Reading is a key to success. In a modern knowledge-based society, knowledge is power and this power is absorbed by reading. “Today a reader, tomorrow a leader” and “The nation who reads is a nation who leads” are well-known proverbs. The great authors, poets, philosophers, politicians, social reformers, scientists, astronauts, technocrats, etc. have usually been avid readers. A good reading habit is a healthy addiction; once this powerful habit is mastered, it improves the vocabulary, analytical skills, concentration power, and deciphering new words and thereby helps a person in the academic and competitive achievements. Insofar schooling is concerned; reading is the most single study tool. Next to the teacher, the reading is usually the principal educating agency contributing to pupil's success. In the modern competitive age, reading is the cornerstone for success in all academic disciplines (Loan, 2017). Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) has found—“success in reading provides the foundation for achievement in other subject areas,” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010). Reading is important not only for the individuals; it has a great social and political significance. Political leaders are well aware of the fact that a country's national indexes of sustainable development are closely related to its level of reading literacy (Elley, 1992). Responsible politicians prefer literate citizens who can read the information thoroughly and are not swayed by the Television manipulation and propagandist slogans. Law enforcement bodies know that majority of the prison population are illiterates (Blair, Turner, Schaudt, 1992). Social workers are witness that adult illiterates are the major shareholders of the unemployed lot. Reading is also essential for international understanding and world peace. It helps understand and appreciate the common achievements of the global family. It empowers us to make a distinction between ignorance and knowledge, between irrationality and wisdom. Reading has a long and distinguished track record for establishing positive and lasting benefits to humanity. It gives a unifying and civilizing force tending to unite social

groups through the dissemination of common experiences. In nutshell, reading is a cornerstone of success not only for individuals but for the peace, progress, and prosperity of the global community as well.

Fifth Law: Reading is a continuous process

Reading habit is the prominent gateway to the knowledge room. It is the heart of self-education and lifelong learning. It continuously irrigates our minds with new ideas, thoughts, facts, and knowledge. It is a continuous and never-ending learning process. According to Tomie de Paola, *“Reading is important, because if you can read you can learn almost anything about everything and everything about anything”* In the last few decades, efforts are taken worldwide to promote literacy rate and create a reading society. However, the acquisition of literacy is a self-defeating exercise unless the newly literate are encouraged to continue reading for keeping alive the existing knowledge and expanding it to further horizons. If literates stop updating their knowledge, they may gradually revert to illiteracy. Henry Ford has rightly quoted, *“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young”*. All humans who stop reading are intellectually dead. Reading keeps a person knowledgeably alive. There is a tremendous need for consistent, continuous, and better reading by persons of all ages. In all professions, one must read a great deal to keep pace with the new developments. No profession can be successful unless its professionals keep themselves up-to-date. All the professionals must sharpen their brains through continuous reading. The best scientists, astronauts, technocrats, administrators, teachers, lawyers, engineers, and doctors demonstrate in their lives the value of reading. Therefore, reading habits must be the companion of all persons from the womb to the tomb.

Conclusion

Reading is the best habit without any worthy substitute. It is of paramount importance for human society. However, people have adopted several new hobbies with the advancement of technologies and will be attracted to many new habits in the future as well. Especially, the new generations will be more inclined towards new technologies and reading may take a back seat. These five laws will remind the users the power of reading and will probably guide them to keep reading habits intact till the dawn of human civilizations.

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